

Rhetorics Rising: The Recovery of Rhetorical Traditions in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and  
N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*

by

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## Abstract

This study suggests, through a rhetorical analysis of the role of orators and oration in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, that literature can be a valuable resource for the study of comparative and contrastive rhetoric; conversely, it also demonstrates that a knowledge of culturally-specific rhetorical and narrative practices is important for understanding ethnic-American novels and their social significance. Written during periods of intense racial upheaval in the United States, *Invisible Man* and *House Made of Dawn* are, to use a term coined by George Kennedy, metarhetorics: works that explore, from cross-cultural and intercultural perspectives, the ends and means of rhetoric and the ways in which rhetoric is linked to the formation of individual, ethnic, and national identities. This exploration is undertaken through the diegetic rhetoric of the novels, the depiction of rhetorical practice within their fictional worlds. Ellison's young orator, who vacillates between accommodationist, communist, and African American vernacular rhetorics, and Momaday's alienated protagonist, who is healed through the postcolonial rhetoric of a Peyotist street preacher and the ritual rhetoric of a displaced Navajo chanter, both illustrate how the recovery of traditional rhetorical practices is an integral part of cultural empowerment. The interaction of culturally-specific systems of rhetoric is also embodied in the extradiegetic rhetoric of the novels, the means by which the novels themselves influence their readers. Central to the novels' own rhetorical effectiveness is their authors' strategic appropriation of modernist techniques, which allowed the works to negotiate multiple literary traditions or social contexts, to penetrate and transform the American canon, and to accommodate and affect readers from a broad range of cultural backgrounds.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of revolutionary change in American race relations, change that was, to a significant degree, reflected in the literature written during those years by ethnic-American authors. In this project, I argue that the increased political activism of marginalized cultural groups in the United States during the mid-twentieth century was associated with another process that is also reflected in the literature of the times: the recovery of culturally-distinct rhetorical practices and traditions that were formerly displaced by dominant Euro-American rhetorical traditions. In order to explore the nature of this rhetorical recovery and its relation to its social and political context, I will examine in depth the role of rhetoric in two works of ethnic-American literature, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, analyzing both the rhetorical action that takes place within the fictional worlds of the novels, which I will call diegetic rhetoric, and the potential rhetorical effects of the novels themselves on their readers, which I will call extradiegetic rhetoric. In his seminal essay "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd Bitzer writes that

The rhetorical situation as real is to be distinguished...from a fictive rhetorical situation. The speech of a character in a novel or play may be clearly required by a fictive rhetorical situation, a situation established by the story itself; but the speech is not genuinely rhetorical, even though, considered in itself, it looks exactly like a courtroom address or a senate speech. It is realistic, made so by fictive context. But the situation is not real, not grounded in history; neither the fictive situation nor the discourse generated by it is rhetorical. We should note, however, that the fictive rhetorical discourse within a play or novel may become genuinely rhetorical outside the fictive context—if there is a real

situation for which the discourse is a rhetorical response. Also, of course, the play or novel itself may be understood as a rhetorical response having poetic form. (224)

Bitzer defines rhetorical discourse as symbolic action on the part of a rhetor in response to a historical situation containing a genuine exigency, an actual audience, and concrete material, psychological, or social constraints, and, accordingly, he suggests that a fictive depiction of oratory cannot actually be considered as rhetorical, except insofar as we examine the extradiegetic rhetorical effects of the work on a genuine audience. In this project, however, I will argue that fictional depictions of rhetorical action in the works I have selected (and in others) may be fruitfully analyzed in rhetorical terms because they are indeed “grounded in history,” reflecting rhetorical practice as it takes place within a particular cultural framework; indeed, I assert that fictive depictions of rhetoric, within the overall context of the works, can function as a narrative form of what George A. Kennedy has termed a “metarhetoric” (*History* 3), a theory of what rhetoric is and how it works. William W. Cook, analyzing the relation of the African American rhetorical tradition to artistic productions, asserts that Ellison’s novel, “when fully understood,” should stand next to the works of sociolinguists such as Roger Abrahams or Geneva Smitherman “as a thoroughly worked-out study not only of African American rhetoric but of the liberating power of that rhetoric and the cultural forces that it embodies” (260). Both novels in this study explicitly concern themselves with the nature and ends of rhetorical practice: Ellison’s unnamed protagonist is an aspiring orator, and Momaday’s protagonist, Abel, is plagued by a lack of speech and is healed through the efforts of two orators: Tosamah, an irreverent Peyote priest, and Ben Benally, a displaced Navajo chanter. This blending of narrative and rhetorical theory is not without precedent, even within



the classical tradition—one need only recall Plato’s *Gorgias* or *Phaedrus*, or Cicero’s *De Oratore*, all of which set their analyses of rhetorical practice within a narrative context, albeit one less developed than that of Ellison or Momaday. Nor is the study of fictional rhetoric foreign to the classical tradition, as rhetorical critics have long commented on speeches from epics such as the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* or on orations which were likely invented by classical historians such as Thucydides or Herodotus, presuming that the speeches, even if fictitious, reveal something about the practice of and attitudes toward rhetoric at the time they were given, or at the time the writer included them in his own work (see, for instance, Kennedy, *History* 13-14, 21-23).

Yet the use of narrative to embody a metarhetoric is especially appropriate in the works studied here, for three reasons: first, because in both African American and Native American oral traditions, story plays a central role in communicating cultural norms or practices; second, because story is an integral part of rhetorical practice as it is portrayed in my selected works; and third, because the complex interaction of rhetorical discourse and its social context in oral cultures is most completely depicted through narrative. In *Black Culture and Consciousness*, Lawrence W. Levine quotes an anonymous Dahomean who says, “While you Whites have schools and books for teaching your children...we tell them stories, for our stories are our books” (90), and Leslie Marmon Silko, speaking of the centrality of storytelling in Pueblo culture, quotes Dennis Brutus, who “has talked about the ‘yet unborn’ as well as ‘those from the past’ and how we are still *all* in *this* place, and language—the storytelling—is our way of passing through or being with them, of being together again” (59). Because traditional oral storytelling is participatory, a co-production of teller and audience that situates the story, however old, within the scene of its telling, storytelling transcends time and presents cultural

practices, rhetorical conventions included, not as past traditions that need to be preserved, but as living systems that stem from and effect a shared context that links past and present. *Sto:loh* author Lee Maracle writes, “We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the thoughts and values of a people. . . . We humanize theory by fusing humanity’s need for common direction—theory—with story” (“Oratory” 235, 237). As I shall show, vernacular or traditional rhetorics in Ellison’s and Momaday’s novels serve not to shelter the rhetor and his audience from modernity, but to affirm that what is viewed as the past is actually a living part of the present context, although the dominant Euro-American culture commonly characterizes the older traditions as historically remote in order to repress them, much as it represses the ongoing consequences of slavery and the prior occupation of the Americas by indigenous peoples. This project will also show that story is an integral part of the African American and Native American rhetorical traditions as they are depicted in Ellison’s and Momaday’s novels, so the diegetic rhetoric within the novels and the extradiegetic rhetoric that is directed at the novels’ readers reflect and complicate one another. Finally, in oral cultures, public oratory, the central form of rhetorical action, is not so much the transmission of a message, but a means by which orator and audience realize particular social and political relationships via shared speech. Walter Ong suggests that in oral cultures, the efficacy of an oratorical activity such as storytelling does not rely solely on the story itself, though of course the story is important, but in how the story is set within the context of the telling, which includes the teller and the audience: “Narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time—at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation, for in oral cultures an audience

must be brought to respond, often vigorously” (41-42). A full understanding of symbolic interaction within oral cultures always requires, to use the words of Native American literary critic Louis Owens, not only the telling of the story, but also the story of the telling (*Destinies* 235), and unlike the texts of decontextualized speeches or the abstractions of theoretical analysis, fiction is a medium through which both the text and context associated with rhetorical discourse can be simultaneously conveyed, and their dynamic and often reciprocal interaction depicted.

But these novels also move beyond the depiction of rhetorical action to consider the relationship between rhetoric and culture, and in particular the relationship between repressed and dominant rhetorical traditions, an issue pursued by a number of contemporary rhetoricians. Cheryl Glenn, examining the process through which women were written out of or excluded from the rhetorical tradition, states that “Rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment (including who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said)” (1-2). Molefi Kete Asante, examining the roots of African rhetorical traditions, echoes Glenn’s point when he suggests that “Just as there is no universal language, there is no universal rhetoric. The rules that govern rhetoric embody a culture’s assumptions about power relations.... *Rhetorical condition is the structure and power pattern a society assumes or imposes during a rhetorical situation*” (28). And, finally, James Berlin, examining the political and epistemological underpinnings of different theories of composition, points out that perceptions of the relationship between rhetoric and ideology have shifted in recent years:

More recently the discussion of the relation between ideology and rhetoric has taken a new turn. Ideology is here foregrounded and problematized in a way

that situates rhetoric within ideology, rather than ideology within rhetoric. In other words, instead of rhetoric acting as the transcendental recorder or arbiter of competing ideological claims, rhetoric is regarded as always already ideological. This position means that any examination of a rhetoric must first consider the ways its very discursive structure can be read so as to favor one version of economic, social, and political arrangement over other versions.... A rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of others because it is always already serving certain ideological claims. (477)

Glenn, Asante, and Berlin all propose that a system of rhetoric seems to be a neutral, catalytic medium for ideological action only from within the social or political system that produces it. When alternative systems of rhetoric, whose patterns of expression reflect other conceptions of social or political relations (or of the relationship between language and reality), clash with the dominant system of rhetoric, the status of rhetoric as “always already ideological” becomes apparent, and rhetoric itself becomes a site through which social struggles are enacted. Rhetoric is a *techne* for producing suasive discourse, but the means of production always control or influence the nature of the product. As Michel Foucault suggests, power is not only, as is commonly believed, a restrictive force, but is primarily a productive one that operates by creating objects of knowledge: “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms.... In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (*Discipline* 194). Ellison and Momaday explore how different rhetorics produce distinct, often conflicting realities, and how alternative rhetorical traditions might assist marginalized people to redefine their identities and reconfigure the social and

political contexts in which they live. At the same time, the novels, written and published during periods of increasing racial tension in the United States, are themselves rhetorical products that influence their readers. Ellison and Momaday infuse the Euro-American modernist novel with African American and Native American motifs, narrative structures, and conventions; as a result, the submerged literary traditions surface within a modernist context, displacing the Euro-American reader and invoking an implied reader who is able to encompass multi-cultural narratives. Further, the American literary tradition is itself subverted as these “Trojan horse” novels (Owens, *Mixedblood* 69) insinuate themselves into the canon under the guise of the modernist novel, re-inscribing Americanness itself so that it becomes not a monolithic quality but a dynamic state in which multiple traditions—rhetorical, literary, and cultural—engage in a process of mutual influence.

My choice of works for this study, then, is based on the intersection of two qualities. First, both texts represent important turning points in their respective literary traditions because they not only break into but also effectively challenge the hegemonic aesthetics and ideologies that underlie the Euro-American literary canon. Louis Owens asserts that

What has matured with Momaday is not merely an undeniable facility with the techniques and tropes of modernism, but more significantly the profound awareness of conflicting epistemologies.... With Momaday the American Indian novel shows its ability to appropriate the discourse of the privileged center and make it “bear the burden” of an “other” world view. (*Destinies* 92)

And, as Joseph Bruchac points out, while “In the 1950s and 1960s, an Indian writer was a voice crying unheard in the civilized wilderness of American letters,” Momaday’s novel and its reception changed “the atmosphere in which the Native American writer could exist,”

precipitating a surge in Native American writing that is often called the Native American renaissance (311-12). Though Bruchac, among other critics, is somewhat skeptical of the concept of a renaissance, preferring to see Momaday's novel as part of a continuum rather than as a isolated, originary tour de force, there is no denying that *House Made of Dawn* is a seminal work that transformed both the production and reception of Native American literature. This transformative power was partly the result of external forces, such as Momaday's winning of the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 and the subsequent increased attention paid to Native American authors and literature: James Welch writes that, after Momaday won the Pulitzer, "suddenly people started to notice Indian Literature, [and] the way kind of opened for Indians;...younger people who didn't think they had much chance as a writer, suddenly realized, well, an Indian can write" (qtd. in Patell 627). However, I will suggest in this introduction and demonstrate in more detail in my conclusion that the ultimate source of the novel's cultural power lies in Momaday's strategic appropriation of the modernist tradition, an appropriation that allows the novel to do rhetorical and cultural work on both Native and non-Native audiences that novels by earlier Native American authors such as Mourning Dove, John Joseph Matthews, and D'Arcy McNickle were unable to do. Other Native American writers in the 1970s, such as Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko, further established public and academic interest in Native American literature, but Momaday's book retains a special interest in this study because of its distinctive status within both Native American literature and American literature in general.

Ellison effects a similar appropriation of modernism, although his position and influence within the African American tradition is more complicated than Momaday's. Preceded by the seminal work of Richard Wright and followed by the writers of the Black Arts

movement, Ellison, like James Baldwin, was bracketed by figures who were unsympathetic to his artistic aims and the complex ideologies that underlay them. Writing against Wright's powerful if deterministic naturalism, and rejected in turn by the literary nationalists who would dominate African American literature in the 1960s and 1970s, Ellison is an author whose artistic capital within the African American artistic and critical community has fluctuated, although his novel quickly became a part of the broader American canon. Nonetheless, after seeing his reputation among many African American critics and writers dip from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, Ellison had the satisfaction of seeing his work not only continually supported by Euro-American critics but also re-affirmed by prominent contemporary African American critics, including Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and (until recently) Houston A. Baker, Jr. Ellison has repeatedly been pilloried as an author who, in the face of the intensifying cold war and rising American conservatism, retreated from social engagement in favour of aestheticism, liberalism, or existentialist individualism, and then failed to reflect the changing times as the civil rights and Black Power movements rose to prominence.<sup>1</sup> But while black nationalists repeatedly claimed that Ellison was irrelevant, as Kenneth W. Warren points out, "Ellison had never really disappeared from the scene.... Ellison, as a cultural authority, had remained in view from the 1950s until his death" (16). To a significant degree, Ellison's influence continued because, although nationalists objected to Ellison's integrationist politics, they could not deny that his novel was an especially potent portrayal of African American vernacular language and culture; Houston Baker writes that Larry Neal "worried an Ellisonian line so persistently because he knew that Ellison was a mighty instrument of the blues god confused about where all the good love and feelin' that he poured into *Invisible Man* came from" (*Poetics* 159). As the chapters on Ellison will show, his complex, subtle conception of the

vernacular defeats any attempts to pigeonhole him ideologically, and this has allowed his novel to represent to a unique degree not just a particular ideological stance, but the complex interaction of ideologies that has characterized African American life from the 1950s to the present. Morris Dickstein, writing in the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, affirms the ongoing relevance of *Invisible Man* and its importance in both the African American and American canons:

In *Invisible Man*, Marcus Garvey foreshadows the Black Panthers, thirties Marxism anticipates postsixties Marxism, and a mid-century conception of America's cultural diversity proves remarkably germane to an end-of-century debate over pluralism and multiculturalism. Summing up every ideology roiling the turbulent waters of black life, Ellison wrote a great ideological novel, perhaps the single best novel of the whole postwar era, at once his own inner history and the complex paradigm of a diverse and braided culture. (292)

The second quality for selection is, as I have stated above, that both novels represent and explore their respective rhetorical traditions with a subtlety that is unprecedented within their literatures; the proof of my assertion is contained in the chapters that follow. Earlier novels within the African American and Native American literary traditions had, to some degree, focused on the subject of rhetoric, and more specifically on the roles of orators and oratory. In the African American tradition, such novels include, among others, William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, and Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*. In Native American novels an overt concentration on orators and oration is less common, but John Rollins Ridge's *Joaquin Murieta*, Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*, and John Joseph Matthew's *Sundown* all show



an interest, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, in the role and power of oratory. As this study will demonstrate, however, both *Invisible Man* and *House Made of Dawn* examine culturally distinct rhetorical practices and the interaction of dominant and marginalized rhetorical traditions with a unique thoroughness, and the centrality of rhetoric within the fictional worlds of the novels is directly related to the extradiegetic rhetorical effects the novels have on readers who are both within and outside the cultural contexts of the novels. I would not go so far as to claim that the novels were a primary cause of the historical events that followed their publications, but I would suggest that Ellison and Momaday sensed and captured signal shifts in the discursive and political relations between marginalized and mainstream America. If artists are, as Ezra Pound suggests, the “antennae of the race” (73), then perhaps it is no coincidence that the publication of Ellison’s novel in 1952 precedes the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, as well as the first Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, and that the publication of Momaday’s novel in 1968 comes just before the Native occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, and the occupations of the Bureau of Indian Affairs office and Wounded Knee in 1973.

While it is beyond the scope of this project to speculate at length about the applicability of the methods used here to fictional works written after the selected novels, or to works written by authors of other ethnic-American backgrounds, I would tentatively suggest that a rhetorical analysis of subsequent works such as James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, or Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart* might well lead to results as rich as I have discovered for the novels of Ellison and Momaday, as might a study of Chicano works such as José Antonio Villarreal’s *Pocho* or Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me Ultima*. All of these works, and many others, explore the

relationship between rhetoric and political liberation, and all of them portray, implicitly or explicitly, the rhetorical aspects of inter-cultural relations. The present project is one of only a few studies exploring ethnic-American fiction from the perspective of comparative rhetoric; much work remains to be done to examine the role of rhetoric within other ethnic-American works, to identify in greater detail patterns of rhetorical development within given literary traditions, and to determine how those patterns reflect the social and political contexts in which the traditions exist.

### **Contrastive and Comparative Rhetoric: Methodological Issues**

This study is situated at the confluence of a number of critical streams. I draw broadly (perhaps even promiscuously) on the work of a variety of critics; for the chapters on Ellison, I refer in particular to Houston Baker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Jacques Lacan, Barbara Biesecker, and Roger Abrahams; for the chapters on Momaday, to Gerald Vizenor, Jeanette Armstrong, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Gary Witherspoon. My intent is to explore a particular aspect of the texts—the rhetorical—rather than to give a reading that reflects the perspective of any one critic, and so the works of the above critics are used as needed, treated as means of augmentation or explication rather than as central paradigms. Kenneth Burke is referred to relatively often, but this is not a strictly Burkean reading of these texts, though it is certainly inspired by Burke’s voracious polymathy and his avid interest in relating poetics to rhetoric. My analysis of the diegetic rhetoric portrayed in the novels is best classified under the rubrics of comparative and contrastive rhetoric, multidisciplinary fields that draw on work done in rhetorical criticism, ethnology and anthropology, and sociolinguistics. George Kennedy defines comparative rhetoric as “the cross-cultural study of rhetorical traditions as they exist or have existed in different societies around the world” (1), whereas contrastive rhetoric, according to

Michael H. Long and Jack C. Richards, traditionally examines “the role of first language conventions of discourse and rhetorical structures on second language usage, as well as cognitive and cultural dimensions of transfer, particularly in relation to writing” (Long and Richards xi). In communication studies, comparative rhetoric would be analogous to cross-cultural communication, which examines communication patterns within particular cultures, whereas contrastive rhetoric would be analogous to intercultural communication, which studies communication between members of different cultures (Gudykunst and Mody xi). My analysis of the extradiegetic rhetoric of the novels is an exercise in the rhetoric of fiction, another interdisciplinary area which draws on literary analysis, narratology, and reader-response theory in order to understand how fiction influences the attitude of its readers toward various elements within or outside of a literary or cinematic work.

There are methodological issues that attend all these areas, in particular the question of whether one can use the word “rhetoric” in connection with the communication practices of non-western cultures without being either inaccurate or colonizing. I suggest that the question of inaccuracy or colonization depends on the definition of “rhetoric,” which, as Lucaites, Condit, and Caudill point out, has been matter of perpetual contestation:

In some instances the definitions attributed to rhetoric have made it so narrow as to include little more than style and delivery within its purview; in other instances its meaning has been so broad as to colonize and include all other forms of discourse, ranging from logic to poetics. Indeed the range of answers to this question is so varied, and the implications of each answer so significant for how we engage the practical, critical, and theoretical problematics of rhetoric, that it seems more productive to ask the more inclusive and proactive

question “What can a rhetoric be?” rather than to ask the foundational and totalizing question “What is rhetoric?” (Lucaites, Condit, and Caudill 19)

Contemporary definitions of rhetoric range widely. In his book *Comparative Rhetoric*, George Kennedy defines rhetoric in the broadest possible terms, as an inherent, natural force in all living beings that is identified with “the mental or emotional energy that impels the speaker to expression, the energy level encoded in the message, and the energy received by the recipient who then uses mental energy in decoding and perhaps acting on the message” (5), whereas Edward Schiappa, echoing Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric* 1355b14) rather than as the actual use of persuasive language, insists that the term “rhetoric” should, strictly used, designate only an explicitly systematized theory of how suasive language works (“Neo-Sophistic” 197). As Kenneth Burke states, “every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (*Permanence* 49), and any definition will reveal some things at the cost of concealing others. Kennedy’s broadened definition of rhetoric, which allows him to characterize even stags and songbirds as rhetors (13, 21), gives him the ability to draw novel parallels between species and cultures but, in encompassing almost any communicative action, it runs the danger of concealing more than it reveals, much as the broad definitions of stimulus and response employed by the most dogmatic Skinnerians, in making a squawk and a sonnet theoretically equivalent, drew valid parallels within their own semantic fields, but at the cost of eliding substantial differences in products and processes.

In contrast, Schiappa’s definition effectively restricts the term “rhetoric” to the classical tradition that stems from Plato and Aristotle, since most studies in comparative rhetoric echo the observation of Robert T. Oliver who, in his landmark study *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*, states that “Rhetorical views—the principles which explained or

governed the nature, functions, and effective methods of oral discourse of the ancient Indians and Chinese—are seldom explicit but are intrinsic in their religio-philosophical writings and in their political and social practices” (ix).<sup>2</sup> Fixing the definition for rhetoric in this more restricted way allows for historical rigour (Schiappa, for instance, uses it to criticize John Poulakos’s contention that the older sophists had a philosophy of rhetoric<sup>3</sup>), but it fails to reflect the development of the term “rhetoric” over the last 2500 years, during which, like the term “philosophy,” it has accrued a variety of denotative and connotative meanings that interact in a complex manner and give the term a rich resonance that includes but transcends its original significance. Suitably enough, “rhetoric,” which designates, in part, an art notorious for proving opposites, has itself become a signifier that is multivalent, conveying at times conflicting meanings. Carol S. Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley, the editors of an anthology on the communicative practices of ancient cultures other than the Greeks, acknowledge the potential dangers of using the term “rhetoric” with reference to other cultures, and they explore alternative terms, but conclude that “In the end, none of the alternate lenses and terms has the breadth and richness of the term rhetoric, which implies invention and approaches to developing text along with guidelines for organizing and developing text” (10). Xing Lu, in her study of rhetoric in ancient China, states that

There is, in fact, no unified signifier, equivalent to the term rhetoric, in Chinese texts. This does not mean, however, that rhetoric did not exist in ancient China. In fact, the ancient Chinese had a well-developed sense of the power and impact of language in their social, political, and individual lives.... The task of a rhetorical scholar, then, is to remain open to the universal sense of rhetoric, as

well as to the transformative power of a particular culture on the practice of rhetoric. (3)

This “universal” sense corresponds to Burke’s characterization of rhetoric not as a specific way of speaking or persuading, or as a method of analysis, but as a function of language; Burke defines rhetoric as “*the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols*.... The term ‘rhetoric’ is no substitute for ‘magic,’ ‘witchcraft,’ ‘socialization,’ ‘communication,’ and so on. But the term rhetoric designates a *function* which is present in the areas variously covered by these other terms” (*Rhetoric* 43). Within this project, I use Barbara Biesecker’s work in association with Burke’s concept of rhetoric as a function, shifting the emphasis from cooperation to *articulation*, a term that I hope will encompass Burke’s statement that identification and division are always reciprocal processes within rhetoric (*Rhetoric* 25), and will also capture the complex process through which rhetoric not only mediates between individuals within a particular rhetorical situation (a paradigm that is characteristic of western rhetorics), but also serves to define and bring into being both the individuals and the situations in which they operate (a paradigm that is more characteristic of non-western rhetorics).

Biesecker distinguishes between what she calls a logic of influence and a logic of articulation (232-33). Under a logic of influence, the rhetor and audience are framed as autonomous entities existing within a given rhetorical situation, and rhetoric is a means for the rhetor to influence the audience in line with the exigencies and constraints that already exist within the situation. Under a logic of articulation, rhetor, audience, and situation have a more reciprocal relationship with one another; to a degree, the existing situation can determine what rhetorical action is possible, but to a significant degree symbolic action, by shifting the terms

that interlocutors use to define each other and the context in which they exist, creates the roles of rhetor and audience and brings into being the rhetorical situation, bringing about new relationships, or articulations between them. Biesecker, drawing on poststructuralist theory, suggests that the rhetorical situation should be characterized “neither as an event that merely induces an audience to act one way or another nor as an incident that, in representing the interests of a particular collectivity, merely wrestles the probable within the realm of the actualizable. Rather, we would see the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations” (243). Characterizing rhetoric in terms of articulation allows it to encompass both the eristic and persuasive practices that are derived from the classical and western tradition and the more indirect, non-interventionist practices that characterize many other societies. The goal of the comparative rhetorician, then, is to examine the means by which a particular culture accomplishes this articulative function, and where those means are not contained within an explicit body of theory, they must be gleaned from other texts of the culture or from observation of interpersonal interactions, where they exist implicitly.<sup>4</sup> This project, through its examination of the works of both Ellison and Momaday, suggests that literature itself can be a valuable resource for constructing and understanding the implied metarhetoric of a particular culture, and that, conversely, the rhetorical aspects of other texts or studies in comparative rhetoric can be valuable sources for exploring the rhetorical aspects of ethnic-American literatures.

But ethnic-American literary works, though they embody distinctive cultural traditions, are also written from within the context of a broader American society and are, as a rule, directed at a wider audience that includes readers of various cultural backgrounds. Werner Sollors warns that “If anything, ethnic literary history ought to increase our understanding of

the cultural interplays and contacts among writers of different backgrounds, the cultural mergers and secessions that took place in America, all of which can be accomplished only if the categorization of writers as members of ethnic groups is understood to be a very partial, temporal, and insufficient characterization at best” (*Beyond* 14-15). While Sollors’s arguments for the primacy of syncretism sometimes underplay both the conflict attending cultural relations in the United States and the complicated and significant role ethnicity plays in the works of many ethnic-American writers, his warning that American writers of all cultures must be viewed through a variety of lenses is well-founded, particularly in case of writers such as Momaday and Ellison, whose relationship with the Euro-American literary tradition is complex (a topic taken up in more detail in my final chapter). Within an American context especially, a comparative approach examining those rhetorical elements that are culturally distinct must be balanced with a contrastive approach that examines how those elements function within generic, literary, social, and political contexts that are characteristic of a broader American culture.

Contrastive rhetoric first developed within the fields of applied linguistics and, more specifically, second language teaching in the 1960s. As a field of study, its main aim, initially, was to increase the rhetorical efficacy of discourse produced by second language speakers, mostly by identifying and correcting instances of rhetorical interference—the misplaced or unconscious employment of rhetorical strategies customarily associated with the speaker’s first language. However, recent research has expanded the scope of contrastive rhetoric in a number of ways, aligning it less with applied linguistics and more with intercultural communication studies. Focus has shifted from prescriptive studies of language instruction, where the primary concern is text analysis and correction, to more holistic descriptive analyses that examine how



social, political, and cultural contexts affect the production and reception of intercultural texts, without framing the interaction of multiple rhetorics solely as a problem to be solved. This project joins a number of other studies in expanding the scope of the field by shifting the basis of comparison from national language to intra-national cultures sharing the same language, and by focusing on literature rather than expository texts, the usual genre on which studies in contrastive rhetoric are based.<sup>5</sup>

On the diegetic level, both Ellison and Momaday represent characters caught between conflicting rhetorics—Ellison's invisible man is caught between the accommodationist rhetoric of Booker T. Washington and a repressed African American vernacular rhetoric, while both Tosamah and Benally in Momaday's novel are situated within the conflicting dynamics of an essentializing Euro-American rhetoric and their respective tribal traditions. On the extradiegetic level, ethnic-American literary works are often bicultural (or even multicultural, in the case of Momaday) productions that merge literary traditions whose conventions may be very different from one another. The narrative conventions and rhetorical strategies employed in ethnic-American works are often contrary to those that a Euro-American audience might expect, and they can disrupt or disturb a Euro-American audience's reading experience. To frame the issue in narratological terms, the unfamiliar aspects of the work can make it difficult for a reader from outside the culture to identify with the text's implied audience. But, whereas contrastive rhetoric traditionally frames the inclusion of first language rhetorical strategies as an error, the inclusion of interfering strategies in ethnic-American texts is often an act of resistance, a conscious attempt to make the reader aware that the code by which she customarily reads is not a universal norm, but one of many possible schemas, each of which reflects a particular worldview and ideology. Or (and this is especially the case with Ellison),

an author's goal might be to make the reader realize that the familiar code by which she reads is in fact *informed* by elements she considers alien, or else is a colonial appropriation of those elements, just as she might be made aware of the extent to which the construction of Americanness is itself informed by elements drawn from African American or Native American culture, even as the origin of those elements is repressed.

As Donald C. Bryant states, a rhetor's objective is not only to "adjust ideas to people," but to adjust "people to ideas" (413). Rhetoric aims not only to accommodate but also to affect its audience, and with respect to the Euro-American reader at least, the rhetorical challenge for both Ellison and Momaday is to lever the familiar in a way that draws the reader in and yet maximizes the opportunity to disturb or complicate her experience of reading the text. So long as the reader can be persuaded to occupy the position of the implied reader, even provisionally, then the novel can do rhetorical work by influencing the reader's construction of her own identity in relation to the text, a rhetorical process which, I shall argue in my last chapter, is very different from the reading processes associated with the didactic ethnic-American fiction preceding the modernist movement. The various rhetorics then, both diegetic and extradiegetic, that inhabit the novels of Ellison and Momaday do not simply interfere with but also resonate with one another, disrupting the hegemony of dominant rhetorical modes.

But the dynamic interaction of the different forms of rhetoric in these novels also qualifies Asante's claim that there is no universal rhetoric, for if it is true that there is no rhetoric that is beyond culture or ideology, neither are there any isolated, pure systems of rhetoric, especially within American society. Kermit E. Campbell writes that "American Africanism is deeply rooted in all that is America, even America's rhetorical tradition... what we need is altogether different histories of rhetoric, what I like to call mestizo or hybrid

rhetorical histories. This means not just histories that include a sampling of, say, African American oratory or great Native American orators (through we do need substantive accounts of these as well) but historical studies that take into account rhetorical influences across racial and cultural lines” (218-19). Campbell’s statement, which is mainly concerned with African American rhetoric, cannot be applied without qualification to Native American rhetoric, since Native Americans have had a very different historical and linguistic relationship to Euro-American society than have African Americans. Nonetheless, it is generally true that, like Bakhtin’s dialogic interlocutors, cultural rhetorics maintain a significant degree of distinction but, as they intermix within American society, and especially within the American novel, they also begin to contain traces and echoes of the rival systems against which they define themselves; the task of rhetorical analysis in a cultural context therefore includes not just identifying distinctive elements of emergent or dominant rhetorics but investigating how different rhetorical systems interact with or modify one another.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of Ethnic-American Literatures**

African American literature has been analyzed in rhetorical terms far more often than has Native American literature.<sup>6</sup> There are a number of reasons for this: African American vernacular rhetoric occurs mainly in English and has, in addition to features which can be traced to traditional African verbal practices, a close, even reciprocal, relationship with some American rhetorical traditions (particularly abolitionist oratory and folk preaching); as a result, it is more accessible and more thoroughly studied than Native American rhetorical traditions. Further, while there are regional differences in African American language and culture, there is enough uniformity to allow for general statements about African American rhetorical practice, even if those statements are subject to some qualification.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the very concept of a

general Native American rhetoric is problematic, since rhetorical systems tend to reflect the contexts in which they are formed and used, and Native American tribes differ significantly in terms of their languages, social structures, political systems, and ethical or religious beliefs, both from one another and from Euro-American culture. Examining the rhetoric of even one tribe is a challenging endeavor, involving, ideally, an intimate knowledge of tribal language and customs that would take extensive, perhaps prohibitive, time and effort for someone whose primary area of expertise is not cultural anthropology; otherwise, scholars attempting to study the rhetorical aspects of Native American literature from an emic perspective must rely mainly on the works written in English by tribal members and on the translations and analyses of ethnologists and anthropologists.<sup>8</sup>

The vast majority of works that examine Native American rhetoric in general rather than tribal terms draw on speeches made during treaty negotiations, where efforts to understand discourse from a cross-cultural or comparative perspective are complicated by the intercultural nature of the rhetorical interaction and issues of translation.<sup>9</sup> Because African American rhetorical traditions are more accessible to literary scholars, the rhetorical elements within African American literature are more readily detected, and the work of examining the role of rhetoric within the tradition can draw more easily on existing scholarship. It is much less likely that scholars who do not share the tribal background of a Native American author will even detect the presence of a distinctive rhetorical tradition in a given work, or that the existing scholarship would allow them to confirm or expand upon their surmises. In addition, because the African American rhetorical tradition partakes of the western rhetorical tradition, it is easier to apply customary modes of rhetorical analysis to it, although this application tends to elide those elements that reflect non-western rhetorical practices. I argue in my chapters on

Ellison that a full understanding of the rhetorical elements of *Invisible Man* requires a knowledge of African American vernacular rhetoric, and I assert in my chapters on Momaday that the role of story in many Native American rhetorics requires a rethinking of the relationship between narrative and rhetoric.

The originality of the work presented here, then, is three-fold: first, literature has not widely been analyzed in terms of comparative or contrastive rhetoric, and the present study investigates the degree to which the materials of comparative or contrastive rhetoric might be fruitfully applied in literary analysis, and, reciprocally, the degree to which literature might serve as a resource for a study of comparative or contrastive rhetoric. Secondly, most of the theory on the rhetoric of fiction has been based on works written within the Western tradition (even though the structuralist paradigm that underlies the narratological aspect of the field is deeply rooted in anthropology), and this study investigates the degree to which the existing critical tools can be applied to works that draw on narrative forms that have been excluded from that tradition.<sup>10</sup> Finally, my readings suggest that, given the tension between the socio-political and aesthetic imperatives that often, though by no means always, weighs on writers of ethnic-American literature, the role of rhetoric, both diegetic and extradiegetic, in works of minority writers may merit more attention than has previously been given to it. It is not my intent to compare the two novels in terms of their diegetic rhetoric. I have chosen two works in order to demonstrate that the general critical presumptions underlying my readings are productive across different cultures, rather than to draw parallels between African American and Native American rhetorics, although the fact that both novels draw strongly on oral traditions results in some significant commonalities between them. Chapters two and three, therefore, explore diegetic rhetoric within Ellison's novel, and chapters four and five examine

the diegetic rhetoric of Momaday's novel. Where I would like to compare the works, however, is in their extradiegetic rhetoric, and in particular in their relationship to the American literary tradition. As ethnic-American writers working in the modernist mode, both Ellison and Momaday face similar challenges in situating themselves within the literary traditions of what Sollors might call their respective cultures of descent and consent. The challenge posed by modernism is particularly difficult given that ethnic-American literary production has been motivated in good part by the explicitly rhetorical aim of asserting the humanity and intelligence of the artist's culture of descent, while modernist aesthetics tend to be universalist and have generally proscribed overt rhetoric in art. In my final chapter, I examine how the extradiegetic rhetoric of both novels attempts to negotiate this seeming impasse.

## Chapter 2: Washingtonian and Vernacular Rhetoric in the Deep South

### Ellison and the Vernacular

Oratory plays a central part in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, but how well did Ellison really know African American culture and rhetoric, and how accurately did he represent it? A peculiar critical chiasmus testifies to the ongoing controversy over Ellison and his work. In the 1960s, advocates of the Black Arts movement generally viewed Ellison as a sell-out because of his criticism of black nationalism and his assertion that African Americans were American, not African, although Ellison also asserted that "I don't recognize any white culture...I recognize no American culture which is not the partial creation of black people. I recognize no American style in literature, in dance, in music, even in assembly-line processes, which does not bear the mark of the American Negro" (qtd. in McPherson 356). An early review by Lloyd L. Brown, a leftist African American novelist, accuses Ellison of being "profoundly anti-Negro...his work is alien to the Negro people and has its source in upper-class corruption" (32), while John O. Killens called *Invisible Man* "a vicious distortion of Negro life" (qtd. in Butler xxii). This assessment was shared by many nationalists throughout the 1960s, including Larry Neal, who in his afterward to the 1968 anthology *Black Fire* suggested that Ellison was simply irrelevant: "The things that concerned Ellison are interesting to read, but contemporary Black youth feel another force in the world today. We know who we are, and are not invisible, *at least not to each other*" (652). This early dismissal by Neal, a prominent Black Arts critic, is reversed nearly two decades later in his article, "Ellison's Zoot Suit," in which he admits that "dealing with Ralph Ellison is no easy matter" (105) and acknowledges that, far from being disengaged from African American culture, "Ellison's spiritual roots are...deep in the black American folk tradition" (Neal 120). This rise in critical opinion from a formerly hostile nationalist critic

contrasts with the revised view of Houston Baker. In 1984, Baker wrote in *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* that *Invisible Man* “reflexively and nimbly negotiates not only the economics of slavery, but also the break held to obtain between ‘the form of things unknown’ [Richard Wright’s phrase for folk culture] and the ‘evolved’ forms of English and American literatures. The novel not only discovers AMERICA in a stunningly energetic blues manner, but also sets that idea singing in ways unheard before its production and unequalled since its first appearance in 1952” (173); indeed, “*We glimpse Ralph Ellison’s creative genius beneath his Western critical mask. And while we stand waiting for the next high-cultural pronouncement from the critic, we are startled by a captivating sound of flattened thirds and sevenths—the private artist’s blues-filled flight, the blues artist’s surrender to the air in lively fulfillment of a dream of American form*” (199). Almost two decades later, however, Baker writes that “There is simply no insight with respect to black folk consciousness, black northern migration, or black urban-industrial existence in *Invisible Man* that is not anticipated in [Richard Wright’s] *12 Million Black Voices*” (*Critical* 29). Baker also suggests that Ellison has had no direct exposure to southern African American culture and calls *Invisible Man* “a Disneyesque prison of American novelistic form” (32). As these contrasting critical revisions imply, it is indeed “no easy matter” to deal with Ralph Ellison, particularly because his vision of what African American culture actually is sometimes proves to be ambiguous and complex. These chapters on *Invisible Man* will demonstrate that, while it would be a mistake to read the book through a black nationalist lens, Ellison does offer an illuminating depiction of African American culture, and in particular of African American oratory. This chapter focuses on how the African American vernacular tradition that is part of the invisible man’s southern heritage is displaced by the accommodationist rhetoric of the Founder, a figure whose ideology and



rhetoric are based largely on those of Booker T. Washington, and the next chapter will examine how the invisible man recovers the vernacular tradition after he moves to the north and begins to work for the Brotherhood. In the conclusion of this project I will shift my frame of analysis, examining both *Invisible Man* and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* as rhetorical statements functioning within a broader American literary and cultural context.

Many critics have commented on the use of folk or vernacular traditions in *Invisible Man*.<sup>11</sup> It is worthwhile, however, to briefly examine the word "vernacular," since, while most critics of African American literature agree with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. that "The vernacular is the source from which black theory springs" (92), its definition can itself be a point of contention. Houston Baker's definition in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* is a good starting point:

The "vernacular" in relation to human beings signals "a slave born on his master's estate." In expressive terms, vernacular indicates "arts native or peculiar to a particular country or locale." The material conditions of slavery in the United States and the rhythms of African American blues combined and emerged from my revised materialistic perspective as an ancestral matrix that has produced a forceful and indigenous American creativity. (2)

The African American vernacular, for Baker, is a product of material conditions specific to African American history; it is a womb in which a wide variety of culturally distinctive artistic forms germinate, gestate, and are born. In *Afro-American Poetics*, Baker goes so far as to suggest "that *race* carries distinctive expressive cultural incumbencies" (101); in other words, linguistic difference is a necessary condition for the construction of a distinct racial identity. However, for Ellison, the vernacular is not so much a sign of cultural distinction as an

appropriative process by which voices that are temporally or culturally distinct come to form a single though internally diverse social or political entity: “by ‘vernacular’ I mean far more than popular or indigenous language. I see the vernacular as a dynamic *process* in which the most refined styles from the past are continually merged with the play-it-by-eye-and-by-ear improvisations which we invent in our efforts to control our environment and entertain ourselves” (“Territory” 608). The vernacular is a product of material conditions, but it is also a product of the various voices it assimilates, and this capacity for assimilation is what most characterizes American culture:

the American nation is in a sense the product of the American language, a colloquial speech that began emerging long before the British colonials and Africans were transformed into Americans. It is a language that evolved from the King’s English but, basing itself upon the realities of the American land and colonial institutions—or lack of institutions—began quite early as a vernacular revolt against the signs, symbols, manners and authority of the mother country. It is a language that began by merging the sounds of many tongues, brought together in the struggle of diverse regions. And whether it is admitted or not, much of the sound of that language is derived from the timbre of the African voice and the listening habits of the African ear. So there is a *de’z* and *do’z* of slave speech sounding beneath our most polished Harvard accents, and if there is such a thing as a Yale accent, there is a Negro wail in it—doubtless introduced there by Old Yalie John C. Calhoun, who probably got it from his mammy. (“What America Would Be” 581)

Ellison, while maintaining that African Americans do have a distinct voice, argues that the strongest expression of that voice is within American culture and language themselves, because the distinctiveness of American culture is due to its incorporation of multiple voices, among which is the African American's. While this project will refer to and make use of both Baker's and Ellison's descriptions of the vernacular, the description of the vernacular that most closely agrees with the word's general meaning in these chapters is Barbara Johnson's:

The terms "black" and "white" often imply a relation of mutual exclusion. This binary model is based on two fallacies: the fallacy of positing the existence of pure, unified, and separate traditions, and the fallacy of spatialization.... But spatial models are simply not adequate for cultural and linguistic phenomena. Cultures are not containable within boundaries. Rhetorical figures are not Euclidean. New logical models are needed for describing the task of finding a "vernacular" theory, models that acknowledge the ineradicable trace of Western culture within Afro-American culture (and vice versa) without losing the "signifying black difference." Even the word "vernacular" does not name a separate realm: it comes from the Latin "verna," which means "a slave born in his master's home." The vernacular is a difference *within*, not a realm outside. And the "master's home" could not be what it is without all it has stolen from the slave. (42)

Johnson suggests that the vernacular is a relational term which links and yet distinguishes registers. At a later point in this chapter and in the following chapter, I will suggest that Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s concept of Signifyin(g) allows for a non-exclusive model of cultural and linguistic action that still maintains a distinctive African American voice.

In the southern section of Ellison's book, the invisible man's initial reluctance to acknowledge his southern roots, his drive to efface any vestiges of an African American vernacular tradition in favour of a genteel Europeanized culture, is symptomatic of his lack of personal autonomy. Ellison has described African American folklore as "an especially courageous expression. It announced the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibilities as to the definition of reality, rather than allow his masters to define these crucial matters for him" ("Art" 214). In contrast, for much of his career, the invisible man is unable or unwilling to challenge others' interpretations of his own experiences: "I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer" (15). If, as Kenneth Burke suggests, terms that reflect and form particular realities must be organized through representative anecdotes—paradigmatic narratives that structure and generate linguistic acts (*Grammar* 59)—then the invisible man, by rejecting African American folklore in favour of the narratives supplied by the college or the Brotherhood, chooses to live within narratives that erase him, that interpellate him only to efface his existence and render him unseeable. His own text, driven by a "compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white" (13), provides new terms for existence by appropriating the other narratives to form an alternative representative anecdote that makes him visible to the reader. But within the invisible man's own narrative, it is his career as an orator that powers his personal transformations and, just as the invisible man must come to terms with African American folklore if he is to escape the restricting narratives provided for him by others, so he must also negotiate his way between different oratorical traditions if he is to engage in forms of symbolic action that are effective and liberatory rather than futile and accommodationist. *Invisible Man* is an African American *Institutio Oratoria*, but the liberation of its protagonist depends in part

on his appropriation of an alternative rhetorical tradition that challenges many of the received assumptions of oratory as it has been practiced in western culture.

### **Washingtonian Rhetoric and the Repression of Pathos**

Dolan Hubbard, in his analysis of the African American sermon and its literary significance, points out that the black church serves as “a forum for the preacher and the community to perfect in unison the rhetorical modes inherent in the expressive power of black religion” (8), and that “the ‘full’ concretization of the sermon/text is realized when the embedded cultural referents explode in the imagination; at that moment, the preacher/writer and the audience are one” (24). African American vernacular rhetoric, even in secular contexts, draws on the dynamics of sacred rhetoric, in which the folk sermon is an unscripted, emotionally-charged co-production of speaker and audience, a dialogue that affirms in a non-hierarchical manner “the priesthood of all believers” within a shared culture and ensures that the speaker “does not preach *at* or *to*, but *with* the congregation” (Crawford 42). The shouts from the audience that attend the African American folk preacher’s sermon are not merely reactions to or confirmations of his statements—they are themselves symbolic acts intended to spur the speaker to greater eloquence, to bear him up. The preacher’s audience is not merely responding to his oration, but participating in and helping to construct it, and the preacher is not merely speaking to his audience but working with it to shape a rhetorical experience that can capture and extend their shared values: “Black preachers must not only be teachers and mobilizers, parent figures and enablers, but they also must be celebrants” (Mitchell 132).

But, in the southern sections of *Invisible Man*, the protagonist describes a world in which the practices and foundations of African American vernacular oratory are repressed or

inverted. When the invisible man recalls his days at college, he rhapsodizes ironically about the speeches that teachers and patrons delivered to the students:

I remember the evenings spent before the sweeping platform in awe and in pleasure, and in the pleasure of awe; remember the short formal sermons intoned from the pulpit there, rendered in smooth articulate tones, with calm assurance purged of that wild emotion of the crude preachers most of us knew in our home towns and of whom we were deeply ashamed, those logical appeals which reached us more like the thrust of a firm and formal design requiring nothing more than the lucidity of uncluttered periods, the lulling movement of multisyllabic words to thrill and console us. (109)

Oratory not only accommodates, but also creates its audience. Within the college, the emotional and dialogic conventions associated with traditional folk preaching are viewed as a pollution that needs to be purged, and the resulting oratory constructs an audience which eschews the particularity of emotions in favour of abstract logic.

While the Founder obviously has a very close relation to the influential African American educator and advocate Booker T. Washington, he is not totally identified with him; the invisible man says to Jack, “the Founder came before him [Washington] and did practically everything Washington did and a lot more. And more people believed in him” (299). John F. Callahan objects that “critics perversely persist in one-to-one correspondences,” asking “Why should the founder evoke only Booker T. Washington? Why not other founders as well?... The reality is historical and mythic—archetypal” (“Chaos” 135). Callahan has a point but, while the Founder does at times function as an archetypal figure, the special connection with Washington is, as we shall see, undeniable. The ambiguous relationship between the two figures allows

Ellison to situate the Founder *between* history and myth—to use the Founder as a stand-in for Washington, or to expand the character so that he stands for any mythologized foundational personality. The two roles are not, of course, antithetical—when the Founder stands as a mythological figure, he transcends but still encompasses Washington, offering a broader perspective on the historical figure.

While Ellison takes pains at points to distinguish the founder of the college from Booker T. Washington, the college is clearly Washingtonian in its approach to racial progress. Like Washington's Tuskegee Institute, the Founder's institution attempts to foster economic and cultural advancement in the hope that admission to political advancement will be the logical consequence, a path of political quietism that Washington first blazed: "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extreme folly, and that the progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing" (Washington, *Slavery* 108). The college's rational approach to oratory is also Washingtonian. Washington constantly foregrounded the role of logic in oratory, stating that the most important advice he was given on public speaking was "Give them an idea for every word," and that "the average audience...wants facts rather than generalities or sermonizing" (*Slavery* 87, 119).<sup>12</sup> William H. Lewis, reporting in 1910 on one of Washington's tours of North Carolina, said of Washington's oratory: "His points were made clear by convincing logic or illustrated by one of his inimitable stories. The dominant qualities of his oratory were his humor and logic; there was little pathos and less poesy, evidencing the intensely human and practical side of the man—the courageous worker rather than the theorist, the bewailer, and the dreamer" (457). Indeed, Caroline H. Pemberton, a Philadelphia writer and social worker, wrote Washington to

warn him that he might be foregoing a potentially powerful means of appealing to his audience:

It is all very well to appeal to the head when you want to convince, but to draw money out of pockets...you must aim at the heart. It seems to me that an appeal to help the negro rise into successful competition with the white man is a kind of pill that needs a *little* coating of sentiment, and if you leave out all the sentiment, what have you left but the antagonism of races, each jealous of the other?... I assure you my sentiments do not prevent my appreciating the manliness, common sense & clear logic of your arguments & your attitude, only I do not think it would be wise for you to cast out sentiment altogether from your speeches. (268-69)

Of course, Washington did at times effectively employ the pathetic appeal in his oratory. In the Atlanta Exposition Address, he establishes the trustworthiness of African Americans through an explicitly emotional appeal to the white members of the audience: “As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach” (*Slavery* 107). However, Washington, when he does employ pathos, uses it not to argue in favour of racial progress but to assuage the anxieties of his white audiences. Pathos—which, as we shall see, Washington associates with primitive forms of African American religious oratory—is used to establish an ethos of humility. It is an important part of what Houston Baker describes as Washington’s “mastery of form” (*Modernism* 33), his ability to strategically appropriate the stereotypical minstrel mask in order



to speak to his white audience in a guise it is comfortable with (Bledsoe later says to the invisible man, “I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am. I had to wait and plan and lick around... Yes, I had to act the nigger!” [141]). In the Atlanta Exposition Address, African American progress is not a movement away from an oppressive past, but a way to re-establish the idealized racial relationships of the pastoral South in an age overtaken by industrialism and racial tensions. And, as David Lionel Smith points out, when Washington attempted to accommodate the conflicting exigencies of a rhetorical situation which included northern whites, southern whites, and African Americans, he was often more concerned with pasting over the cracks in an inevitably fractured and self-contradictory argument with the appearance of logic than he was with actually applying logic (196). Nonetheless, logic, or the appearance of it, remains central to the success of Washington’s oratory.

An oratory that exclusively values logic is as well-suited to reinforce the accommodationist ideology of the college as it is to elide the factor of race in the Brotherhood’s internationalist ideology; indeed, Brother Jack links the two when he later asks the invisible man, “How would you like to be the next Booker T. Washington?” (299). That this logical approach was agreeable to Washington’s white audience is evinced in an 1894 *Philadelphia Enquirer* article entitled “A NEGRO HAS SENSE,” in which the author, Henry McFarland, compares the high-flown but impractical oration of men like Frederick Douglass to the pragmatic rhetoric of Washington. Unlike political African American orators, Washington “indulged in no flights of rhetoric, but his cold facts, with homely but striking illustrations, were more convincing than eloquence” in establishing that “the solution of what is called the negro problem... is simply a phase of the common human problem of material success” (399, 402). Within the rhetoric of the college (a rhetoric which the invisible man will later discover

is belied by the machinations of Bledsoe), as within Washingtonian rhetoric, slavery is treated as a problem amenable to logical solutions implemented in a reasonable manner—the oppressor and the oppressed are presented as co-existing, however imperfectly, in a logical continuum, and the job of oratory is to iron out any wrinkles that might exist in their shared environment. Rhetoric at the college is in the service of pragmatism, not revolution, and pragmatism requires accommodation to existing circumstances; the visitors to the college “exhorted and threatened, intimidated with innocent words as they described to us the limitations of our lives and the vast boldness of our aspirations, the staggering folly of our impatience to rise even higher” (110). One of the veterans at the Golden Day offers a trenchant analysis of the college’s rhetoric when he says of the invisible man that “Already he’s learned to repress not only his emotions, but his humanity,” and states that the invisible man has been taught to believe in “that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white is right” (92, 94). In his working notes for the novel, Ellison states that the invisible man “must act within the absurd predicament in which Negroes find themselves upon the assumption that all is completely logical. Against the tragic-comic attitude adopted by folk Negroes (best expressed by the blues and in our scheme by Trueblood) he is strictly, during the first phase of his life, of the nineteenth century” (“Working” 344).

The absurdity of treating racism as a problem in logic is embodied most powerfully in the “battle royal” episode of *Invisible Man*, in which the young invisible man stubbornly refuses to abandon his faith in Washingtonian rhetoric, clinging to his idealized vision of both Southern civilization and his own potential place in it even when he finds himself in a smoker that presents him with a vision of white society stripped of all its facades: “I was shocked to see some of the most important men of the town quite tipsy. They were all there—bankers,

lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants. Even one of the more fashionable pastors.... I heard the school superintendent, who had told me to come, yell, 'Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up the little shines!'" (18). The smoker is a carnivalesque microcosm of Southern society that overtly manifests the oppressive nature of racial relations in the new South, and the battle royal, by demonstrating the blindness of the invisible man, satirically reveals how absurd Washington's logical accommodationism is within a context of irrational racial oppression. The mature narrator, speaking from the vantage point of his well-lit hole, portrays the blindness of his younger self with a large dose of irony: "I suspected that fighting a battle royal might detract from the dignity of my speech. In those pre-invisible days I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington" (17). The aspiring orator is unwilling to see who he is to the white people of the town, clinging, even in the midst of the degrading mass battle, to his belief that the white folk of the town actually care about what he has to say, that he is in fact visible to them: "The harder we fought the more threatening the men became. And yet, I had begun to worry about my speech again. How would it go? Would they recognize my ability? What would they give me?" (24). The recognition and rewarding of ability is a staple of material progressivism that the invisible man cannot abandon even in the midst of the battle; indeed, economic advancement is the ideology that keeps him invisible to himself, that spurs him to run frantically without allowing him to realize he is never really moving. The naked woman dancing in front of the young black boys, with her white face, rouged cheeks, blue eye shadow, and American flag tattooed on her belly, is meant by the townspeople to represent both all America has to offer and all that African Americans, on pain of lynching, can never have. Her nakedness only serves to reinforce for the boys how thoroughly shrouded she is in racial proscriptions. As a visual icon, she functions as a

sexualized version of the Founder's statue (based on a famous statue at Tuskegee that portrays Booker T. Washington lifting a veil from the face of a kneeling black man): the narrator says of the statue that he is "unable to decide whether the veil is really lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding" (36). This process of blindness through illumination is further manifested in the invisible man's fixation on speech even as he fights the other boys: "Blindfolds were put on. Yet even then I had been going over my speech. In my mind each word was as bright as flame" (21).

Washington's best known oration is, of course, the Atlanta Exposition Address, and Ellison caps his satire by putting the address in the mouth of the aspiring young orator who, after enduring the battle royal and electric shocks, finally has the opportunity to repeat Washington's famous words: "To those of my race who depend upon bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is his next-door neighbor, I would say: 'Cast down your bucket where you are'" (30). Washington's analogy, which was intended to suggest that both blacks and whites could slake their thirst for prosperity through mutual cooperation, is countered throughout the smoker scene by images of the invisible man repeating Washington's words while choking on his own blood: "I spoke automatically and with such fervor that I did not realize that the men were still talking and laughing until my dry mouth, filling up with blood from the cut, almost strangled me.... I closed my ears and swallowed blood until I was nauseated" (30). If the African American casts his bucket into Southern waters, it is not "fresh sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon" that he draws up, but his own blood. Ellison's use of the speech satirizes not only Washingtonian rhetoric, but also Southern society. The 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition was intended to demonstrate that the South

was coming out of the reconstruction as an area ready to make the transition from a conservative agricultural society to one that would embrace modern values and industry. The smoker suggests that southern society is far from reforming its racial or social values and is, in fact, barely civilized at all. The function of accommodationist rhetoric within such a society becomes further apparent when the white crowd demands that the invisible man speak louder, only to disregard him until he makes the signal error of using the phrase “social equality,” a code phrase for miscegenation (Myrdal 68). If, as Gregory Bateson suggests, information is “difference which makes a difference” (459), then the invisible man’s accommodationist oratory contains no information for the white crowd at the smoker. The invisible man’s oratory has value only as performance, as a demonstration that, like an exceptionally gifted parrot, “he knows more big words than a pocket-sized dictionary” (29). The crowd shouts for him to repeat any large words he uses so that their status as signs of intelligence is neutralized by their status as a performance—the invisible man is transformed from an orator to a minstrel in whiteface. The more oratorically gifted the invisible man might be, the more valuable his performance is within the context of the smoker, since he demonstrates that his power is harnessed by the constraints of white society—the louder he speaks, the more thoroughly his white listeners can ignore him.

The discursive system offered by the college circumscribes the ways in which slavery and present oppression are interpreted by its students. When treated in terms of pure logic, slavery and racial oppression are bled of the concrete material and emotional foundations that underlie them. The logical appeal is transcendent and universal, whereas the pathetic appeal is individual and specific—in classical rhetoric, the logical appeal is best realized through abstract structures such as the syllogism or enthymeme, whereas the pathetic appeal is best

realized by vivid, concrete images that invoke emotions (see, for instance, Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.29). If, as Francis Bacon states, “the duty and office of Rhetoric, if it be deeply looked into, is no other than to apply and recommend the dictates of reason to imagination, in order to excite the appetite and will” (*De Augmentis* 4: 455), then the total repudiation of the pathetic appeal by the college seems to ensure that reason and will are severed so that the students are inhibited from acting on the knowledge they receive. The rhetoric of the college produces a “firm and formal design,” an aestheticized discourse that serves as an uncluttered, lulling object of contemplation rather than as a spur to action.

In terms of classical rhetoric, the rhetoric of the college is not forensic or deliberative, but rather epideictic; the object is not to clarify the past or determine future action, but to reinforce particular values that exist in the present. Both Bledsoe and Brother Tarp keep shackles as mementos, but Bledsoe’s is “smooth” (381) and is an abstract “symbol of our progress” (138) that situates slavery in the past. The shackle is presented only as a symbolic benchmark from which economic advancement, carried out through rational means, is to be measured. Tarp’s, in contrast, “bore the marks of haste and violence, looking as though it had been attacked and conquered before it stubbornly yielded” (381). Worn around his ankle for nineteen years, Tarp’s shackle is no abstract symbol of progress, but is rather an embodiment of personal suffering and triumph that has “a heap of signifying wrapped up in it” and manifests the continuing reality of oppression under other guises: Tarp still limps as though he is dragging a chain along, although doctors have been unable to find a cause for his irregular gait, and he gives the shackle to the invisible man with the hope that “it might help you remember what we’re really fighting against” (381). For Tarp, who escaped from prison and has “been looking for freedom ever since” (381), oppression is not past and the fight is not

over. The other gift he gives to the invisible man is a picture of Frederick Douglass, an orator whose later political philosophy is directly opposed to Washington's: "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning.... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will" (Douglass, "No Struggle" 310). And, unlike the students of the college, Douglass developed his powers of speech not by forsaking the traditions of folk oratory, but by merging "two traditions—the oral tradition of the slave culture with the classical rhetorical tradition" (Lampe 13), so that he can not only function within the context of a white audience, but can, as in his best-known address, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," challenge the very context he is speaking in.

The college's rhetoric is also accommodationist in that it distances the students from their African heritage as it is manifested in folk preaching and oratory. Scholars such as Lawrence W. Levine (57), Sterling Stuckey (53) and Henry H. Mitchell (13) agree with W. E. B. Du Bois that African American folk religion and preaching is closely related to practices in African Traditional Religions: "as bard, physician, judge, and priest, within the narrow limits allowed by the slave system, rose the Negro preacher, and under him the first church was not at first by any means Christian nor definitely organized; rather it was an adaptation and mingling of heathen rites among the members of each plantation, and roughly designated as Voodooism" (Du Bois 216). If rhetoric both reflects and effects particular power relations and social roles, then the college's denigration of traditional oratory in favour of a more "rational" style is also an effort to undermine a competing political regime.

The conflict between pathetic and logical oratory in the college has an American precedent in the Great Awakening, the eighteenth century religious revival in which

charismatic preachers such as George Whitefield converted thousands by rejecting the rational, formal homiletics characteristic of mainstream churches in favour of vivid, emotional preaching. Again, each style of oratory had its political implications—while the formalism of the institutional churches tended to subsume individual belief within a framework of dogma, the revivalists were concerned with individualizing religious experience by directly appealing to the audience’s emotions rather than mediating their appeal through institutional dogmas or structures. In the wake of the Great Awakening, the authority of educated clergy in the colonies was permanently weakened, institutionalized religion no longer provided the framework for civil society, and the bonds between church and state were severed (Bailyn et al 140). The revivalist movement also crossed economic, geographical, and racial lines, and Mitchell, citing the research of William H. Pipes, identifies Whitefield as a pivotal figure who allowed African American slaves to fuse Christian doctrine with African oratory (32). The participatory nature of African American folk preaching, its spontaneity and dynamism, and its reliance on pathetic appeals all bespeak a non-hierarchical, fluid politics whose collectivism is not externally imposed but rather effected by the unique role of each individual within the oratorical context: “The congregation’s responses and participation in shaping the act of proclamation makes it clear the preacher does not hold a hieratic monopoly on the word of God. The word is shared by the entire group” (Crawford 39). In contrast, the formalism and rationality of the college’s rhetoric suggests a more structured, deterministic political agenda in which orator and audience are distinct and the audience’s responses are largely circumscribed by a restrictive social and interpretive context. The college’s aim of integrating African Americans into the dominant Euro-American society is therefore threatened not only by the



retention of African American culture, but also by the practices of African American folk oratory.

In 1890, Booker T. Washington deprecated African American folk preaching in an a prominent article in the *Christian Union*:

With few exceptions, the preaching of the colored ministry is emotional in the highest degree, and the minister considers himself successful in proportion as he is able to set the people in all parts of the congregation to groaning, uttering wild screams, and jumping, and finally going into a trance. One of the principal ends sought by most of these ministers is their salary, and to this everything else is made subservient. Most of the church service seems to resolve itself into an effort to get money. Not one in twenty has the business standing in the communities where they reside, and those who know them best mistrust them most in matters of finance and general morality. (“*Christian Union*” 73)

In *Up From Slavery*, Washington reflects with some satisfaction that, after an initial uproar over the article, “public sentiment began making itself felt, in demanding a purifying of the ministry” (113), a purification similar to the purgation practiced at the college. “The ‘calls’ to preach, I am glad to say, are not nearly so numerous now as they were formerly, and the calls to some industrial occupation are growing more numerous” (Washington, *Slavery* 48). On the one hand, Washington objects to the commodification of the spiritual, but on the other, he continually constructs financial progress in spiritual terms: the ministers are accused of being involved in “an effort to get money,” but they would have more legitimacy in the pulpit if they had “business standing in the communities where they reside.” The Pentecostal call of the lay preacher, like the spirit that grips the shouter in a revivalist service, is independent of social or

financial status; indeed, the indifference of the spirit to material considerations is itself an implicit challenge to more earthly forms of power. Washington, through the “gospel of the toothbrush” (*Slavery* 102), seeks to redefine economic advancement as a calling that integrates material and spiritual progress: “It has been said that the trouble with the Negro Church is that it is too emotional. It seems to me that what the Negro Church needs is a more definite connection with the social and moral life of the Negro people. Could this connection be effected in a large degree, it would give to the movement for the upbuilding of the race the force and inspiration of a religious spirit” (“Religious Life” 335).

This mixture of the economic and the spiritual is also implicit in the rhetoric of the college, which performs “the black rite of Horatio Alger...to God’s own acting script, with millionaires come down to portray themselves.... Not the wafer and the wine, but the flesh and the blood, vibrant and alive, and vibrant even when stooped, ancient, and withered” (109). The power these men have over the students is exercised not merely through their affluence, but through their rhetoric: their words “were stronger than the strength of philanthropic dollars, deeper than shafts sunk in the earth for oil and gold, more awe-inspiring than the miracles fabricated in scientific laboratories” (110). Like that iconic siren of the American Dream, Daisy Buchanan, their voices are “full of money” (Fitzgerald 115), but even as they foment the students’ aspirations, they cajole them to defer their dreams for a more enlightened time, trapping them in the complex game of movement and stasis that the invisible man’s grandfather identifies after the invisible man receives his scholarship to the college—“Keep This Nigger-Boy Running” (33)—and which is anticipated by the naked woman in the smoker scene. The logical appeals and calm assurances of the sponsors construct the past and continuing oppression of the students not in terms of the emotional, idealistic discourse of

politics, but of the rational, pragmatic discourse of economics. In this way, the students are politically hobbled even as they are putatively offered a path to racial progress. Even when Tarp gives him a portrait of Frederick Douglass, the invisible man is unable to view the portrait except through the screen of Washingtonian rhetoric:

For now I had come to believe, despite all the talk of science around me, that there was a magic in spoken words. Sometimes I sat watching the watery play of light upon Douglass' portrait, thinking how magical it was that he had talked his way from slavery to a government position, and so swiftly. Perhaps, I thought, something of the kind is happening to me. (374)

As Robert Stepto suggests, the phrase “from slavery to a government position” is “a remarkable revision or misreading of Douglass’s famous ‘from slavery to freedom’” (185)—for Douglass, as for most slaves who were trying to redefine themselves as free people, words were the key, to quote Baker, to “the problem of being itself” (*Journey* 32), but the invisible man, because he is still submerged in the college’s rhetoric, is only capable of seeing how words were the key to Douglass’s economic and social progress.

Yet even within the college there are vestiges of the vernacular, though they are drained of their efficacy. For the invisible man, as for other students, the vernacular is embodied in “*the gray-haired matron,*” Miss Susie Gresham, a “*relic of slavery whom the campus loved but did not understand, aged, of slavery, yet bearer of something warm and vital and all-enduring, of which in that island of shame we were not ashamed*” (111-12). In *Blues, Ideology, and African-American Literature*, Houston Baker conceives of vernacular culture, and specifically the blues, as “an ancestral matrix that has produced a forceful and indigenous American creativity.... A matrix is a womb, a network, a fossil-bearing rock, a rocky trace of a

gemstone's removal, a principal metal in an alloy, a mat or plate for reproducing print or phonograph records" (2-3). In all these senses, Mother Gresham is a matriarchal embodiment of the vernacular culture in which the students of the college were first nurtured and from which they are obliged to alienate themselves if they are to assimilate into genteel Euro-American culture. Though the young invisible man aspires to follow in the Founder's footsteps, rising above the vernacular, Mother Gresham attracts him and reminds him of the matrix from which he issued.

The older invisible man, who is narrating, expresses the tension in the young invisible man between past and future, folk and high culture, by satirizing the oratory of his younger self. Frederick Douglass "could meld his experiences within the slave community with the classical art of oratory" (Lampe 13) to produce a hybrid discourse able to both accommodate and challenge his white listeners, but the oratory of the young invisible man, as it is portrayed by the narrator in a mock-sermon, evinces not a melding but a split between sound and sense that betrays his fragmented subjectivity:

*Listen to the vowel sounds and the crackling dentals, to the low harsh gutturals of empty anguish, now riding the curve of preacher's rhythm I heard long ago in a Baptist church, stripped now of its imagery: No suns having hemorrhages, no moons weeping tears, no earthworms refusing the sacred flesh and dancing in the earth on Easter morn. Ha! singing achievement, Ha! booming success, intoning, Ha! acceptance, Ha! a river of word-sounds filled with drowned passions, floating, Ha! with wrecks of unachievable ambitions and stillborn revolts.... (111)*

The polyvocal nature of this passage manifests the complex relationship the narrator has with his younger self, and the ambiguous feelings the young invisible man holds towards his own culture. While the context of the passage makes it appear that the speech is an example of the oratory the invisible man had produced at the college, the narrator actually takes the younger man's words, synopsis and evaluates them in order to capture the subtext of the speech, and then places the revised words back in the orator's mouth; at this point in the narrative, the young invisible man, still largely naïve to the ways of the world, would not have been able to judge the value of his own oratory in such scathing terms. The narrator satirizes his younger self by making him his mouthpiece, just as the invisible man, as a young orator, was a mouthpiece for the college.

Larry Neal writes of this passage, "In his longing for a sustainable image of the world that has created him, he [the invisible man] transforms an 'ordinary' housemother into a ritual goddess. Dig. Here is your black aesthetic at its best" ("Zoot" 117). But while the form of the passage reflects the folk culture that Neal asserts is central to the black aesthetic, the content of the speech makes it a parody. In place of the divine salvation offered by the preacher, the young man offers the futile dream of an infinitely deferred material salvation: "*blaring triumphant sounds empty of triumphs. Hey Miss Suzie! the sound of words that were not words, counterfeit notes singing achievements yet unachieved*" (111). The narrator recognizes that, even while the young orator mouths the platitudes that the college teaches him, he is trying to reach back to his folk roots: "*hear me, old matron, justify now this sound with your dear old nod of affirmation, your closed-eye smile and bow of recognition, who'll never be fooled with the mere content of words*" (111). When the narrator writes that he thinks of Suzie Gresham with "*shame and regret*" (112) as he waits for the ceremony to begin, there is a double-voiced

quality to the passage, for the young man regrets that he has failed the Founder's cause by introducing Norton to the very embodiment of the vernacular, Jim Trueblood, while the older narrator knows that the true cause for regret is his younger self's abandonment of folk culture in favour of the Founder's ideology.

### **The Reverend Homer A. Barbee, in Black and White**

The Founder's day speech by the reverend Homer A. Barbee has been the source of much critical disagreement. Some critics, such as Kerry McSweeney, disparage Barbee's "purple" performance: "Barbee's speech undermines itself from within through its banality of language, tired tropes, and cheap rhetorical tricks"; it is "laced with hackneyed similes and allusions, and autodidactic flourishes" (64). Others, such as John S. Wright, hold that Ellison "allows the reader to feel with the narrator the full powers of Barbee's eloquence, powers that, though yoked here to a finally delusive vision of the race's history as 'a saga of mounting triumphs,' nonetheless hold the promise of leadership for whoever might possess them" (165). O'Meally and Stepto hold that the speech is a parody: on the train in which the Founder dies, "Barbee and Bledsoe, like two disciples become vaudevillians, are on board. Where you there when they crucified my Lord? Yessir, as a matter of fact I was! Me and Bledsoe! Right there!" (Stepto 181). Even among those who agree that Barbee's speech is a virtuoso performance, there is disagreement over the end to which the preacher's skill is applied. For Leon Forrest, Barbee is a "high priest of bamboozlement" who "drops the enslaving veil of intellectual blindness across the students' eyes" by "preferring the luxurious delusion of 'sweet harmonies' over the reality of the chaos of African-American life" (310), while Dolan Hubbard suggests that "Through his ritual action, Barbee creates a value free of the structures of domination (which, of course, is undercut when he trips over the feet of Dr. Bledsoe); consequently, he

enables parents and students to free themselves symbolically from what they must passively endure in the day-to-day” (80). As with Washington’s oratory, it seems that critics can take away from Barbee’s speech whatever it is they are looking for.

Nor is Ellison entirely forthcoming in his assessment of Barbee, saying that in writing Barbee’s speech he was

concerned with the problem of heroism and with the mythology of the hero. I had read Rank’s *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. I wasn’t using these things consciously, but they are just a part of my sense of how myth structures certain human activities. Barbee’s speech had a great deal of irony in it but it was not simply a projection of irony. Barbee believed in certain things and I believed in certain things. Myth has a viable function in human life and I don’t think we can escape it. But what I was trying to show was that this is how Barbee saw the Founder, who was by now idealized and whose influence was shaping the pattern of the narrator’s life. (O’Brien interview 231)

In accordance with his conception of the vernacular, Ellison asserts that “culture is exchange” (Ellison, “Exploring” 41), and he states that, in the period just before he began working on *Invisible Man*, “creatures from Afro-American fables—Jack-the-Rabbit and Jack-the-Bear—blended in my mind with figures of myth and history about whom I’d been reading” (“Subscribers” 349). This cultural blending is reflected in his depiction of vernacular orators in *Invisible Man*. Jim Trueblood transforms Nemesis into a benign goddess by framing his narrative of incest within the Oedipal myth, allowing his Euro-American audience (in this case, the philanthropist Norton, whose expressions of affection for his daughter are tinged with sexuality) to vicariously transgress the primary taboos of western culture in exchange for

financial support. Barbee's speech is also a blending of African American vernacular traditions with western myth, especially as western myth is read through Lord Raglan's *The Hero*, Otto Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, and Whitman's "When Lilacs Last Through the Dooryard Bloom'd." However, as Ellison filters all these sources through Barbee's African American folk oratory, what is produced is neither a wholesale adoption of nor an ironic repudiation of western heroic myths. Rather, Barbee's speech Signifies, in Henry Louis Gates's sense of the word, upon western heroic myths and upon certain aspects of African American oratory.<sup>13</sup> Gates coined the term Signifyin(g) in order to describe the rhetorical process by which African American vernacular rhetoric assimilates and destabilizes the reifying process of signification that gives the language of the dominant white culture its authority. The semi-elided *g* in Gates's coinage suggests that white *signifying* and black *Signifyin(g)* are closely related, but it also suggests that, within the African American vernacular, where the word is as often as not pronounced *signifyin'*, there is "the trace of a black difference" (46), a trace that does not directly oppose white signification by establishing an antithetical set of meanings, but rather disrupts the syntagmatic relationship that gives a series of signifiers the illusion of a stable, self-contained meaning. In line with Derrida's concept of *différance*, the black and white discursive universes neither blend together nor exclude one another, but instead enact a complex relationship of deferral and differing, establishing a distinction which is relational rather than essential. Signifyin(g) effects this destabilization by reflexively foregrounding the figurative nature of all signs; indeed, Gates calls Signifyin(g) "the trope of tropes, the figure for black rhetorical figures" (51).

According to Gates,



Signifyin(g), in Lacan's sense, is the Other of discourse; but it also constitutes the black Other's discourse as its rhetoric. Ironically, rather than a proclamation of emancipation from the white person's standard English, the symbiotic relationship between black and white, between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, between black vernacular discourse and standard English discourse, is underscored here, and signified, by the vertiginous relationship between the terms *signification* and *Signification*, each of which is dependent on the other. We can, then, think of American discourse as both the opposition between and the ironic identity of the movement, the very vertigo, that we encounter in a mental shift between the two terms. (50)

And it is vertigo that Barbee's conjuring rhetoric induces, not only among the students, but even among those that one might imagine would be immune to it: "the men in the seats of honor slowly shake their spellbound heads" and even Bledsoe sits "with his face in his hands" (124, 130) as the Euro-American rhetoric of heroic progressivism intersects with African American vernacular speech. Gates states that Signifyin(g) is "a black act of (re)doubling" that critiques the white sign by associating with the signifier not the signified but the rhetorical figures subsumed in the term "signifying" (48). As a result, language becomes self-reflexive and polyvocal. In the master's language, the signifier is associated with a signified by repressing the signifier's other, paradigmatic, associations and linking it with other signifiers in a syntagmatic chain. But African American Signifyin(g) frees those paradigmatic associations so that speech becomes a form of rhetorical play that complicates the syntagmatic relationship between signifiers. The signifier does not refer to some thing, but rather serves to manifest a

particular linguistic style which effectively plays the formerly repressed associations off each other (78): pragmatics takes precedence over semantics.

Thus, when Barbee successively relates the Founder, in an instance of typology run amok, to Jesus (116), Moses (118), Aristotle (118), and Lincoln (127), Ellison, through Barbee, signifies on Raglan and Rank, who attempt to meld the disparate figures of legend into one archetypal heroic figure. But even as this signifying implicitly questions the philological accuracy of heroic conflation, it acknowledges its oratorical effectiveness. The very density of the allusions in Barbee's speech undermines their effectiveness as comparisons but foregrounds his performative ingenuity, his ability to satisfy the requirement of *copia* (to use a term from classical rhetoric) that Ong suggests is characteristic of communication in oral cultures (41), and "the demand for copiousness and verbal adaptability on the part of the speaker" (*Talking* 15-16) that Roger D. Abrahams identifies as a key aesthetic criterion in African American vernacular communication:

Expressive behavior tends to be judged as performance—in terms of its ability to affect onlookers, drawing them into some type of sympathetic participation.... BE [Black English] public encounters...tend toward conscious stylization. The speaker expects to be judged in terms of how well he invests his performance energies and uses the conventional devices which are situationally called forth.

(8)

Allusion becomes not an adjunct to the logical appeal, but a means through which the speaker demonstrates his oratorical versatility, and it is the ability to perform that, above all else, gives the speech authority. (James Weldon Johnson tells the story of a preacher who, after reading a particularly obscure biblical passage to his congregation, "closed the Bible with a bang and by

way of preface said, ‘Brothers and sisters, this morning—I intend to explain the unexplainable—find out the undefinable—ponder over the imponderable—and unscrew the inscrutable’ [4-5]; the assertion of oratorical skill here approaches the stature of a heroic boast.)

The founder’s day address is epideictic both in the sense of its being a memorial speech which solidifies existing values within a community, and in the sense of its being a speech in which the auditor is treated as a judge—but as a judge familiar with African American oratory. While McSweeney correctly questions the ideology underlying Barbee’s speech, his characterization of the speech as banal, tired, and cheap suggests that he is not reading it from within the African American tradition. As Janice D. Hamlet states in her analysis of African American oratory, “Seemingly ignorant of African and African American constructs, scholars and commentators have imposed Western constructs on discourse that grows out of a coherent, albeit contrasting, tradition” (89-90). Lawrence Jackson records that Ellison attended a founder’s day address at Tuskegee by Dean Kelly Miller of Howard University in which Washington was described in mythical terms: “the Founder ‘knew without learning; he understood without being taught; he was born with a caul over his face’” (134). Ellison is certainly critiquing the mythologization of leaders like Washington, but at the same time he is affirming a particular oratorical tradition that transcends Barbee’s speech and gives it its power. Barbee may be blind, but his first name *is* Homer. Ellison, during his time at Tuskegee, found elite culture and folk culture to be totally divorced, and he describes how “At Tuskegee during graduation week countless high-powered word artists, black and white, descended upon us and gathered in the gym and chapel to tell us in high-flown words what the Negro thought, what our lives were and what our goals should be”; at the same time the farm people from the

neighborhood would gather on the old athletic field and hold their own celebration, with dances and games, “visiting among themselves as though the ceremonies across the wide lawns did not exist—or at best had no connection with the lives they led” (“Same Pain” 77-78). Ellison would often sneak out of the orchestra to watch the dances and games, since “I found their unrhetorical activities on the old football field the more meaningful.” Barbee, while obviously a “high-powered word-artist,” bridges the worlds of the college and the field by bringing the vernacular to the college podium. Ellison has written the oration that would have kept him in the orchestra, even if it would not have eased his ideological misgivings.

Barbee constantly works in the anamnestic mode, as one who is not merely telling a story but quoting an authority; he continually reminds the students that they have heard the Founder’s legend “time and time again” (117), not only from speakers at the college but from their parents, and states that “You have heard it and it—this true story of rich implication, this living parable of proven glory and humble nobility—and it, as I say, has made you free” (118). It is not the Founder, however much he might be idealized, that saves, but the story he makes possible, the fact that he is such a fertile medium for language to grow in. For, as Barbee constantly reiterates, the Founder’s story is heard, not read—it is not an independent, disembodied text that exists outside of the community, but an oral tradition passed down which in its telling forms the community. And, as an oral tradition, the Founder’s life is not treated as a static, self-contained narrative; rather, it is a resource to be drawn upon or adapted to serve present needs. Henry H. Mitchell suggests that “The Black preacher is more apt to think of the Bible as an inexhaustible source of good preaching material than as an inert doctrinal and ethical authority” (58) because the African American community first encountered Biblical texts as oral stories, and oral stories are transmitted and transformed according to the needs of

the living community. The Founder is presented as a Christ figure, but it is as the Word that he most completely functions in the community, which is why Barbee's statement that the Founder's story "has made you free" echoes John 8: 31-32: "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'"

The dominance of narrative, and in particular mimesis, in Barbee's speech strikes some critics as overblown; O'Meally suggests that Barbee's "outrageously inflated, mock-heroic rhetoric warn[s] against his version of the Founder's exemplary career" (12), but the artfulness of African American folk rhetoric is not the artfulness of Quintilian, who says that "the moment [art] is detected it ceases to be art" (4.2.127). Zora Neale Hurston asserts that "all religious expression among Negroes is regarded as art," and this applies especially to the sermon. If the preacher does not flaunt his artfulness, then he risks being classified as a white preacher: "They say of that type of preacher, 'Why he don't preach at all. He just lectures.' And the way they say the word 'lecture' make it sound like horse-stealing" (*Sanctified* 106-07). The outrageous nature of Barbee's sermon—the grotesque figures, the melodramatic death at the top of a mountain, the overdetermined typology and symbolism—are only failures if we do not consider the complex nature of Barbee's audience. Although Barbee is addressing a group of literate college students, the genre of oratory he is employing originated in and calls upon an earlier African American oral tradition and, as Ong suggests, the noetic economy of the oral tradition "of its nature generates outside figures, that is, heroic figures, not for romantic reasons or for reflectively didactic reasons but for much more basic reasons: to organize experience in some sort of permanently memorable form" (70). Larry Neal suggests that Barbee,

taking the role of the tribal poet, ritually consecrates the memory of the Founder. The Founder's image is not merely locked into legitimate history, it bobs and weaves between facts, half-remembered truths, and apocrypha.... Barbee makes his audience, composed mostly of black college students, identify with the Founder. No, in fact, under the spell of the ritual sermon, they must *become* the Founder. They must don the mask of the god, so to speak.... These are the memories that his young audience must internalize, and share fully, if they are to ever realize themselves in the passage from adolescence into maturity. And this is the function of folk culture. ("Zoot" 118)

Although I will later suggest that Barbee's speech ultimately works against rather than for the self-realization of his young audience, Neal's suggestion that the address is meant to internalize particular memories and Ong's reflections about the role of "outsize" characters in oral traditions may serve to counter charges that Barbee's oratory is ineffectual. Unlike the rationalist speakers usually featured at the college, Barbee draws on repressed rhetorical traditions that link his audience with preliterate slave culture.

The features of the Founder's story reflect many of Raglan's twenty-two archetypal patterns in *The Hero* (178-79): the "insane cousin who splashed the babe [the Founder] with lye and shriveled his seed" (116-17) is a variation on Raglan's observation that "At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather, to kill him"; the Founder's flight to the North and eventual return to the South reflect the journey pattern in which the hero "is spirited away, and...[r]eared by foster-parents in a far country.... On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom"; the sudden collapse of the Founder and his death as his train crests a mountain neatly manifest the pattern in which the hero "meets with a mysterious

death, ... [o]ften at the top of a hill.” But these patterns of western myth are themselves signified upon by Ellison through Barbee’s speech. If, within the myths, the attempt by the father figure to kill the child is, in Freudian terms, a form of attempted castration, then Ellison parodically desublimates the act by making the attempt a direct assault on the Founder’s genitals. Barbee reframes the story of the grotesque attack, which could be read as a sign of the Founder’s spiritual sterility or unwillingness to directly confront oppression, as a form of Christ-like resurrection: “a mere babe, he lay nine days in a deathlike coma and then suddenly and miraculously recovered. You might say that it was as though he had risen from the dead or been reborn” (117). While returning south to his “kingdom,” the Founder receives a warning of danger from a racially ambiguous man: “Some say he was a Greek. Some a Mongolian. Others a mulatto—and still others still, a simple white man of God. Whoever, and whatsoever, and we must not rule out the possibility of an emissary direct from above—oh yes!” (119). But, following Barbee’s tentative deification of the messenger, we learn that the Founder simply ignores the mysterious emissary and continues on his path, thereby blundering straight into an ambush, an obtuseness at odds with Barbee’s mythological portrayal of the messenger.

Barbee sidesteps the Founder’s own failure to follow advice by emphasizing the possible divine providence of the messenger and by applying particularly intense rhetorical pressure to erase any distance his audience might have from the Founder: “I’m sure each of you lived with him through his escape. . . . You hurried with him full of doubt to the cabin designated by the stranger, where he met a seemingly demented black man. . . it was he who bound up your wounds with the wounds of the Founder” (119). If, as Burke suggests, the essence of rhetoric is identification (*Rhetoric* 20), then it is at this point that Barbee is at his most overtly rhetorical, prompting the audience, in Neal’s words, to “don the mask of the god,”

however blundering the god might be. And the Founder's collapse during his final speech is an ironic comment on his ultimate inability to deal with the real suffering caused by racism:

And I hear now, again, the great humming hush as his voice reached the end of a mighty period, and one of the listeners, a snowy-headed man, leaps to his feet crying out, "Tell us what is to be done, sir! For God's sake, tell us! Tell us in the name of the son they snatched from me last week!" And all through the room the voices arising, imploring, "Tell us, tell us!" And the Founder is suddenly mute with tears.... And the Founder pauses, then steps forward with his eyes spilling his great emotion. With his arms upraised, he begins to answer and totters. Then all is commotion. We rush forward and lead him away. (123)

Though the Founder "holds the audience within the gentle palm of his eloquence, rocking it, soothing it, instructing it" (122), his rhetoric, passed down in "the lulling movement of multisyllabic words to thrill and console" (109) that the invisible man has heard during his days at the college, cannot withstand the demands of his audience for a concrete response to oppression—he is "mute with tears." The hero's mysterious fall is a manifestation of his ultimate failure to answer the central question of his people; indeed, it almost seems a self-immolation intended to forestall the rebellious response which might follow upon that question. But it is a failure elided within Barbee's narrative by Bledsoe's voice, which rings out "whip-like with authority, a song of hope" (123; here Barbee begins to shift his focus from the Founder to Bledsoe in order to effect a transfer of power to the present head of the college), and by Barbee himself through an intensification of his discourse until he falls into the rhythmical pattern of the chanted sermon, which is the most characteristic form of African American oratory:



They calm, and with him they sing out against the tottering of their giant. Sing out their long black songs of blood and bones:

“Meaning HOPE!

“Of hardship and pain:

“Meaning FAITH!

Of humbleness and absurdity:

Meaning ENDURANCE!

Of ceaseless struggle in darkness, meaning:

TRIUMPH...

“Ha!” Barbee cried, slapping his hands, “Ha! Singing verse after verse, until the leader revived!” (Slap, slap of his hands.)

“Addressed them”—

(Slap!) “My God, My God!”

“Assured them”—(Slap!)

“That”—(Slap!)

“He was only tired of his ceaseless efforts.” (Slap!) (123-24)

Here the voices of Bledsoe and Barbee combine to transform the Founder’s failure into a fortunate fall, a potential source of doubt which, approached properly, serves merely as an opportunity for a stronger assertion of faith. The Founder’s audience, and Barbee’s audience, are recouped by the same rhetoric of indefinite deferment that has dogged the invisible man ever since he received his briefcase at the smoker.

Barbee’s typological approach to the Founder also supplies Ellison with other opportunities for more specific Signifyin(g). Barbee’s apocalyptic picture of the South after

Emancipation, “where the hand of brother had been turned against brother, father against son, and son against father” (116), alludes to Luke 12:53: “they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Barbee’s subsequent reference to the Founder as a “humble prophet, lowly like the humble carpenter of Nazareth” (116) coming to heal this land of conflict is ironic, since in Luke it is the Jesus of the apocalypse who is actually responsible for the conflict: “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three” (12:51-52). Though the Founder seems to harmonize the races, he does so by dividing them politically and following the Washingtonian approach of eschewing political rights in favour of pursuing economic progress. The additional allusions to Moses and to Lincoln make Barbee’s speech, as Robert Bone suggests, “an incomparable fusion of the ‘Let My People Go Sermon’ and the ‘Train Sermon’” (23), two of the standard orations given by folk preachers, though in each case the sermon is given a twist which undermines the Founder’s role in it. When Barbee says, “your parents followed this remarkable man across the black sea of prejudice, safely out of the land of ignorance, through the storms of fear and anger, shouting, LET MY PEOPLE GO! when it was necessary, whispering it during those times when whispering was wisest” (118), the image of a pragmatic Moses whispering to Pharaoh to let his people go humorously undercuts the heroism of the Founder’s exodus, and, as the narrator’s account of the college suggests, even if the Founder had at one time shouted the message, the college has been whispering it ever since.

But the most extended comparison of Barbee’s speech matches the Founder with Abraham Lincoln. This facet of the speech has a Washingtonian precedent. In his

autobiography, and likely in his chapel talks as well, Robert Russa Moton, president of Tuskegee while Ellison attended, described Washington's death in terms of Lincoln's:

I have never known anything to impress the colored people so profoundly as did the passing of Doctor Washington. I had often heard that when the word came that President Lincoln had been shot the colored people went about as if they had lost the dearest member of their immediate family, and that this feeling was largely shared by white people as well, especially the older ones. This same attitude seemed to prevail among the colored people at the passing of Doctor Washington. (194)

However, as many critics have noted, the comparisons to Lincoln in Barbee's speech are made indirectly through allusions to Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."<sup>14</sup> Barbee's description of the Founder's train as "A slow train. A sorrowful train. And all along the line in mountain and valley, wherever the rails found their fateful course, the people were one in their common mourning" (128) echoes Whitman's description of the "processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,/With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared heads" that greeted Lincoln's train (37-38), and Barbee's description of how "I looked out of the frosted pane and saw the looming great North Star and lost it, as though the sky had shut its eye" (125) echoes Whitman's characterization of Lincoln as a "great star disappear'd" (9). Barbee's image of the "single wild rose" tossed onto the Founder's coffin echoes the single sprig of lilac Whitman offers in his poem (45), and, as Busby suggests, the thin brown girl who sings before Barbee's speech resembles the gray-brown thrush in Whitman's poem (Busby 75).

For Ellison, Whitman is a figure who represents a synthetic force in American culture. Ellison pointed out that “very early, I guess in the 1830s, Whitman was suggesting that in the dialect of the American Negro was a basis of an American form of grand opera” (“Exploring” 245), and Ellison, after reading Leslie Fiedler’s essay on homosexuality in *Huckleberry Finn*, became interested in the relationship between race and sexual orientation in Whitman, eventually using his findings to construct the “Emerson” scene of *Invisible Man* (Jackson 386), with its intimations of seduction: “With us it’s still Jim and Huck Finn,” says the young Emerson (184). Within Barbee’s speech, Ellison reciprocates Whitman’s synthesisism by incorporating Whitman’s elegy to Lincoln into an African American folk genre known as the train sermon, in which “God and the devil were pictured as running trains, one loaded with saints, that pulled up in heaven, and the other with sinners, that dumped its load in hell” (Johnson 1). The death of the Founder at the crest of a mountain, in addition to fulfilling Raglan’s specification that the death of a hero usually occurs on the top of a hill (179), suggests that the train has deposited the Founder at the appropriate station. Further, with his powerful description of “the black despair of black people” (128), Barbee also places himself within the blues tradition. Houston Baker uses the ubiquitous association of trains with the blues to posit that the blues performer is always at the (railway) juncture, constructing a vernacular art which provides “expressive equivalence for this juncture’s ceaseless flux” (*Blues* 7): “The blues, therefore, comprise a mediational site where familiar antinomies are resolved (or dissolved) in the office of adequate cultural understanding” (*Blues* 6). In Barbee’s sermon, the train is always moving but it never leaves that signifying junction where the rhetoric of progressivism meets the seminal matrix of the vernacular.

Yet Barbee's blues are also strategic: at this point in his oration, he is concerned with transferring authority to Bledsoe, and his strategy for accomplishing the transference is to frame the Founder's death as a fall back into slavery. Barbee's imagery—the loss of the north star, the engine “loping like a great black hound” (125)—evokes the desperation of the fugitive slave and prepares the way for the explicit linking of the Founder's death to slavery: “they felt the dark night of slavery settling once more upon them. They smelt that old obscene stink of darkness, that old slavery smell, worse than the rank halitosis of hoary death” (129). It is only after he takes his audience down into slavery with him, only after they see how desperately they are in need without the Founder, that they are adequately prepared to appreciate Bledsoe as a leader, and Barbee then presents Bledsoe as the Founder reborn, reframing the Founder's loss “not as a death, but as a birth. A great seed has been planted. A seed which has continued to put forth its fruit in its season as surely as if the great creator had been resurrected. For in a sense he was, if not in the flesh, in the spirit. And in a sense in the flesh too. For has not your present leader become his living agent, his physical presence?” (130). George Campbell, in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, suggests that, in order to move the will, the rhetor must first “excite some passion or desire in the hearers” and then “satisfy their judgment that there is a connexion between the action to which he would persuade them, and the gratification of the desire or passion which he excites” (83); Barbee follows this pattern exactly, instilling despair in order to prepare his audience to accept the anointed successor who will remove it.

Lloyd W. Brown, in an effort to define a clear dichotomy in *Invisible Man* between a rhetoric devoted to “scientific detachment or dehumanized intellectuality” and a rhetoric of “self-expression,” suggests that “Barbee's rhetoric represents, and postulates, the bloodless identity of what the Golden Day veteran calls the ‘mechanical man’” and holds that Barbee's

exhortation is based on “The principle of logical, formal appeal” (290-91), but even a cursory reading shows that the logical appeal is an insignificant part of Barbee’s speech—overwhelmingly, Barbee’s appeals are ethical and emotional. Brown is trying to elide a seeming contradiction that arises with Barbee’s speech: what is this folk rhetoric doing within the confines of the college? Why is this “word-artist-cum-magician” (Forrest 309) allowed to cast his spell over a collegiate audience in terms which cannot fail to recall, in the invisible man’s words, “that wild emotion of the crude preachers most of us knew in our home towns and of whom we were deeply ashamed” (109), all in the name of a man who would repudiate the very rhetoric with which he is being eulogized? But of course Barbee and his speech are, within the context of African American folk oratory, insufficient unto themselves—a response from the audience is required to complete the oratorical process. And, although Barbee’s text and performance evoke the call in folk preaching, the context in which he speaks forbids the students to respond.

As with its use of spirituals, the college appropriates traditional folk arts only in order to neutralize them: “I seem to hear already the voices mechanically raised in the songs the visitors loved. (Loved? Demanded. Sung? An ultimatum accepted and ritualized, an allegiance recited for the peace it imparted, and for that perhaps loved. Loved as the defeated come to love the symbols of their conquerors. A gesture of acceptance, of terms laid down and reluctantly approved.)” (108-09). Spirituals, a folk expression of survival and resistance for slaves doing hard labour, are, within the college, mechanically produced to show the white conquerors how thankful the students are for the advantages of an industrial education. The vernacular, formerly a means of African American resistance, has become a means by which the college shows how completely its students have been assimilated, since the very arts of

resistance, including oratory and song, are now produced on demand for the pleasure of the former oppressors. There is no longer any space for resistance within the college. Even as the students head for chapel, “our place of convergence,” they are “moving not in the mood of worship but of judgment...drifting forward with rigid motions, limbs stiff and voices now silent, as though on exhibit even in the dark, and the moon a white man’s bloodshot eye” (107-08), a passage which recalls Michel Foucault’s statement in *Discipline and Punish* that “The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a center towards which all gazes would be turned” (173). If discipline is “a political anatomy of detail” (Foucault 139) in which the threat of external punishment is rendered redundant by the instilling of a refined, habitual self-surveillance (the internalization of the external gaze), then the omnipresence of the white gaze, even in the moon-lit darkness, shows that the college has successfully trained its students to always see themselves as whites see them. The result is what W. E. B. Du Bois famously termed “double consciousness,” a mindset that

yields him [the Negro] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (45)

Spirituals and folk preaching at the college are not means of re-connecting with folk culture, but are rather temptations to be resisted, examinations that confirm the students' ability to take the vernacular in the way that white Southerners give it to them and that affirm the strength of the internalized white gaze. If Barbee, described as "a man of striking ugliness," (115) has a homologous presence in the novel, it is the alluring blonde woman at the smoker: their appearances could scarcely be more different, but both characters call to or seduce the audience, only to manifest the power that social constraints have to forbid any response. The students are instilled with the desire for both Euro-American prosperity and the power of the African American folk tradition, but are then suspended between them. Two women do in fact shout in response to Barbee's speech (120, 129), but the narrator, like the other students, remains moved but motionless, caught in "the rows of puritanical benches straight and torturous...bending my body to its agony" (108); even a whispered inquiry regarding the identity of the speaker results in "a look of annoyance, almost of outrage" from a neighbor (121). Like Jim Trueblood, who wakes to find himself having sex with his own daughter, the students are caught in a conundrum. They are asked to "move *without* movin'" (59), but unlike Trueblood, who finally chooses motion, accepts the weight of his guilt, and transforms it into a blues song that convinces him "I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen" (66), the students are caught in an interminable race in which they are always "winning near the goal" but never reaching it. Held in abeyance between their social limitations and their dreams of success, they are denied the self-consciousness that would enable them to question the identities with which the college interpellates them.



### **Chapter 3: The Return of the Repressed Vernacular**

*What we teach the subject to recognize as his unconscious is his history.*

*(Lacan, "Speech" 52)*

#### **The Vernacular as Primary Language**

The invisible man's education in the south is a process of repressing the vernacular in favour of a socially-approved language that simultaneously evokes and neutralizes political or material progress. If, as Jacques Lacan states, "The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter" ("Speech" 50), then the individual repression the invisible man suffers might be considered a reflection of the larger repression of those disruptive cultural identities within America that threaten the stability of a hegemonic national identity. As Wilson Neate suggests, "ethnicity itself may be understood as the national unconscious and, as such, its articulations always find their way into the conscious state of the latter...while the national consciousness would seek to organize itself in terms of binary oppositions and difference, the ethnic unconscious comprises the space of contradiction, ambiguity, and multiplicity which exceeds the order of national identity" (69). The northern experiences of the invisible man evince the return of the repressed on both the individual and societal levels, and this return is manifested through language, and more particularly through oratory, in which the language of the individual situates itself performatively within the social. Even in the south, the invisible man is gripped by an anxiety regarding the repressed vernacular, most concretely manifested in his reaction to his grandfather, who on his deathbed confesses "our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with

yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction, let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open” (15-16). The effect of the seemingly meek old man’s confession is profound: “It was as though he had not died at all, his words caused so much anxiety. I was warned emphatically to forget what he said.” But however much the young man would like to obey the injunction to forget, he cannot: “whenever things went well for me I remembered my grandfather and felt guilty and uncomfortable. It was as though I was carrying out his advice in spite of myself” (16).

Stepito suggests that the grandfather is speech itself (178; Brown calls him “the archetype of the ideal exhorter” [303]), and the old man’s rebellious indeterminacy, his stubborn refusal to lie still even after he has been buried, supports Stepito’s contention. The invisible man’s grandfather hands in his gun but subsequently mounts a linguistic guerilla campaign, adopting the language assigned to him by the dominant society but subverting the seeming stability of white signification through Signifyin(g), a strategy which terrifies the invisible man because, living in a household steeped in Washingtonian rhetoric, it undermines the very substrate on which his identity and his image of society are founded. More specifically, it calls into question his vocation as an orator. The young invisible man believes he has something to say, but what if, like the grandfather whom others say he takes after (15), he does not, or even cannot, really mean what he says? What if, alongside the confident, absolute language of Washingtonian rhetoric that he adopts so skillfully, he is unconsciously speaking from within the vernacular, where the spectral paradigmatic associations of each signifier constantly rattle the links in the syntagmatic chain, rendering ambiguous both meaning and identity? What if, in short, instead of possessing language, he is possessed by it? These anxieties are not unfounded—his “social equality” slip at the smoker is only the first

instance in which the invisible man finds himself mastered by language instead of mastering it.

To quote Lacan again,

We analysts have to deal with slaves who think they are masters, and who find in a language whose mission is universal the support of their servitude, and the bonds of its ambiguity.... In order to free the subject's speech, we introduce him into the language of his desire, that is to say, into the *primary language* in which, beyond what he tells us of himself, he is already talking to us unknown to himself, and, in the first place, in the symbols of the symptom. ("Speech" 81)

As Baker points out, the word "vernacular" refers to a slave who is born on a master's estate, as well as to the arts or language characteristic of a particular country or locality (*Blues* xii).

Insofar as the African American vernacular is a repressed primary language for the invisible man, the underlying symptoms he unknowingly speaks of—unknowingly, because

Washingtonian discourse denies him direct expression or knowledge of them—are slavery and its continuing social manifestations, and the corresponding desire, obscured by a dominant rhetoric which implies the attainment of that desire even as it ensures its elision, is freedom.

In the prologue of *Invisible Man*, the protagonist enters a drug-induced state of hallucination and asks an elderly slave who appears to him what freedom is. She replies, "*I done forgot, son. It's all mixed up. First I think it's one thing, then I think it's another. It gits my head to spinning. I guess now it ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head*" (11). The invisible man's freedom, like the elderly slave's, is linked to his ability to speak, but he is silenced by internal and external repression of the very vernacular tradition that would allow him to give voice to his desires. Like the Biblical Jonah evoked by the grandfather's injunction to "let 'em swoller you," the young orator is a prophet who refuses to

speaking his liberatory message; nonetheless, as a disembodied preacher in the same episode exclaims, the “*Blackness of Blackness*” will “*put you, glory, glory, Oh my Lawd in the WHALE’S BELLY...an’ make you tempt...Old Aunt Nelly!*” (9-10). Racism renders Ellison’s protagonist invisible to others, but the internalized repression of his vernacular heritage leaves him unaware of his own invisibility, immersing him not just in blackness, but in a double invisibility stemming from his denial of his societal status, the blackness of blackness. Later, the mature protagonist states, “I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility” (6), but the young orator, closing his eyes to his own invisibility and seeing himself only through the obscurant perspectives of the college and, later, the Brotherhood, is launched on a long involuntary journey from south to north in the dark belly of self-ignorance. But, like Jonah, the invisible man delivers his message in spite of himself. Just as the patient who is “already talking to us unknown to himself” speaks, but does not know he is speaking of his symptoms, the invisible man, when he works as an orator in the north, is seized by a rhetoric at odds with those of both the college and the Brotherhood, and finds himself giving voice to the personal and social desires that have been proscribed by the two organizations that have attempted to regulate his speech.

### **Speaking in Tongues: Oratory and Possession in *Invisible Man***

Lacan suggests, following Freud, that in dreams, the repressed is always manifested through indirect rhetoric—the tropes that enable the dreamer’s desires and fears to be expressed and yet concealed (“Speech” 58). For the invisible man, the repressed vernacular is manifested indirectly not only through the rhetoric of dreams, but through dreams of rhetoric—his obsessive aspiration to be an orator. During his incarceration and electronic lobotomy in the factory hospital, the invisible man discovers that “I could no more escape than I could think of

my identity. Perhaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am, I'll be set free" (238-39). However, after the revelation that Bledsoe never meant him to come back to the college and his subsequent experience in the Liberty Paint factory, the invisible man finds that he is bereft of the foundations that formerly underlay his identity. The result, to his horror, is not that he is emptied of identity but that he becomes a site in which multiple identities contest with one another:

If only all the contradictory voices shouting inside my head would calm down and sing a song in unison, whatever it was I wouldn't care as long as they sang without dissonance; yes, and avoided the uncertain extremes of the scale. But there was no relief. I was wild with resentment but too much under "self control," that frozen virtue, that freezing vice. And the more resentful I became, the more my old urge to make speeches returned. While walking along the streets words would spill from my lips in a mumble over which I had little control. (254)

Though the invisible man does not yet realize it, his situation resembles that of the antebellum slave as described by Houston Baker:

He first had to seize the word. His being had to erupt from nothingness. Only by grasping the word could he engage in the speech acts that would ultimately define his selfhood. Further, the slave's task was primarily one of creating a human and liberated self rather than of projecting one that reflected a peculiar landscape and tradition. His problem was not to answer Crèvecoeur's question: "What is the American, this new man?" It was, rather, the problem of being itself. (*Journey*, 31-32)

The first two sentences of Baker's description embody the essential conundrum facing African American slaves and the invisible man. On the one hand, because social forces have suspended them in nothingness or invisibility, they must create themselves *ex nihilo*; on the other hand, to do so, they must draw on a resource that pre-exists them and was the very medium used to reduce them to non-existence: the word. The problem is one that revolves around possession and the nature of the subject. Do we possess the word or does the word possess us? Can we speak ourselves into being, or does language speak us into being? As a self-declared orator, the invisible man stakes his future on language, on his ability to seize the word and, by seizing it, to speak himself into being, but as he makes his way he finds that at first his words only shroud him in different shades of invisibility, and that the most profound form of blindness is his inability to see himself: "to be unaware of one's form is to live a death" (6). For Lacan, the ego "is frustration in essence," since the subject who attempts to define himself through speech "ends up recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary and that this construct disappoints all his certainties[.] For in this labour which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation which made him construct it *like another*, and which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another*" ("Speech" 42). Speech rushes into the void created by the desire for identity but, instead of filling the void, it only further distances the individual from his or her own subjecthood. The rhetor finds that in the act of speaking himself he is not self-identified but rather self-alienated—however much he wishes to be the unified, exclusive origin of speech, he always sees his own estranged face in the audience.

Yet it is this dispossession, this loss of identity, that allows the vernacular to begin displacing the logical, controlled rhetoric that the invisible man had been practicing in college,

for if the rhetorical tradition of the college requires that the word be possessed in order to assume a decorous social identity, the vernacular tradition requires, rather, that one be possessed by the word and thereby give up the idea of an essential, stable identity. The uncontrolled mumbling which passes the lips of the invisible man presages a new relationship to language and a new way of construing the self that is foreshadowed by the young singer who precedes Barbee at the college assembly. Although the college has circumscribed the folk arts of resistance so that they serve as entertainment for white philanthropists, there is still, in the song of the thin brown girl, the suggestion of a realm beyond the reach of the dominant culture:

She began softly, as though singing to herself of emotions of utmost privacy, a sound not addressed to the gathering, but which they overheard almost against her will. Gradually she increased its volume, until at times the voice seemed to become a disembodied force that sought to enter her, to violate her, shaking her, rocking her rhythmically, as though it had become the source of her being, rather than the fluid web of her own creation. (114)

Though “[t]he white guests exchanged smiles of approval” (115), their approbation seems, for once, irrelevant to the performance, for the singer is not offering the song to them, but is rather afflicted with the song almost in spite of herself. Her identity is displaced by the voice that sings through her, and she becomes hollowed out, “standing high against the organ pipes, herself become before our eyes a pipe of controlled and sublimated anguish” (114). She is, in a word, possessed by the voice, and Ellison here alludes to a central element in African American folk religion, song, and rhetoric which will, after the invisible man moves north, play a role in the development of his oratorical abilities and his search for identity.

Slavery itself is a state of possession: possession in the legal sense of the word (insofar as a decision like Dred Scott might be characterized as law), but also in another sense often employed by Malcolm X when, after properly preparing his audience, he finally whispered the repressed truth that he believed would inevitably bring about the political and religious conversion of any black person: “The white man is the devil” (186). Du Bois points out that early slave religion interpreted slavery in light of supernatural powers: “Slavery, then, was to him the dark triumph of Evil over him. All the hateful powers of the Under-world were striving against him, and a spirit of revolt and revenge filled his heart. He called up all the resources of heathenism to aid,—exorcism and witchcraft” (218). The gradual adoption of Christianity introduced an element of fatalism that promoted passivity among some slaves (the most perfect fictional embodiment of which is Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom), but although religious content may have promoted acceptance of slavery, ritual forms of the African American folk tradition served as a form of implicit resistance by framing Christianity within an African context, and the idea of possession was an essential part of folk oratory. As Mitchell points out,

The Black sermon is produced in a process which has already been established as deeply involving the congregation. Black folk-theology of the people has always gone a step farther in assuming that there is a third personal presence in the process, even the Holy Spirit.... However stated, it has clearly been assumed that the sermon came from God. This assumption has seldom, if ever, been stated outright in terms of God as preacher, but the implication that God speaks by possessing the preacher has always been clear. (123)

Nor, according to Zora Neale Hurston, is the congregation exempt from this process: “There can be little doubt that shouting is a survival of African ‘possession’ by the gods. In Africa it is



sacred to the priesthood or acolytes, in America it has become generalized. The implication is the same, however, it is a sign of special favour from the spirit that it chooses to drive out the individual consciousness temporarily and use the body for its expression” (*Church* 91). Du Bois describes how the “frenzy” gripped him the first time he went to a rural church:

A sort of suppressed terror hung in the air and seemed to seize us,—a pythian madness, a demoniac possession, that leant terrible reality to song and word. The black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words crowded to his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence. The people moaned and fluttered, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round about came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived before. (211)

Du Bois points out that, at the time of emancipation, the frenzy was the element of African American religious practice that was “more devoutly believed in than all the rest” and he contextualizes this by saying that “All this is nothing new in the world, but old as religion, as Delphi and Endor” (212). But, while it is true that religious ecstasy exists across many cultures and religions, recent studies by I. M. Lewis and Fritz W. Kramer on the sociological, political, and aesthetic aspects of possession offer new insights and new perspectives from which to examine both the role of possession within African American folk religion and, more specifically, the relationship of the invisible man to the repressed vernacular.

The invisible man’s identity crisis leads him not only to speak, but to make speeches—he instinctively knows that, in shaping his audience through oratory, he shapes himself and thereby gains an identity. However, a schism develops between the aspiring orator and the

practicing orator. The invisible man's oratorical aspirations are an extension of his college education, with its ideals of progressivism and upward mobility, and as a self-declared orator, especially within the Brotherhood, he is still trying to possess language in order to control his audience and establish his own social status. In his actual practice as an orator, however, the invisible man becomes possessed by a language that violates his own expectations and those of his employers, and he finds that, rather than being granted an identity which leads to status and privilege, he is instead emptied of identity and becomes a conduit through which marginalized voices speak. Emile Durkheim, examining how social power is channeled through mythology, ritual, and religion, suggests, in an inversion of George Herbert's definition of prayer as "God's breath in man returning to its birth" (2), that the true source of inspired oratory comes when an audience grants a speaker the authority to embody it and become its voice:

We can...explain the curious posture that is so characteristic of a man who is speaking to a crowd—if he has achieved communion with it. His language becomes high-flown in a way that would be ridiculous under ordinary circumstances; his gestures take on an overbearing quality; his very thought becomes impatient of limits and slips easily into every kind of extreme. This is because he feels filled to overflowing, as though with a phenomenal oversupply of forces that spill over and tend to spread around him. Sometimes he even feels possessed by a moral force greater than he, of which he is only the interpreter. This is the hallmark of what has often been called the demon of oratorical inspiration. This extraordinary surplus of forces is quite real and comes to him from the very group he is addressing. The feelings he arouses as he speaks return to him enlarged and amplified, reinforcing his own to the same degree.

The passionate energies that he arouses reecho in turn with him, and they increase his dynamism. It is then no longer a mere individual who speaks but a group incarnated and personified. (212)

Dispossessed of his identity and wandering the streets, the invisible man is seized by language that is, as yet, in search of an audience. I. M. Lewis, in his seminal study on possession, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, points out that possession is initially manifested as an illness or affliction, but “in the case of those who persist in the shamanistic calling, the uncontrolled, unsolicited, initial possession leads to a state where possession can be controlled and can be turned off and on at will.... This is the controlled phase of possession where, as the Tungus say, the shaman ‘possesses’ his spirits (although they also possess him)” (48). As we shall see, the invisible man gradually evolves from a speaker afflicted by the vernacular to one who both possesses and is possessed by it. In *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa*, Fritz W. Kramer describes how some west African tribes, such as the Tallensi and Kalabari, believe that, before birth, each person’s soul utters a word that will assume bodily form as the person and determine the person’s destiny; after birth, the soul forgets its primal word, but the word attempts to fulfill or realize itself by calling to its assistance spiritual powers (ancestral or natural) that the person must acknowledge and honour (31, 53). This idea of a primal word intersects interestingly with Lacan’s concept of a primary language which is lost to the speaking subject, a language which the subject continually speaks but can only hear when he treats his speech not as reference but as rhetoric. During his eviction speech, the invisible man has his first extended experience of being seized by the word; in time, by

situating himself within his primary language rather than attempting to repress it, he will also learn to grasp the word.

### **Awakening to the Vernacular**

John F. Callahan characterizes the invisible man as a “failed orator” who, when he seeks to make a speech at the eviction of an elderly black couple, unintentionally stirs a crowd to violent action through pacifistic rhetoric: “an ironic collaboration occurs between Invisible Man and his audience. Accommodate, he urges, perhaps again echoing Booker T. Washington’s southern strategy, but his words remind these northern Negroes of why they came north, remind them of injustice endured passively too long” (“Frequencies” 150, 161). A close reading of the invisible man’s eviction speech, however, suggests that, rather than failing in his intentions, the invisible man finds his intentions involuntarily shifting throughout his speech as he struggles with conflicting subject positions. He loses control not over the crowd but over himself as he is buffeted by competing rhetorical imperatives, so that, in retrospect, he comes to believe that, “at the eviction I had uttered words that had possessed me” (347). Barbara A. Biesecker, re-examining Lloyd Bitzer’s depiction of the rhetorical situation from a poststructuralist perspective, suggests that

the deconstruction of the subject opens up possibilities for the field of Rhetoric by enabling us to read the rhetorical situation as an event structured not by a logic of influence but by a logic of articulation. If the subject is shifting and unstable (constituted in and by the play of *différance*), then the rhetorical event may be seen as an incident that produces and reproduces the identities of subjects and constructs and reconstructs linkages between them. (242-43)

The Washingtonian rhetoric that the invisible man imbibed at the college, with its clear division of active orator and passive listeners, enacts a logic of influence; the reproduction of hierarchical power relationships is masked by an appeal to a universal, ahistorical logic, and calls to action are belied by the immobility imposed on the audience. In contrast, African American folk oratory, with its co-participation by orator and audience, is a forum in which truth is not so much transmitted as overtly constructed through the mutual articulation of the orator and the congregation, each of which influences the other. Crawford states that, in traditional folk preaching, “the preacher does not preach *at* or *to*, but *with* the congregation” because preachers “are aware that our function is not simply to deliver our message or version of the truth, but to awaken a sense of the word that is alive in the congregation, both in individual hearts and in the group as a whole” (Crawford 42). Within a church setting, the process is not one (or not *only* one) of transmitting dogma, but of enacting a social dynamic that allows the divine to be present. Carolyn R. Miller suggests that “what we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have. . . . As a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality” (138). The invisible man finds, in shifting between Washingtonian and vernacular rhetoric, not only that he must shift his oratorical means to reach a particular end, but that, by inhabiting a particular mode of speech, his ends, and indeed his very being, are themselves changed.

When the invisible man first attempts to intervene in the eviction, it is not so much to stop the crowd from attacking the white men who are forcibly removing the elderly couple and their belongings, but to stop himself from participating in the attack: “I both wanted it and feared the consequences, was outraged and angered at what I saw and yet surged with fear; not

for the man or of the consequences of an attack, but of what the sight of violence might release in me” (268-69). Already a blurring of orator and audience has begun—the invisible man, who feels himself “totter on the edge of a great dark hole,” is compelled to use the crowd as a means of addressing and persuading himself, and his first appeal uses the “shock absorbing phrases” typical of Washingtonian rhetoric (269). It is not surprising that the invisible man resorts to the rhetoric of the college, since the “great dark hole” he feels himself falling into is the folk culture that he and the college have been trying so desperately to repress, manifested concretely in the detritus that litters the snow outside the apartment: the old blues records, nuggets of High John the Conqueror, newspaper scraps about Marcus Garvey, and release papers for the former slave, who in his continued poverty and powerlessness belies all the progressivist rhetoric the college is based on. When the invisible man sees these fragments of slave culture, he feels a pang of identification and recognition: “it was as though I myself was being dispossessed of some painful yet precious thing which I could not bear to lose; something confounding, like a rotted tooth that one would rather suffer indefinitely than endure the short, violent eruption of pain that would mark its removal” (266). But although the invisible man cannot extract the remnants of slave culture from himself, he does attempt to numb the source of his pain through pacifistic rhetoric, redefining the black crowd (and himself) as “a law abiding and a slow-to-anger people” (269). However, his initial reference to “that wise leader...who was strong enough to do the wise thing in spite of himself” immediately backfires. The invisible man here alludes to an infamous incident in which the school hospital at Tuskegee turned over to white authorities a black sharecropper who had been shot by lynchers.<sup>15</sup> The outrage of the invisible man’s audience (“He was a handkerchief-headed rat!” yells a woman [270]) makes him backpedal rhetorically, but it also makes him ask

the crowd, “What are we to do?” (270), a question—only partly rhetorical—that echoes an earlier request: the desperate plea from the crowd that preceded the Founder’s collapse in the middle of his final oration: “Tell us what is to be done, sir!” (123). But if the Founder’s collapse evinces his ultimate impotence in the face of that pragmatic question, the invisible man’s repetition and redirection of the question back to the audience suggests a different relationship between orator and audience, one in which rhetorical praxis is not transmission but exchange. Unlike the Founder, the invisible man cannot use an established identity to impose a particular viewpoint on his audience; rather, the invisible man must situate himself rhetorically by constructing an ethos on the fly—if he is to change his audience’s view of who they are, he must, reciprocally, allow them to construct his own identity as a speaker.

At first the invisible man is removed enough from the rhetorical situation to evaluate his own performance—“Oh, God, this wasn’t it at all. Poor technique and not at all what I intended” (270)—but he soon begins, as he interacts with the crowd, not to abandon Washingtonian rhetoric but to signify on it, to take the speech he originally intended to make and speak it from within the vernacular so that its meaning is destabilized. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates describes how Signifyin(g) allows the African American rhetor to negotiate between white and black discursive universes, undermining discursive boundaries even as they are strategically employed for rhetorical purposes:

The mastery of Signifyin(g) creates *homo rhetoricus Africanus*, allowing—through the manipulation of these classic black figures of Signification—the black person to move freely between two discursive universes. This is an excellent example of what I call linguistic masking, the verbal sign of the mask of blackness that demarcates the boundary between the white linguistic realm

and the black, two domains that exist side by side in a homonymic relation signified by the very concept of Signification. (75-76)

The invisible man's initial statement, "We're a law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger people" (269), is repeatedly reframed and complexified throughout his speech: "look at all he's accumulated in eighty-seven years, strewn in the snow like chicken guts, and we're a law-abiding, slow-to-anger bunch of folks turning the other cheek every day in the week" (270); "remember that we're a wise, law-abiding group of people. And remember it when you look up there in the doorway at the law standing there with his forty-five" (271); "He says he'll shoot us down because we're a law-abiding people" (273).

Callahan suggests that the invisible man's speech "produces an effect antithetical to his intention" ("Frequencies" 161), but the irony of the speech is an ambiguous mix of the dramatic and the verbal as the invisible man, surrounded by the fragments of slave culture, is seized by the voice of his repressed grandfather and proceeds to "agree 'em to death and destruction" (16), unraveling in the process not only his own accommodationist rhetoric but the subject position from which he delivered it. His signifying does not explicitly negate pacifistic rhetoric; rather, it makes the very idea of pacifism inflammatory in a way audible only to those within the veil who can hear the vernacular—the white sheriff, oblivious to the double-voiced nature of the speech, says, "You're doing all right, tell 'em to keep out of this" (272-73).<sup>16</sup> When a member of the crowd yells, "Hell, they been dispossessed, you crazy sonofabitch, get out the way!" (272), the invisible man again signifies on the man's comment, even adopting his register, seemingly disagreeing with the man's statement only to intensify the rage that underlies it through a parallelism that emphasizes the continuing injustice of the present, future, and past: "They ain't *got* nothing, they caint *get* nothing, they never *had* nothing. So



who was dispossessed?” (272). Finally, the invisible man translates prayer, the very antithesis of activity and material engagement, into a form of action. When the sheriff denies the couple the opportunity for a final prayer inside the apartment, the invisible man ironically puts the sheriff in the place of the God whom the couple are forbidden to address: “So we’ve been dispossessed, and what’s more, he thinks he’s God. Look up there backed against the post with a criminal on either side of him” (273). In response, the crowd surges forward, and the passive spiritual activity that would have been directed at Christ becomes transubstantiated into a very physical activity directed against the *faux*-Christ the invisible man has constructed through his oratory. And the last question the invisible man speaks before he is overrun by the crowd, “Where do we go from here[?]”—the question that felled the Founder—is transformed by the invisible man’s rhetoric into a spark for action.

It is not that the invisible man simply fails in his original purpose of pacification or adapts to the crowd’s whims merely to maintain his position as a speaker. Rather, to follow Biesecker, he becomes caught in an unanticipated logic of articulation—he begins as an orator using language to influence an audience, but finds that the roles of orator and audience blur into each other as language envelops them both. The crowd itself is a projection of his own repressed rage, a sounding board that transforms his accommodationist language into a message of resistance, and as he progresses in his oration and begins to identify with the audience, he adds yet another twist of the screw, transforming unintentional irony into conscious Signifyin(g) until, like the crowd, his repressed anger bursts out. As the crowd charges, the invisible man calls “No, wait” (273), but he is the first to suggest that they carry all the furniture back inside, saying, “we’ll need some chairs to sit in...rest upon as we kneel[...]. We’re law-abiding, so clear the street of the debris. Put it out of sight! Hide it, hide

their shame! Hide *our* shame!” (274-75). Even after the crowd is moved to action, the invisible man continues to operate in the ironic mode—he frames the very visible resistance of the crowd and the pride that arises from it as a hiding of shame. The double-voicedness of the invisible man’s rhetoric does not cancel out the conflicting accommodationist and radical elements in his oratory, but allows them to mutually intensify each other. As Kenneth Burke suggests, “True irony, humble irony, is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one *needs* him, is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within*, being consubstantial with him” (*Grammar* 514). “True” irony, like Signifyin(g), does not reverse the terms of a dichotomy, but undermines dichotomization itself by rendering it as an explicitly rhetorical construction. Gates suggests that in Signifyin(g) the structure of the sign changes: the signifier remains, but in place of the signified are the rhetorical figures characteristic of the African American vernacular (47), so that “a simultaneous, but negated, parallel discursive (ontological, political) universe exists within the larger white discursive universe, like the matter-and-antimatter fabrications so common to science fiction” (49). The invisible man uses accommodationist language, but he foregrounds its rhetorical nature by rendering it ironically, so that its claims of absolute truth and referentiality are qualified and the dialectical relationships between repression and law, resistance and shame, become apparent.

But, even after the invisible man manages to move the crowd (and himself) to action, the split between the practicing and the aspiring orator continues. When the police arrive and a riot is imminent, he says, “It became too much for me. The whole thing had gotten out of hand. What had I said to bring on all this?” (277), and, while running away, “This was awful. What on earth had I said to have brought on all this?” (280). While the invisible man’s puzzlement

may be in part an attempt to evade responsibility for the material consequences of his oration, he is also genuinely baffled by the origins and ends of his speaking; alienated from his own language, he does not grasp the significance or meaning of his own speech act. The invisible man's development as an orator reverses the intentionalist model of rhetoric wherein the orator, gaining a clearer sense of purpose, searches for linguistic means by which he might attain his ends. The invisible man speaks, and then must find out why and to what end. Speech precedes intention, and he must either discover the purpose imminent within his speech or construct a purpose that accounts for what he says. He must, in other words, find out who is speaking: "It is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak" (Lacan, "Letter" 165). In his first encounter with Brother Jack, the invisible man argues not about what he said, but why he said it, and that argument leads in turn to a disagreement over the identity of the invisible man and of his audience. The invisible man vaguely senses that his speech represented an articulation of audience and speaker: the elderly couple "reminded me of folks I know down South. It's taken me a long time to feel it, but they're folks just like me, except that I've been to school a few years" (285). But Jack has a different interpretation of the invisible man's actions—he attempts to substitute a more generalized class division for racial division, and thereby reframe the invisible man's identity in generic terms:

You're not like them. Perhaps you were, but you're not any longer. Otherwise you'd never have made that speech. Perhaps you were, but that's all past, dead. You might not recognize it just now, but that part of you is dead! You have not completely shed that self, that old agrarian self, but it's dead and you will throw

it off completely and emerge something new. *History* has been born in your brain. (285)

The topos of history is integral to both Jack's construction of the invisible man and to the invisible man's construction of himself, but each character conceives of history differently. Whereas the invisible man is beginning to reach back to the south and to African American vernacular culture in order to integrate his past with his present, Jack advocates a version of history which is revolutionary and disjunctive, in which each stage of social development consumes the ones before it, every year is year zero, and history is a future without a past.

Although the communism that underlies Jack's version of history is antithetical to the capitalism of Washingtonian rhetoric, the two systems of rhetoric have in common a radical displacement that severs the subject from the past and impels her along a trajectory toward an indeterminate and ever-receding end. Thus, when the invisible man decides to take up Jack's offer to be an orator for the Brotherhood, he easily justifies his co-optation as a Marxist orator with progressivist rhetoric. Even after it becomes apparent to him at his first party that he is "a natural resource" (297) the party is using, he "had the sense of being present at the creation of important events, as though a curtain had been parted and I was being allowed to glimpse how the country operated...at least they've invited me, one of us, in at the beginning of something big; and besides, if I refused to join them, where would I go—to a job as porter at the railroad station? At least here there was a chance to speak" (300, 302). With no sense of irony, the invisible man views his job as a communist agitator as a form of upward mobility, and just as the college offered to him a static, defined identity that severed him from his southern roots (embodied by the scholarship papers he receives after his speech at the battle royal), so the Brotherhood also gives him a new identity that isolates him (embodied by the slip of paper that

Jack hands him, containing his new name [303]). His suggestion that “a curtain had been parted” echoes the earlier vision of the Founder’s statue, with its ambiguous lifting of the veil: “I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is really being lifted, or lowered more firmly into place” (36). As with the college, the “revelation” that the invisible man receives at the Chthonian club ultimately proves to be “a more efficient blinding” (36), but, beginning with his eviction speech, the invisible man finds that his language outruns his illusions, and as he becomes wise to the ways of the Brotherhood, he slowly begins to overtake it.

### **The Split Rhetor: Contradictory Dynamics in the Harlem Rally Address**

Lloyd W. Brown, in his analysis of exhorters in *Invisible Man*, sets up a schema wherein the invisible man must negotiate between the logos of institutions such as the Brotherhood and the college, and the pathos of Ras the Exhorter (289). While Brown’s observations serve to illuminate general patterns of rhetorical action, particularly in the southern episodes of *Invisible Man*, shifts in logos and pathos after the invisible man leaves the south are symptomatic of a more foundational change in the invisible man’s rhetorical praxis: the reciprocal construction of ethos between himself and his audience. The invisible man imagines that his new position as a paid orator will make him a “somebody” and reveal his identity, although he has no real idea of what that identity might be. He rejects Jack’s suggestion that he is the reincarnation of Booker T. Washington, but can only define himself negatively: “to hell with this Booker T. Washington business. I would do the work but I would be no one except myself—whatever I was” (305). But while he waits behind the scenes in Harlem to give his first speech for the Brotherhood, he is dogged by a fractured consciousness: “it was as though I stood simultaneously at opposite ends of a tunnel. I seemed to view myself

from the distance of the campus while yet sitting there on a bench in the old arena” (327-28). As much as the invisible man would like his identity to be something he actually *is* rather than something that is constructed, he is unable to remove himself from his own view, and the tunnel through which he views himself relates his present desire for success in the Brotherhood to his past desire for approval within the college. After leaving the college, the invisible man lost the security of a reified identity, and now he hopes to speak himself into being again, though he is dogged by the fear of failure and a subsequent fall into disintegration, manifested immediately before his speech in the haunting impression that his legs were “independent objects that could of their own volition lead me to safety or danger” (327), and in his vision of a syphilitic from his old neighborhood in the south “stretching out a hand from which the fingers had been eaten away” (330).

Significantly, as with his scholarship, it is the invisible man’s grandfather who calls into question his ambitions, making him wonder whether language and identity really operate in the way he hopes they will, or if, as Lacan suggests, the word is only “a presence made of an absence” (“Speech” 64):

Perhaps the part of me that observed listlessly but saw all, missing nothing, was still the malicious, arguing part; the dissenting voice, my grandfather part; the cynical, disbelieving part—the traitor self that always threatened internal discord. Whatever it was, I knew that I’d have to keep it pressed down. I had to.

For if I were successful tonight, I’d be on the road to something big. (328)

The invisible man still represses the disruptive language of the vernacular, though this time in the service of the Brotherhood; yet, even as he contemplates his new ambitions and tries to convince himself that his new identity not only completes him but grants a unified trajectory to

his personal history, he realizes viscerally that in the very act of speaking he will be transformed in ways he cannot control: “I sensed vaguely and with a flash of panic that the moment I walked out upon the platform and opened my mouth I’d be someone else. Not just a nobody with a manufactured name which might have belonged to anyone, or to no one. But another personality” (328). The Brotherhood has given him a new name, but it serves only as an alienated signifier, physical marks without the indwelling signified that would grant them exchange value as a sign, and so when the invisible man finally takes to the podium, the spot light that surrounds him seems a “seamless cage of stainless steel” that reminds him of the “hard, mechanical isolation of the hospital machine” (333-34), where he was unable to recall his own name or to grasp any solid sense of identity.

Yet, for all the fears of the aspiring orator, the practicing orator again finds that in the act of speaking he assumes an identity that is relational and integrative. As with his eviction speech, the invisible man adopts the vernacular; or rather, the vernacular enfolds him as he speaks, situating him not within the isolated word of writing but within the relational word of the oral tradition:

I might have been anyone, might have been trying to speak in a foreign language. For I couldn’t remember the correct words and phrases from the pamphlets. I had to fall back upon tradition and since it was a political meeting, I selected one of the political techniques that I’d heard so often at home: The old down-to-earth, I’m-sick-and-tired-of-the-way-they’ve-been-treating-us approach. (334-35)

The invisible man’s trouble with his microphone turns into an opening gambit that makes the speech an explicit performance and enlists the participation of the audience: “You see, all I

needed was a chance. You've granted it, now it's up to me!" (334). The invisible man effects identification by casting himself in his audience's image, as a person who just needs a chance; the audience accordingly grants the invisible man the chance they would wish to have, and in the process they become drawn into the speech not just as audience members but as judges and co-creators. If Signifyin(g) constructs the African American speaker as a person who is overtly engaging in rhetorical suasion and makes the speech a double-voiced text that simultaneously employs and reveals the strategies that power its assertions, then, reciprocally, the African American audience itself becomes a split entity that assesses the speech's effectiveness even as it is affected by it. Roger D. Abrahams, who studied the sociolinguistics of African American communication in urban environments, identifies this split role in the orator and audience when he observes that although African American audiences tend to judge speech situations according to their effectiveness as performances, "This does not mean that all effective performances are judged as good (though there would be a tendency to do so), but rather that goodness on this score is judged in regard first to the appropriateness, and then whether the audience had *gotten with it* or *into it*, responding with participation in the event" (*Talking* 8). After the invisible man's assertion that it is up to him, a voice from the crowd yells back, "We with you Brother. You pitch 'em we catch 'em!" but the same voice later yells, "That's a strike, Brother... You pitched a strike" (334-35). That is, the audience is both catcher and umpire, within and outside the game of rhetorical exchange. As Gerald L. Davis suggests,

African-American narrative performance is guided by concepts of *ideal* forms and *ideal* standards. The notion of an ideal form is as compelling for the African-American performer as it is for his or her audience. During a performance, when both "performer" and "audience" are actively locked into a



dynamic exchange, the audience compels the performer to acknowledge the most appropriate characteristics of the genre system—the “ideal” in terms of that particular performance environment—before permitting the performer sufficient latitude for the individuation of his genius and style. (26)

Although Robert Bataille suggests the invisible man’s Harlem speech is at first “extremely self-conscious and manipulative” (45), the self-reflective nature of the vernacular register results in a kind of alienation effect (to use Brecht’s term) that complicates any straightforward attempt at manipulation: both the invisible man and his audience are aware of the genre and strategies of his speech, and the rhetorical nature of the speech is overt.

In fact, as pitcher, the invisible man immediately throws a curve ball to his audience that, as with his eviction speech, implicitly critiques the genre in which he first begins speaking. He first masterfully echoes his audience’s resentment toward their exploiters, asserting vaguely that the common people are in fact the “uncommon people,” and then, at the moment of maximum identification, he suddenly reverses the responsibility for the exploitation: “And do you know what makes us so uncommon?... *We let them do it!*” (335). He captures the audience by demonstrating that he can indeed deliver an entertaining “down-to-earth, I’m-sick-and-tired-of-the-way-they’ve-been-treating-us” speech, but he then dramatically asserts his individuality within the genre by undermining its basic assumptions. The abrupt reversal enacts within the speech the very dynamic of festering resentment that fuels the crowd’s inaction—the orator seduces the crowd into wallowing comfortably in its animosity, and then, by abruptly reversing the crowd’s assumed meaning of the word “uncommon,” he lays bare the self-indulgent blindness, the avoidance of personal responsibility, to which unorganized indignation leads. The audience realizes that the orator

has led them on, just as their own feelings of resentment have led them on, and its response—“The silence was profound. The smoke boiled in the spotlight” (335)—parallels the response of the southern crowd in the smoker when the invisible man makes his “social equality” slip: “The laughter hung smokelike in the sudden stillness” (31). In both his smoker speech and his Harlem speech, the invisible man is viewed by the audience as a performer, but the significance of performativity differs between Euro-American and African American contexts. Abrahams suggests that in Euro-American contexts, the audience expects

silence on the part of the hearer, whether in conversation or more stylized performance. Response is expected only when there is a cue given by the performer, unless one is willing to be rude. There is consequently great psychic distance created between performer and audience in SE [Standard English] stylized interactions.... Performance to an Euro-American audience is regarded as a *thing*.... Black performance, on the other hand, is not a thing but an aspect of an interactional process.... [The African-American performer’s] task is not to make a thing but to bring about an experience in which not only his creative energies but the vitality of others may find expression. (*Talking* 9)

When the white audience at the smoker casts the young orator as a performer (all the while showing their disdain of his performance by mocking him while he is speaking), they distance themselves from him and reduce him to a mere entertainer. It is only when he has the inadvertent temerity to depart from his assigned script that the distance between performer and audience suddenly collapses: the orator’s guise of acquiescence—an acquiescence which, as his slip reveals, *is* truly a guise, in spite of the young invisible man’s own denials and his repudiation of his grandfather’s slyness—and the audience’s guise of amused indulgence are

both removed, and the concern of both the young invisible man and his hostile audience is to restore security and distance by re-establishing the performative mode. In contrast, the audience in Harlem does not view the invisible man's sudden reversal as a rupture of the performative contract; rather, its silence indicates a continued appreciation of the accusation on the aesthetic level, even if its affective consequences are dangerously ambiguous: “‘Another strike,’ I heard the voice call sadly. ‘Ain’t no use to protest the decision!’ And I thought, Is he with me or against me?” (335-36).

It is the audience's dual perception of aesthetics and affect that allows the invisible man to negotiate his way past this crux in his speech; his rhetorical versatility buys him credibility even as he touches his audience's most sensitive vulnerabilities. The very blindness he has accused them of becomes a central motif of his speech, treated with a wry, ironic humour that allows the invisible man's “dumb one-eyed brothers” to acknowledge their own blindness from a position of superior vision: “they've dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we're born. So now we can only see in straight white lines. We're a nation of one-eyed mice—Did you ever see such a sight in your life? Such an *uncommon* sight!” (336).<sup>17</sup> The motif of the one-eyed mouse allows the invisible man to develop his thesis that organized, coordinated resistance should replace the futile resentment that blinds the audience, since full vision is only possible in cooperation with a comrade. He further embodies that theme of cooperation within the structure of his own speech by appropriating the baseball metaphor the audience has been employing in response to his statements and grafting it onto his own analogy, making the speech itself a co-production of audience and orator: “I say come on, cross over! Let's make an alliance! I'll look out for you, and you look out for me! I'm good at catching and I've got a damn good pitching arm!” (337). The reciprocal nature of social and political activism is made

explicit by the reciprocal process of rhetorical invention in the speech: audience and orator both catch and pitch to make the game work.

Yet, for all the subtle effectiveness of his speech, the invisible man experiences it as a form of possession wherein, like the young woman singing at the college, he is a conduit for language rather than a user of language. At the eviction speech the invisible man is seized almost against his will, but at his first Brotherhood speech he is a less resistant medium, and only when language briefly ebbs does he become aware of himself:

It was a natural pause and there was applause, but as it burst I realized that the flow of words had stopped. What would I do when they started to listen again? I leaned forward, straining to see through the barrier of light. They were mine, out there, and I couldn't afford to lose them. Yet I suddenly felt naked, sensing that the words were returning and that something was about to be said that I shouldn't reveal. (337)

It is as if the practicing orator who was seized by the vernacular vanishes, and in his place, momentarily, stands the ambitious politico who desires to advance himself within the Brotherhood by possessing an audience he cannot actually see. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the invisible man falls out of language when he conceives of himself as an orator separate from his audience, since at that point he no longer participates with his audience in constructing a shared linguistic and social experience, but instead uses them as a means of reaching a particular end. His final words before he is robbed of speech—"Look down the avenue, there's only one enemy. Can't you see his face?" (337)—invoke pure division to effect total identification (to use Kenneth Burke's terms<sup>18</sup>), but the Manichaean strategy rebounds on the invisible man, who for a silent instant struggles once more with

conflicting rhetorical imperatives, one selfish and the other communal. The opening to the next portion of his speech is, after all, “Look at me!” which serves to indicate a shift to the personal but also, in the light of his previous words, implies a self-accusation and suggests that the distinction between comrade and enemy might not be as clear as he asserts—the enemy might be down the avenue, but he might also be up on the podium. His subsequent request, “May I Confess?... You are my friends. We share a common disinheritance, and it’s said that confession is good for the soul” (338), is therefore not just an attempt to establish a connection with his audience, but a genuine request for absolution from a sin of which his audience is unaware, and the invisible man expresses his repentance and effects his absolution by offering himself to his audience.

Davis, describing the peroration of the African American chanted sermon, writes that the preacher’s personal testimony is used to end the sermon. Symbolically, the preacher assumes the burden of commitment and example for his congregation.... Although there is a strong sense that the sermon has concluded a phase, its energy carries into a time-space well beyond the limitations imposed by the performing space and time. The actual performance will continue its energy, its sensibility, in the daily lives of the congregation. ( 81)

In order to re-enter language, to recover his voice within this context, the invisible man must reverse the rhetorical economy of his speech—instead of attempting to possess his audience, he must allow it to possess him, and instead of asserting his oratorical mastery of it, he must acknowledge its transformative power over him. And so as he tells them that “*Something strange and miraculous and transforming is taking place in me right now,*” he can “feel the words forming themselves, slowly falling into place” (338). In the first part of his speech, the

invisible man established a dynamic of co-production with his audience; in his conclusion, he goes even further, making the audience the active agent and himself the passive receptor, manifesting the audience's power by describing its effect on him: because he is "a new citizen of the country of your vision" (here he reverses the ironic image of blindness and attributes to his audience a power that comes from a new, fraternal mode of seeing), he becomes "more human" (338-39). He constructs for himself a new identity in the language that his audience makes available, and in doing so he becomes the evidence of its new power. The invisible man at first believes that the tears he sheds following his speech undermine his effectiveness, but he soon realizes that, for the audience, his tears are the visible manifestation of their transformative power, even as the audience's raucous cheering and applause are the auditory signs of his.

What the invisible man learns here as an orator is that the condition for oratorical inspiration is a willingness to situate oneself within the vernacular rather than an ambition to master it. The invisible man's retrospective ruminations, in which he tries to adjust his identity to the speech he had given, suggest that language precedes the subject, although the relationship between identity and language is always mediated by social conditioning and social institutions:

I realized that I meant everything that I had said to the audience, even though I hadn't known that I was going to say those things. I had intended only to make a good appearance, to say enough to keep the Brotherhood interested in me.

What had come out was completely uncalculated, as though another self within me had taken over and held forth. And lucky that it had, or I might have been fired.... I sat there in the dark trying to recall the sequence of the speech.

Already it seemed the expression of someone else. Yet I knew that it was mine and mine alone. (346)

The invisible man's own struggles to discover who it was that spoke his speech are still tainted by his Washingtonian progressivism. His experience of speaking throws into question the whole idea of individualism; he knows that the audience "wanted me to succeed, and fortunately I had spoken for them and they had recognized my words. I belonged to them." But he persists in interpreting his success in terms of material progress: the speech was "mine and mine alone," and it allowed him to keep his job (346). His confusion thickens when he considers the key phrase of his speech: "What had I meant by saying that I had become 'more human'? Was it a phrase that I had picked up from some preceding speaker, or a slip of the tongue? For a moment I thought of my grandfather and quickly dismissed him. What had an old slave to do with humanity?" (346). As a practicing orator, the invisible man operates within the vernacular tradition his grandfather represents, yet he represses the destabilizing, ironic influence of his Signifyin(g) ancestor in favour of the "scientific" dogma of the Brotherhood, which offers him at least the illusion of an identity: "If they could take a chance with me, then I'd do the very best that I could. How else could I save myself from disintegration?" (346).

### **Chronos versus Kairos: Oratory as Jazz**

Critics have used a number of different schemas to analyze the Brotherhood's rejection of the invisible man's oratorical style. Even as the invisible man, in the midst of his speech, switches to personal testimony, Jack warns him, "Don't end your usefulness before you're begun," and the invisible man must wait until "a stir behind me" (from the other Brotherhood speakers) stops before he can continue (338). Lloyd W. Brown suggests that "a disciplined and formal style is associated with scientific detachment or dehumanized intellectuality. And this

strategy is pitted against the impulses of self expression, especially against Ras's impetuous exhortation" (290). According to Brown, the invisible man, in order to grow as an orator and a human being, must eschew the abstract formalities of Brotherhood rhetoric for the freedom of individual expression: "On a broad social level, cultural and racial realities subvert the abstract propositions embodied by formal rhetoric. On an individual level, the need for self-expression and self-awareness strains against the mechanical formulae of scientific ideologies" (299).

Robert Bataille questions these clear divisions, suggesting that Ellison is not valorizing expression over formalism but pointing out that both types of rhetoric can be abused if, in place of a rhetoric of inquiry and self-discovery (terms Bataille draws from Richard Ohmann), an orator employs a rhetoric of manipulation for selfish reasons. While Ellison is no doubt offering an ethical evaluation of rhetorical practice in his work, the ongoing moral ambiguity of the invisible man's experience as a rhetor suggests that analyses based on individual expression or individual motivation do not fully capture the critique of rhetorical practice in Ellison's work. Implicit in Ellison's description of rhetoric, of the relationship between the orator and audience, is an exploration of the relationship between individual and group, a relationship that Ellison also explores at length in his essays on African American music, especially jazz. Speaking of black poetry, Stephen Henderson says that "whenever Black poetry is most distinctively and effectively *Black*, it derives its form from two basic sources, Black speech and Black music" (30-31). While Ellison objected to the Black Arts movement's idea of a distinctively black aesthetic, his work does manifest a conjunction of speech and music that serves to illuminate, in part, the difference between the Brotherhood's rhetorical principles and those that the invisible man finds himself gripped by.



In the prologue, while listening to Louis Armstrong under the influence of narcotics, the invisible man tells the story of a yokel who managed to defeat a professional fighter:

The fighter was swift and amazingly scientific. His body was one violent flow of rapid rhythmic action. He hit the yokel a hundred times while the yokel held up his arms in stunned surprise. But suddenly the yokel, rolling about in the gale of boxing gloves, struck one blow and knocked science, speed, and footwork as cold as a well-digger's posterior. The smart money hit the canvas. The long shot got the nod. The yokel had simply stepped inside of his opponent's sense of time. (8)

In rhetorical terms, the difference between the yokel and the fighter is the difference between *chronos* and *kairos*: between time, an ongoing, if punctuated, flow of linked moments, and *a* time, a moment which exists in all its specificity and demands that the combatant fit himself to present exigencies. If rhetorical practice is conceived in terms of combat, then the difference between the scientific fighter and the vernacular yokel is the difference between white signification and black Signifyin(g), between an unbroken, syntagmatic chain of signifiers, each providing a semantic alibi for the others through its contiguity with them, and a paradigmatic instance which, properly invoked, gives the polyvocal lie to that alibi by subtly invoking metaphoric associations which had to be repressed in order to fix the words in their places. The yokel doesn't stand in direct opposition to the fighter; the rhythm of the scientific fighter gives the yokel his opening, just as the linking together of signifiers gives the disruptive African American Signifier a chain to shake. The progressive rhetorics of the college and the Brotherhood sweep the present moment along so that it becomes lost in a ongoing rush toward material prosperity or political fraternity; in both cases, the complex significance of the

moment that might lead to other narratives or other trajectories is repressed in favour of an assigned meaning that is derived from an unrealized future, a transcendental signified.

The questionable nature of the Brotherhood's vision of history is revealed in the symbolic Brotherhood poster that shows "An American Indian couple, representing the dispossessed past; a blond brother (in overalls) and a leading Irish sister, representing the dispossessed present; and Brother Tod Clifton and a young white couple (it had been felt unwise simply to show Clifton and the girl) surrounded by a group of children of mixed races, representing the future" (378). In the Brotherhood's ideal future, the races all live peacefully together—but not *too* close together. When the invisible man agrees to work for the Brotherhood, he says, "My possibilities were suddenly broadened. As a Brotherhood spokesman I would represent not only my own group but one that was much larger. The audience was mixed, their claims broader than race" (346). But what is lost in this broadening of possibilities is the specificity of his audience's situation, the sense of *kairos* that allowed him to construct with his audience a discourse that reflected the present time and place. In his burrow, the invisible man, while listening to Armstrong, evinces a more localized sense of time:

Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around.... I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths. (8)

Invisibility is an interstitial state—the assimilative, trajectorial discourse of the Brotherhood leaves no place for African Americans within history, and so they are elided; as Jack says of the old couple for whom the invisible man made his eviction speech, “They’re living, but dead. Dead-in-living.... History has passed them by. They’re like dead limbs that must be pruned away so that the tree may bear young fruit or the storms of history will blow them down anyway” (285). The invisible man senses that Jack cannot see him either, but he tries to remedy that by inserting himself into history and dutifully assuming the identity the Brotherhood assigns him: “there were two of me: the old self that slept a few hours a night and dreamed sometimes of my grandfather and Bledsoe and Brockway and Mary, the self that flew without wings and plunged from great heights; and the new public self that spoke for the Brotherhood and was becoming so much more important than the other that I seemed to run a foot race against myself” (373). The visible man runs away from his own invisibility by repressing his southern background, but the apparent cost of visibility is blindness, since the invisible man’s assignment requires that he negate his African American roots; he is forbidden to call his family, and Mary, the woman who in her support, inspiration, and encouragement of the invisible man functions as an urban Mother Gresham, a Madonna figure who embodies African American survival in the industrial north, must also be denied: “My name was different; I was under orders. Even if I met Mary on the street, I’d have to pass her by unrecognized” (329). To be seen, the invisible man must collude in rendering others invisible.

But when the invisible man addresses his audiences at the eviction and at the Brotherhood rally, he speaks not from the accommodationist rhetoric of the college or the scientific script of the Brotherhood, but from the interstitial space of the vernacular, where the abstract construct of *chronos* gives way to the relational time of *kairos*. He slips between the

flowing nodes that define the Brotherhood's trajectory of liberation and in that between-space finds not only those the Brotherhood has written out of history, but a language that allows him to forge a relationship with them. As his elder self explains in the prologue, invisibility gives him a different sense of time, and the invisible man, when he is a practicing orator co-producing a discourse with his audience, speaks at a right angle to time, not only entering the flow of progress defined by the college or Brotherhood, but also descending, like Dante, into the depths of the specific moment (*kairos*) to comprehend and respond to the hellish oppression in the present time and place. The invisible man's linguistic practice matches his perceptual practice, since he also speaks at a right angle to the syntagmatic chains that form the genres he speaks in, the accommodationist speech and the "down-to-earth, I'm-sick-and-tired-of-the-way-they've-been-treating-us" speech, using their rigid structures and set features the way the yokel uses the fighter's mechanical timing. He undermines them by Signifyin(g), jostling each signifier so it resonates paradigmatically until the links no longer form a fixed, linear chain, but a fluid, oscillating wave composed of ironic resonances that complicate and qualify one another.

The members of the Brotherhood object to the emotion evinced by the invisible man: "the speech was wild, hysterical, politically irresponsible and dangerous.... And worse than that, it was incorrect!" and they object to the corresponding emotion of the crowd: "It was the antithesis of the scientific approach. Ours is a reasonable point of view. We are champions of a scientific approach to society, and such a speech as we've identified ourselves with tonight destroys everything that has been said before. The audience isn't thinking, it's yelling its head off" (342-43). But a more basic cause of the Brotherhood's condemnation is revealed with brother Wrestrum's accusation that the invisible man is an opportunist who is using the

Brotherhood to advance his own self-interests, a charge that Jack also levels with regard to the invisible man's eulogy of Tod Clifton. Speaking about the rally, John F. Callahan points out that "The audience was moved because of the Invisible Man's creation of an identity in response to its participatory voices. Although that moment passes, any action in the future also depends on participation; because, as the ideologues recognize better than Jack, the contact point between Invisible Man and the audience has been defiance of externally imposed authority" ("Frequencies" 166). The mutual process of identity formation does indeed threaten the authority of the Brotherhood, but not by refuting all forms of externally imposed authority; rather, oratory within the vernacular substitutes for the static templates of written documentation the dynamic templates of the oral tradition. Language that claims to be scientific also claims to be referential; the ideal scientific language perfectly maps word to thing, and it is that assertion of scientism that gives the Brotherhood's language its authority with regard to history. However, the vernacular derives its authority not from the relationship between words and things, which it constantly disrupts, but between words and people—it is not the referential, but the performative that predominates; not the semantic, but the pragmatic. No wonder then that the Brotherhood is threatened by the linguistic *jouissance* of the vernacular, which undermines referentiality and foregrounds the essentially rhetorical nature of all texts that it assimilates, including the scientific.

The Brotherhood's doctrines are embodied as text: the invisible man, prior to his speech at the rally, is directed to read Brotherhood literature in order to guide his comments (though in his excitement he forgets the literature and is overcome by the crowd), and when he is moved from Harlem because of Wrestrum's accusations, Jack informs him, "Your assignment, should you decide to remain active...is to lecture downtown on the Woman

Question.... My pamphlet, 'On the Woman Question in the United States,' will be your guide" (399). The invisible man rationalizes his reassignment by thinking, "I was a *spokesman*—why shouldn't I speak about women, or any other subject? Nothing lay outside the scheme of our ideology, there was a policy on everything" (400). Even as the invisible man leaves Hambro's apartment after realizing that his community is going to be sacrificed for the larger Brotherhood cause, Hambro hands him "the mimeographed sheets of instructions outlining the new program" (498). As a musician of words, the invisible man is always directed to his written score, and the scientific rigour of the Brotherhood requires him to play the notes he is given. But when he speaks at the eviction, the rally, and later at Tod Clifton's funeral, the invisible man turns not to classical music but to jazz for his performative paradigm, just as Ellison—who was attempting to write quite a different sort of novel at the time that an unbidden voice said to him "I am an invisible man"—found himself seized by another register: "I was quite annoyed to have my efforts interrupted by an ironic, down-home voice that struck me as being as irreverent as a honky-tonk trumpet blasting through a performance, say, of Britten's *War Requiem*" (Introduction xxv). Horace A. Porter points out in *Jazz Country: Ralph Ellison in America*, that "*Invisible Man* is a jazz text. Though true to specific historical incidents, it rearranges them in highly imaginative ways. It consciously riffs upon or plays countless variations on familiar literary and cultural themes" (74). The overall structure of Ellison's jazz text is reflected in its depictions of rhetorical practice, particularly in the contrast between the rhetorics of the college and Brotherhood and the vernacular rhetoric in which he delivers his speeches. The Brotherhood sees rhetorical practice as the musical execution of a predetermined score, but, as Alain Locke suggests, "Much of the musical superiority and force of jazz comes from the fact that the men who play it create it.... The music comes alive from

the activity of the group, like folk music originally does, instead of being a mere piece of musical execution” (qtd. in Porter 19). The musical analogy helps to explain a pair of reciprocal paradoxes plaguing the invisible man: although he believes that his Brotherhood work saves him from disintegration by giving him an identity, he feels somehow that as a Brotherhood member he is becoming less visible even to himself; and although the sense of possession he feels when he speaks publicly seems to displace his identity, in the act of speaking he feels as though he has found himself.

After his training with brother Hambro, the invisible man says that “Now I knew most of the Brotherhood arguments so well—those I doubted as well as those I believed—that I could repeat them in my sleep” (350). He has come full circle, back to his speech at the smoker, which was delivered from rote without any adaptation to context. As he speaks (mostly, after his banishment from Harlem, to an audience of white women), the invisible man begins to disappear even to himself: “Something seemed to occur that was hidden from my own consciousness. I acted out a pantomime more eloquent than my most expressive words” (413). The analogy of the pantomime suggests that the essence of the invisible man’s communication has moved away from the verbal to the visual—that is, his audience is not so much interested in what he has to say as in the fact that they are a group of white people listening to a black man speak; he senses that they are “hoping for something like justification” (413), an affirmation of their liberalness. The separation of audience and speaker here is a contrast to the mutual construction of identity at the rally speech, and the sense that the invisible man has of acting betrays a self-alienation that differs from the performative creation that previously characterized his oratorical experiences. As the invisible man speaks his assigned words, they do not give him substance but instead take his place. When the invisible

man returns to his Harlem office, he will find that his portrait of Frederick Douglass is gone (421), but the invisible man himself has assumed the restricted role that Douglass first played within the abolitionist movement:

During the first three or four months, my speeches were almost exclusively made up of narrations of my own personal experience as a slave.... "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy." Just here arose some embarrassment. It was impossible for me to repeat the same old story month after month, and to keep up my interest in it.... "Tell your story, Frederick," would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison, as I stepped upon the platform. I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them. (Douglass, *Bondage* 361-62)

The constant rote repetition alienated Douglass from his own history, so that the telling of it was no longer a process of constructing his identity within language, but an act wherein his identity is replaced by language. For all the power and effectiveness of Douglass's narration, his white abolitionist friends unwittingly cast him as an African American performing in blackface, advising him to sacrifice the social dynamics of vernacular speech for the sake of preserving its surface features: "'People won't believe you was ever a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way,' said Friend Foster. 'Be yourself,' said Collins, 'and tell your story.' It was said to me, 'Better have a *little* of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned'" (362). The invisible man's vague intuition that his white crowds "seemed to expect some unnamed something whenever I appeared" (413) becomes suddenly concrete when Jack, after Tod Clifton's funeral, says explicitly, "you were not hired to think.



Had you forgotten that? If so, listen to me: You were not hired to think” (461). Like Douglass, the invisible man eventually realizes that the restrictions associated with his work as an orator have made him into a hollow parody of himself.

Yet, given the sense of possession he felt at both the eviction and the rally, how is it that he was not self-alienated there, even as he spoke of dispossession? Ellison’s comments on the role of the individual within jazz offer an explanation:

True jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment...springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents...a definition of his identity as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it.

(Ellison, “Christian” 267)

Ellison’s own comments echo Abraham’s remarks on the relationship of the individual verbal performer to his or her audience within African American urban culture: “*doing your thing*...does not mean acting independently of the group but rather asserting yourself *within* the group, especially in performances. Specifically, doing your thing seems to have originally meant entering into a performance by adding one’s voice to the ensemble, by playing off the others” (Abrahams, *Talking* 83). Abrahams describes this as an African American *aufheben*, “at one and the same time negating and affirming. The negation or self-cancellation occurs on the apparently temporal level, while the affirmation arises out of the embodiment and celebration of these opposing ideas or forces ‘out of time’” (82). As a practicing rhetor, the invisible man loses himself in the vernacular register that precedes him, but through his

interaction with his audience—an interaction that occurs between historical nodes, “out of time”—the restrictions of the oral tradition become resources for his *aufheben*, the simultaneous loss and formation of the self (one might also recall here the South African concept of *ubuntu*, the idea that people can only become fully human through interaction with other humans).

Davis suggests in his studies of the performed African American sermon that it is only after the audience is satisfied the orator has fulfilled the requirements of the chosen form that the preacher can mould the conventions of the sermon to his own individuality (26); the requirements are the tools by which the orator constructs his individual identity. The same interdependence applies when relating vernacular and dominant rhetorics. Just as black Signifyin(g) needs white signification, and the yokel his rhythmic opponent, so the vernacular rhetor needs the set genres of the dominant rhetoric if for nothing else than to perform the linguistic actions that operate at cross purposes to them and allow the formation of alternate identities. Ellison explicitly links the concepts of jazz and the vernacular together when he writes,

by “vernacular” I mean far more than popular or indigenous language. I see the vernacular as a dynamic *process* in which the most refined styles from the past are continually merged with the play-it-by-eye-and-by-ear improvisations which we invent in our efforts to control our environment and entertain ourselves.... In it the styles and techniques of the past are adjusted to the needs of the present, and in its integrative action the high styles of the past are democratized. From this perspective the vernacular is, no less than the styles associated with aristocracy, a gesture toward perfection...while the vernacular is shy of abstract

standards, it still seeks perfection in the form of functional felicity. That is why considerations of function and performance figure so prominently in the scale of vernacular aesthetics. (“Territory” 608)

But the invisible man, now trained in the rhetoric of the Brotherhood, has learned to speak scientifically rather than functionally, and finds himself as a consequence to be a role in search of an actor, rather than a player who finds his identity within an ensemble by losing it in shared performance. It is only with the death of Tod Clifton that the invisible man moves once more into the interstices and speaks from within the vernacular.

### **Ras the Exhorter and the Rhetoric of Sovereignty**

Tod Clifton, the youth leader for the Harlem chapter of the Brotherhood, is an iconic character; when the invisible man first sees him, he says Clifton has “the chiseled, black-marble features sometimes found on statues in northern museums” (356). A character with no history, Clifton’s appearance and the effect he has on the characters around him imply that he is charismatic, yet Clifton’s own oratorical efforts on behalf of the Brotherhood are never related by the narrator. Instead, Clifton functions as the target for the competing rhetorics of the Brotherhood and nationalism in Ellison’s work—he stands in for the broader audience that the invisible man and Ras are battling over. Clifton’s idealism and his youth make him the perfect judge. Like the invisible man, Clifton is a character riven by internal racial tensions, but he does not have the hunger for material gain or status that allows the invisible man to rationalize away or repress his own contradictions. Clifton seems a cornerstone of the Brotherhood’s Harlem contingent, but the effects of repressing his cultural identity are suggested when Wrestrum tells the invisible man that “there was a rally and some hoodlums tried to break up the meeting, and in the fighting Brother Tod Clifton got holt to one of the

white brothers by mistake and was beating *him*, thought he was one of the hoodlums, *he* said” (388). It is characteristic of Wrestrum, a character who is totally accommodationist and represses any resentment of the racism shown by his white brothers, that he proposes all brothers should wear an emblem or pin to prevent such a “mistake” from occurring again, even though he clearly suspects that Clifton’s violence was no error. Clifton, after the Brotherhood removes the invisible man from Harlem, rejects the Brotherhood’s putative appeal for racial equality as farce, but he does not align himself with the black nationalists either, even though he is clearly tempted at some points by their charismatic leader, Ras the Exhorter. Like the Founder, the figure of Ras has a historical antecedent: Marcus Garvey, the founder in 1917 of the United Negro Improvement Association, a black nationalist organization that promoted African American social, political, and economic independence with the ultimate aim of repatriating African Americans to a decolonized Africa. And, like the Founder, who is not identical with Booker T. Washington, Ras is not simply a fictional stand-in for Garvey (whom Clifton expresses admiration for), but rather a complex literary construction who exemplifies black nationalism and is portrayed as more or less consonant with Garvey depending on the effect Ellison desires.

Through Ras, Ellison signifies on Garvey’s black nationalist discourse with a mastery that leads one to make the same accusation of him that William Blake, in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” made of John Milton: “he was a true poet and of the Devils party without knowing it” (36). The accusation rings particularly true because, as with Milton’s Satan, it is Ras’s rhetorical virtuosity that makes him a seductive character for both other characters in the work and the audience. Houston Baker’s statement, previously cited, that Larry Neal “worried an Ellisonian line so persistently because he knew that Ellison was a mighty instrument of the

blues god confused about where all the good love and feelin' that he poured into *Invisible Man* came from" (*Poetics* 159) suggests that at least some members of the Black Arts movement thought likewise. Indeed, James Alan McPherson describes an unwitting tribute to Ellison's writing on the part of a young black student who was unsympathetic to his politics: "One girl said to him [Ellison], 'Your book doesn't mean anything because in it you're shooting down Ras the Destroyer, a rebel leader of black people'" (359). The girl's defence of Ras, a creation of Ellison himself, testifies to the verbal power of the nationalist orator. Ras the Exhorter is the first figure the invisible man encounters when he arrives in Harlem, although the invisible man's own initial impression of Ras is complicated by the seemingly indifferent reaction of those who are not members of Ras's audience: "I saw the squat man shake his fist angrily over the uplifted faces, yelling something in a staccato West Indian accent, at which the crowd yelled threateningly.... And as I came alongside, I saw two white policemen talking quietly with one another, their backs turned as they laughed at some joke" (157). Whether the indifference of the white policemen is a testament to the ultimate ineffectiveness of Ras's oratory or to their ignorance of the possibility of a racial uprising is, at this point in the novel, unclear to the invisible man. Later he will see that both possibilities are to a degree true.

Ras is a rhetorical tempter, and the repeated images of red during the scene in which he addresses both the invisible man and Clifton—"I saw his face gleam with red angry tears" (363); "He spat angrily into the dark street. It flew pink in the red glow" (368)—are demonic, though his refusal to kill Clifton and his emotional plea add a sympathetic dimension to his character. While the Brotherhood's ideology elides racial and cultural differences in order to assimilate as many people as possible into its putatively more universal cause, Ras's nationalist rhetoric offers the invisible man and Clifton an essentialist identity based on race and a

brotherhood that is grounded in ethnicity rather than class: “You my brother, mahn. Brothers are the same color; how the hell you call these white men brother? Shit, mahn. That’s shit! Brothers the same color. We sons of Mama Africa, you done forgot? You black, BLACK!... You got bahd hair! You got thick lips! They say you stink! They hate you mahn. You African, AFRICAN!” (363-64). Like the Brotherhood’s rhetoric, nationalist rhetoric is trajectorial, but while the Brotherhood sweeps aside the present moment in a rush to an unrealized future, Ras’s nationalist rhetoric moves back in time to an idealized past and location, responding to the exclusion of African Americans by refusing in turn to identify as American (a point Ellison emphasizes by writing Ras’s dialogue in dialect) and seeking to reverse the African diaspora. Benedict Anderson, examining the foundations of nationalism, notes that, “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future” (11-12). Associated with the idea of a mythical Africa is the idea of a racial purity which has been corrupted within the American context: Ras tells Tod that “It took a billion gallons of black blood to make you” (366), and he suggests that whites offer black men white women to rob them of their racial identity and to pollute the black race: “The good white woman he tell the black mahn is rapist and keep them locked up and ignorant while he makes the black mahn a race of bahstards” (366). When the invisible man suggests Clifton and he leave, Ras says, “Sure you go...but not him. You contahminated but he the real black mahn. In Africa this mahn be a chief, a black king!” (365). The latter remark is ironic in light of the invisible man’s earlier observation that Tod is of mixed heritage, with features “alive in southern towns in which the white offspring of house children and the black offspring of yard children bear names, features, and character traits as identical as the rifling of bullets fired

from a common barrel”; when the invisible man looks at Tod’s face, he also notices the “subtly blended, velvet-over-stone, granite-over-bone, Afro-Anglo-Saxon contour of his cheek” (356).

If Ras’s remark is interpreted metaphorically, however, his accusation that African American Brotherhood members are being bribed with money and sex rings true for the invisible man, who is “suddenly alive in the dark with the horror of the battle royal” (365). Unlike Tod, who is an idealist, the invisible man is contaminated by his material and social ambitions. Against the exhorter’s visceral rhetoric, he can only offer the platitudes prescribed for him by the Brotherhood:

“Don’t be stupid, mahn. They white, they don’t have to be allies with no black people. They get what they wahnt, they turn against you. Where’s your black intelligence?”

“Thinking like that will get you lost in the backwash of history,” I said.

“Start thinking with your mind and not your emotions.” (368)

The invisible man’s anemic rhetoric is no match for the exhorter, and both he and Clifton are “caught in the crude, insane eloquence of his plea” (367). The invisible man repeatedly asks Clifton to leave with him, but Tod continues to listen, fascinated and repelled. Ras speaks to the unspoken hollowness that haunts both the young men within the Brotherhood; in place of the invisibility they intuit but repress, he offers them an identity that is both visible and essential.

Ras repeatedly uses the topos of kingship in his address to Clifton:

Recognize you’self inside and you wan the kings among men!... You six foot tall, mahn. You young and intelligent. You black and beautiful—don’t let ‘em tell you different! You wasn’t them t’ings you be dead, mahn. Dead! I’d have

killed you mahn. Ras the Exhorter raised up his knife and tried to do it, but he could not do it. Why don't you do it? I ask myself. I will do it now, I say; but somet'ing tell me, "No, no! You might be killing your black king!" (366)

Ras's rhetoric is both literal and metaphorical; it invokes a future change in status that would accompany African American liberation and suggests that Clifton is already a king, if he would only recognize who he truly is. The topos of sovereign subjecthood also implies an autonomous identity that is consonant with the independent African state. Foucault writes that a king has "a double body...since it involves not only the transitory element that is born and dies, but another that remains unchanged by time and is maintained as the physical yet intangible support of the kingdom" (*Discipline* 28). The sovereign's identity is not derived from or dependent on context because the sovereign simultaneously embodies both an individual subjectivity and a state; the king therefore represents absolute, self-contained subjectivity. For men whose identity is fractured and whose shifting subjectivity is predicated on the dictates of an organization that does not write their culture into history, Ras's imperial rhetoric is tempting indeed. Clifton can only break away from Ras's rhetoric by hitting him once more, and as they are walking away, he expresses the challenge Ras poses for him by saying, "it's on the inside that Ras is strong.... On the inside he's dangerous," to which the invisible man, characteristically misreading or repressing Clifton's meaning by interpreting his statement in strategic rather than personal terms, replies, "He won't get on the inside.... He'd consider himself a traitor" (370). While the invisible man will efface the effect of Ras's rhetoric by concentrating on logistics, Clifton actually struggles with its effect on him, tentatively proposing that "sometimes a man *has* to plunge outside history," or the tension



within history (or at least the Brotherhood's version of history) might lead him to desperate actions.

While Ellison offers a seductive orator in Ras, he ultimately refutes the exhorter's claim that African Americans are in essence Africans, suggesting that cultural identity is relational rather than absolute, just as the vernacular itself is not separate from or opposed to other, more dominant registers but rather works to signify on and undermine the dichotomies that rationalize their dominance.<sup>19</sup> Ras appears at the riot that concludes Ellison's book "dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap on his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders" (547). He has taken on himself the subjective sovereignty that he was preaching to Clifton and the invisible man, assuming an identity that is African rather than American. Yet, after the invisible man seals Ras's jaws by piercing them with Ras's own spear, the rioters, speaking in the vernacular, view him not as an alternative to Western civilization but in terms of Western culture: "Goddam if he wasn't a sight, riding up and down on this ole hoss, you know, one of the kind that pulls vegetable wagons, and he got him a cowboy saddle and some big spurs.... And 'bout that time some joker with a big ole Georgia voice sticks his head out of the window and yells, 'Ride 'em cowboy. Give 'em hell and bananas'" (553). When Ras charges on his horse, "he's yelling something in African or West Indian or something and he's got his head low down like he knew about that shit too, man; riding like Earle Sande in the fifth at Jamaica.... Ole Ras didn't have time to git his gun so he let fly with that spear and you could hear him grunt and say something 'bout that cop's kinfolks and then him and that hoss shot up the street leaping like Heigho, the goddam Silver!" (554-55). The persistent framing of Ras in terms of cowboys and the Lone Ranger belies any subjective sovereignty he might have, even among the rioters who

are the concrete manifestation of resistance to white oppression—he is seen as an American artifact absurdly masquerading in a lion skin. Even Ras’s spear is described as “one of the kind you see them African guys carrying in the moving pictures” (554), emphasizing the constructedness of Ras’s identity and his inability to claim an autonomous identity for himself outside of an American context (not to mention that the African American audience for his performance conceives of Africans in terms of the American cinema). While the police who are indifferent to Ras when the invisible man first comes to Harlem do indeed underestimate the possibility of racial violence, Ellison, by signifying on Ras within the African American vernacular, also shows that his rhetoric is ultimately futile, since the vernacular inevitably assimilates and undermines essentialist oppositions.

### **Todd Clifton and the Return to the Vernacular**

The invisible man only returns to the vernacular with Tod Clifton’s death and eulogy. Clifton has vanished when the invisible man returns to Harlem, but when the invisible man finally meets him again, he finds that Clifton is selling stereotypical Sambo dolls on the street, rapping out a sales spiel that is an indictment of the invisible man and the Brotherhood:

*He’s more than a toy, ladies and gentlemen, he’s Sambo,  
the dancing doll, the twentieth-century miracle.*

*Look at that rumba, that suzy-q, he’s Sambo-boogie,  
Sambo-Woogie, you don’t have to feed him, he sleeps  
collapsed, he’ll fill your depression*

*And your dispossession, he lives upon the sunshine of  
your lordly smile*

*And only twenty-five cents, the brotherly two bits of a*

*dollar because he wants me to eat.* (425)

Clifton's performance is a complex Signification upon the role that the invisible man and he played within the Brotherhood as puppets dancing to the Brotherhood's scientific rap: "*he'll fill your depression/And your dispossession.*" The obverse of the Brotherhood's deracialized African American members are stereotypical African Americans—"agrarian types" who are, in Jack's words, "living, but dead" (284)—and Clifton realizes that the Brotherhood has been stringing them along with a false dichotomy: African Americans must assimilate and enter into history, or else they are condemned to become stereotypical southern Negroes. The invisible man reflects precisely this understanding when he sees Clifton: "It was as though he had chosen—how had he put it the night he fought with Ras?—to fall outside of *history*.... 'To plunge,' he had said. But he knew that only in the Brotherhood could we make ourselves known, could we avoid being empty Sambo dolls" (427). Clifton no longer accepts the Brotherhood's scientific ideology, but neither can he accept Ras's sovereign rhetoric, and so he chooses to subvert the Brotherhood's rhetoric by re-enacting his role with them, this time enthusiastically substituting the repressed image that the Brotherhood used to control him. Through his doll, Clifton assumes the black mask the Brotherhood threatened him with, but he emphasizes the defiance implicit in his act by explicitly making his assumption a performance. The doll moves in a "dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face," and it is "throwing itself about with the fierce defiance of someone performing a degrading act in public, dancing as though it received a perverse pleasure from its motions" (424). In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," Ellison writes that "Very often...the Negro's masking is motivated not so much by fear as by a profound rejection of the image created to usurp his identity. Sometimes it is for the sheer joy of the joke; sometimes to challenge those who

presume, across the psychological distance created by race manners, to know his identity” (109). Clifton’s rap and his dance become a way of exorcising the black mask (a reversal of the minstrel tradition, which was itself a way of exorcising the African American presence by presenting the Other in a way that deprived him of his humanity [Ellison, “Change” 103]), both in itself and as a threat than can be used to control him. But the invisible man, faced with the image of a doll that will do anything its owner wants for a “brotherly two bits,” is threatened and clings all the more desperately to the antitheses that defines his identity: “Such an obscene flouncing of everything human! My God! And I had been worrying about being left out of a meeting! I’d overlook it a thousand times; no matter why I wasn’t called. I’d forget it and hold on desperately to Brotherhood with all my strength. For to break away would be to plunge... To plunge!” (427-28).

But if Clifton’s doll does not jolt the invisible man from the dichotomies that drive the Brotherhood’s sense of history, Clifton’s death at the hands of a white policeman does. Against the ideology that asserts Clifton had already plunged out of history, his insignificant death witnessed only by a small boy and the invisible man, the invisible man begins to weigh his personal knowledge of Clifton and his own experience of Clifton’s death. As a result, he descends once more between the nodes of the Brotherhood’s construction of history, and in doing so he begins to grasp history as a rhetorical rather than a scientific enterprise: “For history records the patterns of men’s lives, they say.... All things, it is said, are duly recorded—all things of importance, that is. But not quite, for actually it is only the known, the seen, the heard and only those events the recorder regards as important that are put down, those lies his keepers keep their power by” (432). The invisible man’s immersion into an interstitial space is embodied by his descent into a subway, a setting that combines both the motif of being

underground and the blues motif of the train as point of conjunction (the invisible man will later meet Mr. Norton in that space where differences meet and part). There, the invisible man sees the people whom the Brotherhood's ideology had rendered invisible to him, including three African American boys who embody the vernacular in their urban appropriation of southern culture: "the boys speak a jived-up language full of country glamour, think transitional thoughts, through perhaps they dream the same old dreams" (434). This modern renewal of African American rural culture cannot exist within the Brotherhood's construction of history, but now that he is seeing it, the invisible man cannot help but question the potential role that people who are "out of time" might actually play in history: "who knew but that they [the boys] were the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious?... What if Brother Jack were wrong? What if history was a gambler, instead of a force in a laboratory experiment, and the boys his ace in the hole? What if history was not a reasonable citizen, but a madman full of paranoid guile and these boys his agent, his big surprise?" (434). The sudden realization that history might not consist of the scientific trajectory the Brotherhood has specified causes the invisible man to redefine his role as an orator. Instead of following a script that either reinforces or excludes people from the Brotherhood's pattern of history, he is determined to speak from the interstices, with the aim of drawing all of the people who have been rendered invisible into the historical process: "I was painfully aware of other men dressed like the boys, and of girls in dark exotic-colored stockings, their costumes surreal variations of downtown styles. They'd been there all along, but somehow I'd missed them. I'd missed them even when my work had been most successful. They were outside the groove of history, and it was my job to get them in, all of them" (436). This resolve structures the invisible man's eulogy for Tod Clifton, who is the first invisible person he tries to make visible.

Davis suggests that the African American performed sermon incorporates a circling or spiral structure wherein the performer interprets the “most appropriate characteristics” of the ideal form and, based on feedback from the audience, alters his performance until the audience accepts his interpretation, after which he can imprint his own style on the performance:

Circularity as an organizing principle of an African-American performance can also be observed in environments that are more familiar to performance categorizations. African-American popular music, improvisation music or jazz, preaching, some forms of dance, and even selected material culture forms exhibit manifestations of circular performance organization. That is, each of these forms exhibits circular organizational structures sufficiently similar to the others to suggest a shared aesthetic foundation or sensibility among African-Americans. (29)

This pattern describes the iterative nature of Tod Clifton’s eulogy, although, as with his previous speeches, the invisible man also works by challenging the genre he is speaking in, and in doing so he once more makes the audience share in the construction of his speech. The invisible man’s direct questioning of his audience—“What are you waiting for me to tell you? What good will it do?... Go home, he’s as dead as he’ll ever die” (447)—is reminiscent of Frederick Douglass’s direct challenge to his audience in his Fourth of July speech: “Fellow citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence?” (255). Like Douglass, the invisible man not only adapts to but questions the very situation that demands his response; in both speeches, the audience is forced to step back and consider its role in the rhetorical exchange rather than to passively listen to the orator’s address. Furthermore, the explicitly iterative

structure once again makes the rhetorical nature of the speech explicit, since the invisible man gives the same basic speech four times, each time expanding it, constructing the audience's silence as a demand for more detail which he only reluctantly gives: "I've told you to go home...but you keep standing there. Don't you know it's hot out here in the sun?... All right, you do the listening in the sun and I'll try to tell you in the sun. Then you go home and forget it. Forget it." (447-48). As with the eviction speech, a double-voicedness makes the apparently quiescent elements of the speech all the more incendiary. The invisible man stresses that there was nothing exceptional about Clifton: "like any man, he was born of woman to live awhile and fall and die"; "He fell in a heap like any man and his blood spilled out like any blood"; "It was a normal mistake of which many are guilty: He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around" (448-50). But the topos of normality only serves to increase the relevance of Clifton's death to the audience and intensify the audience's identification with him, until the invisible man places the audience in the coffin with Clifton: "He's in the box and we're in there with him, and when I've told you this you can go. It's dark in this box and it's crowded. It has a cracked ceiling and a clogged up toilet in the hall. It has rats and roaches, and it's far, far too expensive a dwelling. The air is bad and it'll be cold this winter" (451). Brother Jack uses the expression "living but dead" to describe the insignificant people who have been written out of history; the invisible man describes his audience's slum dwellings as a living death in order to incite the people to action. Clifton will stay in his box forever, but they can still attempt an escape, and they can still resist: "'Tell them to get out of the box,' that's what he would say...and go teach the cops to forget that rhyme. Tell them to teach them that when they call you *nigger* to make a rhyme with *trigger* it makes the gun backfire" (451).

The invisible man's performance employs and undermines the very rhetoric that the Brotherhood would use to write Clifton out of history. All the protestations about Clifton's unimportance, the insignificance of his death, and the finality of his passing serve, within the vernacular context of the invisible man's speech, to reintroduce Clifton into history more effectively than assertions of glory would. Similarly, the invisible man's injunctions to his audience to stay out of history ("The beer is cold in the taverns, the saxophones will be mellow at the Savoy; plenty good-laughing-lies will be told in the barber shops and beauty parlors; and there'll be sermons in two hundred churches in the cool of the evening, and plenty of laughs at the movies" [449]) serve to spur on action more effectively than overt appeals would, since the invisible man communicates through his persona the Brotherhood's expectations of people who are invisible. Because the invisible man and his audience share a rhetorical context within the interstices of history, the invisible man's reluctance to speak is made eloquent, and the audience's silence, as the ensuing riot shows, is transformed from mere passivity to an explosive tension.

### **Beholding the Invisible**

If the motif of possession holds true for the invisible man when he is a practicing orator, it also seems to hold true for Jack at the moment the invisible man challenges him about his putative blindness to color. When the invisible man asks Jack at a committee meeting, "Wouldn't it be better if they called you Marse Jack?," Jack himself is seized by another language: "he came between me and the light, gripping the edge of the table, sputtering and lapsing into a foreign language, choking and coughing and shaking his head" (465). As this chapter has indicated, in the presence of an audience, the invisible man's repressed primary language suddenly erupts, and he finds himself situated within the vernacular, a linguistic



context that in turn determines the subject-positions available for him and his audience. The invisible man's direct challenge also jolts Jack out of his accustomed persona and register; it is as if the invisible man's thrusting of an excluded African American subjectivity into the shared discursive space of the Brotherhood is so forceful that Jack himself is temporarily displaced into another realm of discourse. The invisible man now realizes that African American subject and Brotherhood member cannot co-exist in the same discursive space, and he sees that all this time he and his community had been invisible to the Brotherhood, and that is why they are being sacrificed for the sake of the Brotherhood's more universal cause: "So that was the meaning of discipline, I thought, sacrifice...yes and blindness; he doesn't see me. He doesn't even see me." Speaking of Jack's lost eye (a further sign of Jack's inability to see and an affirmation of Jack's status as a one-eyed king among the blind), he says, "Maybe he got it where he learned that language he lapsed into.... Make him speak the unknown tongue, the language of the future" (467-68). Jack's vision of the future is a language that has no words for the invisible man or his community, and so, if they choose to accept that language, they will only be able to speak themselves into existence in terms the Brotherhood dictates, terms that render them invisible.

Yet even though he knows that he is invisible to the Brotherhood, the invisible man finds himself defending the organization when he is suddenly challenged in the street by Ras. The hostile rhetorical situation determines his identity and his stance, and he trots out the party line to counter Ras's attempts to capitalize on Clifton's death: "Who was the first organization to act against this killing? The Brotherhood! Who was the first to arouse the people? The Brotherhood! Who will always be the first to advance the cause of the people? Again the Brotherhood!... We are all Americans, all of us, whether black or white, regardless of what the

man on the ladder there tells you, Americans” (472). The invisible man is trapped between the exclusionary rhetoric of the Brotherhood and the essentialist rhetoric of the nationalists, but when he dons dark glasses to escape from Ras’s companions, he discovers another figure who will teach him about the performative nature of identity and suggest to him that binaries can be subverted: the Reverend B. P. Rinehart. As he lives, briefly, inside Rinehart’s skin, the invisible man realizes that, like the rest of the people who are living in the interstices between the Brotherhood’s nodes of history, Rinehart had “been around all the while, but I have been looking in another direction” (485), and that, like the three boys he saw in the subway, Rinehart manifests the southern vernacular in the urban north: on his handbill, the reverend promises a “NEW REVELATION of the OLD TIME RELIGION!” and when the invisible man arrives at Rinehart’s church, he hears “the rise and fall of an old-fashioned prayer such as I hadn’t heard since leaving the campus; and then only when visiting country preachers were asked to pray” (487). But even further, in his multiple identities as numbers runner, briber of police, lover, and reverend, Rinehart combines two strains of the vernacular, the secular and sacred.

In his study of folk narrative in an African American community in Philadelphia, Roger D. Abrahams identifies a split in social orientation that divides the community’s men, even as the vernacular joins them:

The man of words is an important member of the Camingerly male group. His ability with words is as highly valued as physical strength. There are two possible outlets for his ability: as a secular bard or singer, an entertainer who performs on the street corner with the gang or at parties, dances, and other heterosexual occasions; and as a preacher. It may seem strange that preaching

demands the same kind of word control and has the same emotional basis in sexually oriented contest as singing, but such is the case. Not only do both require the ability to persuade and to construct effective imaginative playgrounds...both also involve the overt contest of words.... What is not surprising is that the two groups of good talkers violently hate each other. The preacher of course regards the street corner bard as a corrupt sinner. The other goes even further. He gets back by telling stories about the hypocrisy of the preacher, of his effeminacy, homosexuality, and inefficacy with words. (*Jungle* 59-60)

Geneva Smitherman also suggest that

Black verbal style exists on a sacred-secular continuum...the sacred style is rural and Southern. It is the style of the black preacher and that associated with the black church tradition. It tends to be more emotive and highly charged than the secular style. It is also older in time....The secular style is urban and Northern, but since it probably had its beginnings in black folk tales and proverbs, its *roots* are Southern and rural. This is the street corner style.... It tends to be more cool, more emotionally restrained than the secular style. (64)

Both Abrahams and Smitherman identify the vernacular as a continuum between the secular and the sacred, but in general speakers tend to locate themselves somewhere along the line that joins the two poles. What makes Rinehart a particularly potent manifestation of the vernacular is his ability to encompass the entire continuum and both its poles, to enact the destabilization of binaries that underlies the process of Signifyin(g) not only within a particular situation, but also at the level of the entire register. Rinehart is “both rind and heart” (491)—he confounds

the easy dichotomization of secular and sacred, invention and essence (though, as we shall see, the invisible man, even after he breaks from the Brotherhood, doesn't quite grasp Rinehart's significance, just as he still doesn't quite grasp the meaning of his grandfather's injunctions). The invisible man never actually meets Rinehart because the reverend is not a particular character but, like the vernacular itself, a force that possesses him. When he meets Brother Maceo, the invisible man finds himself speaking with Rinehart's voice in spite of himself: "“You take it easy, old man,’ I said. ‘Don’t let your mouth get your head in trouble,’ thinking, Why am I talking like this?” (480). In fact, it is the invisible man's mouth that outruns his head; his language is creating his intentions, rather than vice versa. Instead of playing a role, he has the impression that his role is speaking him into existence: “Why am I acting from pride when this is not really me?” (481). Rinehart makes the invisible man realize that identity is inessential: “What on earth was hiding behind the face of things? If dark glasses and a white hat could blot out my identity so quickly, who actually was who?” (485). The invisible man discovers not only that identity can be performative, but that it is inevitably performative; even when he thought his work for the Brotherhood was giving him an identity, he was merely avoiding his own performance of identity by projecting the power of subject formation on the Brotherhood.

Rinehart's handbill asserts that the members of his congregation will “BEHOLD THE SEEN UNSEEN...BEHOLD THE INVISIBLE” (487), promises that link Rinehart back to the preacher in the prologue whose sermon was on the “Blackness of Blackness” (9). Just as the blackness of blackness is a paradoxical tautology in which signified and signifier are parsed so that they mirror each other in a infinitely indeterminate *mise en abyme*, disrupting any easy reading of the signifier *blackness*, so beholding the invisible disrupts the meaning of both

*vision* and *invisibility*. The vernacular doesn't render the invisible visible in the way that Ras's ideology does, by offering an essentialized, inviolable identity which, to the invisible man's mind, is another form of invisibility that would remove him from the historical process; rather, the vernacular offers to make the fact of invisibility itself perceptible. It preserves invisibility even as it reveals it, not removing the performative nature of identity but adding a reflexive element to the process which introduces the possibility of choice. When the invisible man has his revelation, "Incidents of my past, both recognized and ignored, sprang together in my mind in an ironic leap of consciousness that was like looking around a corner" (506). The motif of looking around a corner is repeated throughout the novel (11-12, 506), and implies a form of vision that is able to see things that are hidden from a more linear perspective, but it also suggests a more skeptical vision that acknowledges that what seems to be directly in front may in fact be refracted through a hidden medium, such as language. The motif of seeing around a corner relates as well to the repeated image of the boomerang: if the viewer's vision turns enough corners, she eventually sees herself, attaining a degree of irony that undermines any aspirations to absolute knowledge but also allows her to observe herself and more accurately know the nature and consequences of her actions. In the prologue, the invisible man warns that the world moves "Not like an arrow, but a boomerang. (Beware of those who speak of the spiral of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy.)" (6). The spiral of history is always an attempt to interpellate the subject into a particular historical trajectory, an attempt that is presented as progress even as it incapacitates the subject: "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running," says the grandfather about the boy's scholarship (33); "I beg of you, sir, to help him continue in the direction of that promise which, like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler," writes Bledsoe, more poetically but no less

devastatingly (187). A vision that sees around corners ultimately blurs the lines between observer and observed, so that the illusion of the self-contained, sovereign subject is always challenged and any subject position is always qualified.

Yet, although the invisible man finally rejects the Brotherhood's crippling dichotomy in favour of the unlimited possibilities of Rinehart's world and the subversive language of his grandfather, he misunderstands the significance of the vernacular culture those two figures represent. He now believes that the world "was without boundaries.... All boundaries down, freedom was not only the recognition of necessity, it was the recognition of possibility" (491), and although he "didn't know what my grandfather had meant...I was ready to test his advice" (500). The invisible man commits himself to undermining the Brotherhood through deception:

It was frightening and as I sat there I sensed another frightening world of possibilities. For now I saw that I could agree with Jack without agreeing. And I could tell Harlem to have hope when there was no hope. Perhaps I could tell them to hope until I found the basis of something real, some firm ground for action that would lead them onto the plane of history. But until then I would have to move them without myself being moved...I'd have to do a Rinehart.  
(499)

But, simply put, lyin' ain't Signifyin(g), and the invisible man's assumption that he can be the unmoved mover rewrites in hubristic terms the dilemma facing Jim Trueblood when he wakes in the night on top of his daughter: "I had to move without movin'" (59). Trueblood's response to his dilemma isn't mere deception, but the blues, vernacular music that is able to accommodate the ambiguities of Trueblood's situation—"how I'm guilty and how I ain't guilty" (65)—without reducing its complexity. As Houston Baker writes, "Polymorphous and

multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between (ever *entre les deux*), the juncture is the way-station of the blues” (*Blues* 7). The blues take place at a “way-station” that does not negate differences or resolve them within a transcendent, static truth, but rather provides a dynamic junction wherein differences can meet and part without ceasing their movement.

Lying presumes a regime of truth, and the invisible man is still caught in a dichotomous mindset where appearance and reality are distinct: he *seems* to belong to the Brotherhood, but he *really* does not, or so he thinks. The slipperiness of that distinction is made apparent when the invisible man’s attempt at subversion becomes the foundation for the Brotherhood’s plan to sacrifice Harlem. His original intention is to be “a justifier, my task would be to deny the unpredictable human element of all Harlem so they could ignore it when it in any way interfered with their plans” (506), and when the residents of Harlem, abandoned by the Brotherhood and enraged at their oppression, begin to loot stores and burn tenements, he at first gloats over the success of his subversion. But when he hears a looter say that if the looting “become a sho’nough race riot I want to be here where there’ll be some fighting back” (543), he realizes that his deception has backfired because he has in fact inadvertently delivered the race riot the committee was hoping to have: “I had helped, had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree I had indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for...the others whom now the night was making ripe for death” (544). Pretense and reality, role and actor, blur into each other, and it is the invisible man’s illusion of total freedom that is responsible for his eventual entrapment, for if he had thought about Rinehart in a different way, he would have found that Rinehart’s freedom comes not from his opposition to any particular social institution or from his total exteriority to the social system—

in which case he would be all rind but no heart—but from his destabilizing appropriation of different institutions, including the police and church. It is not that Rinehart’s world is actually “without boundaries,” (490), but that Rinehart is able to elide boundaries by employing overlapping subject positions; faced with a barrier, he doesn’t retreat from it or breach it, but moves at a right angle to it by occupying a strategic but non-oppositional identity, not deceiving but Signifyin(g). Characteristically, the invisible man blames his grandfather for his own misreading of the vernacular and the situation: “My grandfather had been wrong about yessing them to death and destruction or else things had changed too much since his day” (555). But the real problem is that the invisible man fails to realize that the vernacular does not undermine one side of a binary, but the whole idea of binarism, while at the same time maintaining difference as a relational rather than an essential quality.

In the midst of the riot, the invisible man asserts that this is “A night for Clifton,” but the night is far more complex than that; indeed, the looters cannot agree among themselves about the cause of the riot, some saying it broke out because “a cop shot a woman or something,” others because a “paddy slapped a kid for grabbing a Baby Ruth,” while others claim “a white woman set it off by trying to take a black gal’s man” (531). The riot is not a simple case of cause and effect, though the invisible man continues to see it in those terms. When he meets Ras, the invisible man still believes that he can defuse the situation by revealing which side he is *really* on and illuminating the *true* reason for the riot: “all the months of illusion and the night of chaos required but a few simple words, a mild, even a meek, muted action to clear the air. To awaken them and me” (548). But he finds that “even as I spoke I knew it was no good. I had no words and no eloquence” (548-49) because he is still in the grip of the Brotherhood’s pattern of thinking, even if he has escaped their ideology: he



has the truth, and his audience needs to know it. Although running a spear through Ras's jaws may silence the exhorter, it only matches his silence to the invisible man's own silence, and the realization the invisible man has to make in order to speak again (this time by making writing—the medium that defined the Brotherhood's rhetorical strategy—an oratorical act) is that his identity is neither essential nor absolutely free, but relational, and that language is neither referential nor arbitrary, but rhetorical—always, in Kenneth Burke's term, addressed (*Rhetoric* 38; or, to draw once more on Lacan: “the allocution of the subject entails an allocutor...in other words...the locutor is constituted in it as intersubjectivity” [“Function” 49]).

The invisible man's burning of the various documents that have interpellated him—his high-school diploma, Clifton's doll, the anonymous letter warning him about enemies at the Brotherhood, the slip of paper with his Brotherhood name—in order to light his way in the coal chute (558-59) shows that he is finally stripped of the illusion of the self-contained sign, the signifier that is able to identify him to himself as an unproblematic signified. On the other hand, contemplation of his grandfather's words and their relation to “the principle on which this country was built” (564) finally leads him to the realization that his identity is not completely arbitrary, either: ““Agree ‘em to death and destruction,’ grandfather had advised. Hell, weren't they their own death and their own destruction except as the principle lived in them and in us? And here's the cream of the joke: Weren't we *part of them* as well as apart from them and subject to die when they died?” (565). The invisible man here struggles to understand a complex symbiosis that enfolds self and Other and yet preserves their difference, an interrelatedness that makes each individual and culture a part of and yet apart from the others. The medium that both structures and is structured by this paradoxical relationship is the

vernacular and, for Ellison, it is the very infiltration of African American language that makes possible a distinctively American vernacular:

whenever anyone tells you that you're outside the framework of American culture, and when they deflect you into something called "black English," remember that the American version of the English language was born in rebellion against proper English usage, and that the music of the African voice and the imagery coming from the people who lived close to the soil and under the conditions of slavery added greatly to that language. And when you look for the spiritual context of that language, you can be sure that some of the passion for the unfulfilled ideals of democracy comes from the voices of those black and unknown bards, as well as from my mama and papa and your mama and papa crying in church, protesting in pool halls, cussing in shine parlors, and celebrating Juneteenth (that's what we call emancipation). The language of the United States is partly black people's creation.... There is no specifically American vernacular and language which has not been touched by us and our style. (Ellison, "Alain Locke" 445-46)

Those who repress the discourse of the Other, or attribute otherness to particular discourses in order to create a hegemonic American culture, are therefore also repressing the American vernacular itself, and the invisible man's journey toward recovering southern African American culture and oratory has not been a journey away from American culture and speech, but toward it. African American vernacular oratory, with its reciprocal construction of a shared context on the part of both orator and audience, becomes a model for the construction and functioning of America itself, just as Houston Baker suggests that the blues are a matrix not

only for African American cultural survival, but for defining the idea of AMERICA in non-hegemonic terms: “The blues matrix—the fluid, mediating vernacular of the New World—enables one to understand that, rather than being a nation of strangers in search of Anglo-male domestication, AMERICA has no strangers” (Baker, *Blues* 112).

In the epilogue, as in the prologue, the invisible man directly addresses his audience, but whereas in the prologue he is mainly the teller of a tale (although he briefly mentions his “compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white” [13], the most apparent gloss is musical notation rather than written text), in the epilogue he is the writer of a text; he explicitly claims authorship of the novel and attempts to recoup in writing the sense of the vernacular that he has found in his journey as an orator. The invisible man’s statement, “Why should I be dedicated and set aside—yes, if not to tell a few people about it?” (570) harkens back to his feeling, after his connection with the audience during his first Brotherhood speech, that “Perhaps this was what was meant by being ‘dedicated and set aside’” (346), suggesting that his written work serves as an extension of his oratorical work. The invisible man foregrounds the rhetorical aspect of his written work, explicitly stating that it is written as a form of action and a mode of re-engagement: “So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in spite of myself I’ve learned some things. Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled ‘file and forget,’ and I can neither file nor forget...now that I’ve tried to put it all down the old fascination with playing a role returns, and I’m drawn upward again” (570).

But the invisible man has a problem: as he has discovered with the Brotherhood, writing is a very different mode from speaking. How can he effect a relation with his audience that is similar to the one he created with his vernacular oratory? Ellison supplies the invisible

man with a method by introducing a subtly metafictional twist into the novel, thereby alienating the reader from the written text just as the invisible man distanced his oratorical audiences from the genres in which he spoke. For most of the novel, the reader experiences the invisible man's statements in the epilogue on a purely diegetic level, as narrator addressing a narratee within the story. So long as the invisible man remains an oral storyteller whose tale is recorded by an anonymous amanuensis, the roles of implied author and narrator remain distinct, and the reader can comfortably identify with the narratee within the novel. However, when the invisible man claims to be a writer and asserts that the novel is "his" text, he is "drawn upward" not only out of his hole, but in terms of his narrative level: he makes a defamiliarizing claim that blurs the roles of implied author and narrator, and the reader is compelled in turn to revoke the suspension of disbelief that allows for her unproblematic identification with the narratee and to acknowledge her central role in the performance of the text. Our denial of the invisible man's ability to materially contribute to the written text foregrounds our own role in its construction. Although written text is a medium that is potentially isolated and isolating, Ellison still manages to transform the reader from a passive receptor to an active participant who does not just consume the text but responds to its call, mirroring in the written mode the reciprocal relationship the invisible man established in the oral mode.

And so on the diegetic level the invisible man continues to effect an identification with his narratee that also maintains division, emphasizing that "men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health" (567), but also pointing out that "Our fate is to become one, and yet many—This is not prophecy, but description. Thus one of the greatest jokes in the world is the spectacle of the whites busy escaping blackness and becoming

blacker every day, and the blacks striving towards whiteness, becoming quite dull and gray” (586). The invisible man is not interested in “colorlessness,” nor is he interested in claiming an essentialized identity that would compromise his vision of unification through division. His politics are not solely a unifying politics of love, nor simply a divisive politics of hate. Rather, through the complexities of a rhetoric that encompasses both identification and division, he enacts the “beautiful absurdity” of his African American and American identity (550), and in eschewing static opposition for a Signifyin(g) subversion, he becomes, like his grandfather, the embodiment of the vernacular: “So it is now that I denounce and defend, or feel prepared to defend. I condemn and affirm, say no and say yes, say yes and say no.... I denounce and I defend and I hate and I love. Perhaps that makes me a little bit as human as my grandfather” (570-71). And, at the dynamic junction where diegetic and extradiegetic, implied author and nameless narrator, meet, blur momentarily together, and then part, the novel’s rhetoric allows readers to recognize that, by participating in the construction of the work, they too have seen the invisible without reifying it into visibility, and thereby allowed a character who is “invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were” (572) to speak for them.

## Chapter 4: Trickster Oratory in *House Made of Dawn*

### Introduction: Rhetoric, Story, and Identity in Native American Contexts

In the introduction to this project, I briefly outlined some of the challenges faced in understanding the role of rhetoric within Native American cultures, such as accounting for the specific linguistic and cultural contexts of different tribes, and distinguishing the rhetorical patterns present in negotiations between cultures from the patterns that are used between tribal members. But the two features of Native American rhetorical practice that most challenge western paradigms of rhetoric are the non-eristic nature of much Native American rhetoric and the especially close association of story and rhetoric, features that are in fact intimately linked. In *Comparative Rhetoric*, George A. Kennedy suggests that “The most distinctive feature of Greek public address in contrast to that of many other cultures is its eristic qualities. In the traditional oral and early literate societies...the goal of deliberative rhetoric is usually consensus and concord in accordance with conservative values, and sharp altercation is avoided if possible” (197). For an ancient Greek steeped in the tradition of *dissoi logoi*, aggressive disputation is the very medium that constitutes society, but for people in other traditions, open verbal combat is a sign that the social structure that allows people to mediate differences has already broken down. Gary Witherspoon observes that

Navajos emphasize the freedom of the individual to pursue his own course.... Desirable actions on the part of others are hoped for and even expected, but they are not required or demanded. Coercion is always deplored. In intragroup relations no individual, regardless of position or status, has the right to impose his will or decision on a group. Likewise, the group does not have the right to impose its will on the individual. (533)

This valuing of personal autonomy is balanced by a commitment to communalism, so that “unanimity is the only basis of collective action.”<sup>20</sup> The next chapter will explore in more depth the relationship of Navajo rhetoric to N. Scott Momaday’s novel, *House Made of Dawn*, but for now it is sufficient to note that ancient Greek and Navajo orators differ not just in the rhetorical resources that are available to them, but in their concepts of what rhetorical action is intended to achieve. Gladys A. Reichard emphasizes that rhetoric within Navajo society delicately balances suasion and respect for autonomy, eschewing the eristic: “The right to come to one’s own conclusion is respected, though the decision itself may be ‘talked down’ in a family or local council. The individual is persuaded; he is not high-pressured into a judgment contrary to his own” (*Religion* xxxix).

Rhetoric may always be, as Kenneth Burke suggests, a matter of identification, of making the audience consubstantial with the rhetor, and it may also be that identification is always “compensatory to division” (*Rhetoric* 22), a unification that requires the construction of an Other. However, there is a difference between traditional tribal societies and western democratic societies in how the individual is framed, and in how identification and division function within them. In *Ravensong*, a novel by Coast Salish writer Lee Maracle, the young Native Canadian protagonist, Stacey, puzzles over how the attitude to death differs between the members of her own Native village and the Euro-Canadian occupants of a nearby town. In her own culture, each individual death seems more of a crisis because “Every single person served the community, each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being revolved. A missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced. White people didn’t seem to live this way. No one individual was indispensable. Their parts didn’t seem bonded to the whole” (26). Stacey’s observations revolve around a

signal difference in tribal and western conceptions of the relationship between self and group: tribal peoples are not contained within a social circle, but rather are themselves the circle. Vine Deloria asserts that “Indian tribes are communities in fundamental ways that other American communities or organizations are not. Tribal communities are wholly defined by family relationships, whereas non-Indian communities are defined primarily by residence or agreement with sets of intellectual beliefs” (qtd. in Weaver 37). In democratic societies, and in particular the modern nation-state, the social structure is an abstract entity (in Benedict Anderson’s phrase, an imagined community) that exists independently of the population it contains or embodies, and so it is possible for a speaker to alienate a fellow member of that community without distending or destroying the structure that contains them both. For many Native American tribes, however, the tribe traditionally is not an abstract entity but is, rather, consubstantial with the actual people who form it; indeed, the vernacular label that Native American tribespeople apply to themselves, including the Navajo *Diné*, is often translatable simply as “the people” (one might compare this to the more abstract names commonly given to western empires or nation-states). Jace Weaver writes that “Native societies are synecdochic (part-to-whole), while the more Western conception is metonymic (part-to-part),” and he quotes Donald Fixico’s statement that “Natives tend to see themselves in terms of ‘self in society’ rather than ‘self and society’” (39).

This basic difference in the relationship of individual to group—and, ultimately, to the natural world, since, as Paula Gunn Allen states, “the tribal community of relatives [does not] end with human kin: the supernaturals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, fire, water, rock, and plants are perceived to be members of one’s community” (Introduction 10)—has significant rhetorical implications,



since one cannot make a fellow tribal member into an Other without threatening the actual structure of the tribe. In the imagined democratic nation-state, identification is abstract, but in a tribal society that operates mainly on consensus, it is division that is abstract, a realm of Otherness that by definition exists outside the tribe, and so the rhetor must carefully manage the divisive aspects of rhetorical action.<sup>21</sup> Given how concretely interwoven tribal members are, an individual rhetorical triumph that alienates another member may be in the end a pyrrhic victory that reduces the overall stability of the entire group. Paula Gunn Allen's comments on Native literature apply as well to Native rhetorics: "Right relationship, or right kinship, is fundamental to Native aesthetics. Right relationship is dictated by custom within a given tribe or cultural grouping, but everywhere it is characterized by considerations of proportion, harmony, balance, and communality" (9).

How then, given the avoidance of eristic rhetoric, does rhetorical practice occur in Native American societies? Kimberly Roppolo, in her study of how indigenous rhetorics might be used in reading Native literature, asserts that the continued existence of Native peoples "hinges, both on a spiritual level from one perspective and on a cultural level from another, on the fact that we remain 'storied Peoples'.... Native articulation of philosophy—of who we are and how we see the world, of what our position in it is in relation to the rest of Creation—has been accomplished by indirect discourse. We are taught by story, and we explain by story, not by exposition" (267-68). Roppolo's remarks suggest that narrative is more central to Native American rhetorics than it is in western rhetoric. Narrative has, of course, played an important role in the western rhetorical tradition; indeed, we see in Plato how even Socrates, who expels the poets from his Republic and castigates sophistic rhetoric, regularly employs myths for rhetorical purposes at the climax of dialogues such as the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. In ancient

rhetoric the second of the four classical divisions of a speech (which are derived from the realm of forensic rhetoric but are often, in Greek and Roman texts on rhetoric, applied to the deliberative and epideictic genres as well) is the *diegesis* (Greek) or *narratio* (Latin), an account of the facts of a case, and rhetorical figures such as *enargeia* (a general figure which refers to the use of lively description) and *ekphrasis* (the use of vivid details) are particularly important in relation to the pathetic appeal. The importance of narrative in classical rhetoric is further reflected in the progymnasmata, the traditional exercises used to train young orators. Of the fourteen exercises assigned, four deal with various forms of narrative: *mythos* (fable), *diegema* (narrative), *chreia* (anecdote), and *ekphrasis* (description) (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric* 203-06).

Yet the relationship between rhetoric and story is very different in Native and western cultures, largely because the ends of their rhetorics differ in accordance with their differing views of the relation of individual and society. Narrative operates rhetorically in accordance with the ends the particular rhetorical system allows. *Narratio* in classical eristic rhetoric is a weapon deployed to illustrate, exemplify, or provoke in the service of a particular cause. To fulfill its function in eristic rhetoric, *narratio* must not only state the facts plausibly but, overtly or covertly, control their interpretation; otherwise, especially given the inescapable ambiguity of language, which is exacerbated even more within a narrative context, the audience may understand the narrative in a way that is unflattering to the cause it is intended to support. The role of narrative in Native American rhetorics, however, is often exactly the opposite. Betty Booth Donahue cites Randy Jacob, a Choctaw scholar and reverend, who explains that “the well-composed American Indian text is designed to confuse the hearer or reader. In the oral tradition, good story tellers do not tell all of the story. The hearer/reader must supply the

missing parts of a narrative and comprehend the point of the work by means of his or her own intellectual efforts” (qtd. in Roppolo 270). An anonymous Navajo elder who explains how to ask for and receive a story from a storyteller makes a similar observation:

*The storyteller will tell you a story here, then skip one or two and tell you another story, then tell you another. If there were another person there, he would tell that person the part that he didn't tell you, and the part that he told you, he will not tell to him. Then after he has finished telling you everything you wanted to know, he will say, "GO, go tell each other the stories that I have told you." In that way, the complete story does not come from his mouth. So no two people hear the complete story from one man. That is the way it is.*

*You cannot tell everything. You MUST not tell everything. This protects you and shields you. You walk behind this shield. It protects you, and you walk behind it.*

*It is like that. (Rockpoint 89)*

In western rhetoric, narrative moves toward closure, a narrowing of interpretive possibilities that reflects the desire to win the audience over to a specific, limited viewpoint. In Native American rhetorics, narrative tends to move toward openness, and this openness is effected by merging the hermeneutic with the personal. In the oral storytelling tradition, one cannot listen to the tale without listening to the teller: the question “What does this story mean?” is equivalent to the questions “Who are you to me, and who am I to you?”

Walter Ong points out that, in oral cultures, language is always an event and words are always “soundings” produced by someone in reaction to someone or something else, rather than static, independent things; paraphrasing Malinowski, Ong states that among oral peoples “language is a mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought” (32). Story is a form of

personal action that demands personal reaction, and the validity of the words spoken cannot be divorced from the authority of the speaker. Further, any given story is not complete in itself, but derives its meaning from a context composed of other stories, and of other speakers and audiences. In the storytelling method described by the Navajo elder, interpretation is a process that requires both telling and listening, since each listener knows only part of the story; and, if each teller operates as the original storyteller does, telling only some of the stories he or she knows, further indeterminacy is created that will require still more telling and listening. The point is not to fix text and meaning, but to provoke more story-telling and meaning-making, to effect a network of relationships through story. Leslie Marmon Silko extends this even to the level of words: “many individual words have their own stories. So when one is telling a story and one is using words to tell the story, each word that one is speaking has a story of its own too,” so that the Laguna perspective on narrative is one “of story within story, the idea that one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end” (50). This dependence on personal, social, and narrative context implies that the meaning of a story can never be fixed; rather, it shifts depending on changes in the context that surround it, and so as the listener brings his experience to bear on the teller’s, narrative serves rhetorically to effect, in Barbara Biesecker’s terms, an articulation of listener and speaker within the wider social context in which they both exist: “the rhetorical event can not signify the consolidation of already constituted identities whose operations and relations are determined *a priori* by a logic that operates quite apart from real historical circumstances. Rather it marks the articulation of provisional identities and the construction of contingent relations that obtain between them” (243).

Roppolo explores the difference between western and Native rhetorics by comparing two iconic representations of the rhetorical situation:

The spiderweb illustrates a Native ontology and epistemology, and not just because of its role in the stories of Southwest tribes. The spiderweb, the work of the Creator-Grandmother, is what is real, both seen and unseen. All of this creation is one story, the story which we as human beings inhabit. We can affect this story through our words, thoughts, and actions. And, like a web, if one strand is broken, the whole is affected. If someone wants to communicate something about this reality to someone else, there are an infinite number of connections between the speaker and the listener—and the story is all of the rest of the web. The speaker, knowing this, must pick a strand to follow. The listener must meet him or her at the point of connection. This is quite different from the rhetorical triangle of composition and communication theory, in which the noetic field is depicted with the speaker (subject) at one corner of the triangle, the audience (object) at another, the particular aspect of reality being discussed at the third, and the text in the middle. (Roppolo 268-69)

Again, using Biesecker's terms, the web represents a logic of articulation, the triangle a logic of influence.<sup>22</sup> In the former, rhetoric consists of a mutual process in which teller and listener use story to position themselves within a dynamic context they in part create. In the latter, speaker, reality, and audience are separate, and the speaker uses the rhetorical text to frame a particular slice of reality in a way that will allow him to influence his target audience. The two models manifest contrasting ideas about the relationship of the interlocutors with each other and with their shared context, and these in turn reflect differing views of both the ends and

means of rhetoric. Roppolo, examining the relationship of modern critical theory to literature, reflects these differences when she suggests that “In most, if not all, Native cultures...argument doesn’t proceed the way it does in academic discourse, at least traditionally. Argument is done by analogy, by association, by means of indirect discourse because while we value community, the rights of the individual to make his or her own decisions are also valued. The idea is that the only way to really learn something is to learn it for yourself...‘oratory’ serves, in rhetorical terms, as argument in Native Cultures” (270).

But if, as Roppolo suggests, oratory serves as argument in Native cultures, we are still left with the problem of exactly what oratory is in a Native American context. Donald Bahr, in an article on Native American oratory, suggests that oratory be defined as “a speech by a mortal person to a mortal person. The speech argues a position on what is good for the community” (107). For Bahr, oratory is “an engine of persuasion” and primarily serves an argumentative function: “Thus, I tie the notion of oratory to the practice of contentious (although not necessarily rowdy or unreasonable) communal argument: politics” (108). Bahr’s concept of oratory reflects the Aristotelian category of deliberative rhetoric and is largely based on the intercultural process of treaty negotiation; his goal is, as William M. Clements puts it, to apply the western term “oratory” “only to those Native American verbal expressions that resemble what Europeans conceived oratory to be. To use ‘oratory’ for other speech forms would, in this light, be inappropriate, misleading, perhaps even ethnocentric” (xiii). Bahr’s concern is well-taken; the application of western terms to Native American speech situations can elide the distinct ways in which Native Americans themselves consider and classify their own speech acts. Yet, from a comparative perspective, it can be useful to retain the term “oratory,” provided that, like the term “rhetoric,” it is applied *sous rature*, not as an essential

category but as a provisional tool for comparison (see the Introduction and footnote two for more discussion of the use of western categories with non-western cultures). In the following chapters, therefore, I use the term “oratory” in a flexible, relational way that includes not only deliberative rhetoric, but also storytelling, which is, as many Native critics argue, central to Native culture and rhetoric. Further, I include as oratory not only the formal, public telling of traditional stories by a trained storyteller, but also the informal telling of personal or familial stories to even one other person, provided the object of the storytelling is to effect the symbiotic relationship between teller and listener characteristic of Native storytelling and rhetorical action. Leslie Marmon Silko points out that “Anthropologists and ethnologists have, for a long time, differentiated the types of stories the Pueblos tell. They tended to elevate the old, sacred, and traditional stories and to brush aside family stories, the family’s account of itself. But in Pueblo culture, these family stories are given equal recognition” (51). As with the term “rhetoric,” using the more restricted meaning of “oratory” results in an artificial separation of certain types of symbolic action which are from an emic perspective organically bound together, while applying the term in a looser way allows us to see how differing criteria associated with the category “oratory” can reflect differing ideas about language and its uses within different cultural contexts. Because of the integration of oratory, story, and rhetoric within many Native American cultures, literary analysis and rhetorical criticism share a closer relationship than they do within the western tradition; indeed, it will become evident in the next two chapters that within a Native American context they are inextricably linked.

## The Dialectic of Imagination and Blood

Like Ralph Ellison, N. Scott Momaday is a writer who knows and appreciates his culture's oratorical tradition. When asked by Charles Woodard, "What are the most powerful statements you know?" Momaday replies,

Many things in Shakespeare and in the Bible and in great orations by Indian chiefs. One of the greatest orations ever was delivered by the Kiowa chief Satanta...that oration is very powerful. It would be hard to find language more direct or simple than the language in that statement...thank goodness there are quite a few such things around. When I read those things, I am always struck by the intensity of feeling behind them. (Woodard 94)<sup>23</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that speech in general and oratory in particular play a major role in Momaday's seminal work, *House Made of Dawn*. The central problem of the protagonist, Abel, is his inability to speak; as Momaday points out, "One of the prayers in the night chant which begins *House Made of Dawn* is 'restore my voice for me.' And that's Abel's prayer, I think. That's the thing he needs most, to have his voice restored. If he could just speak as he once could, that would be a great sign of recovery" (Bonetti interview 141).<sup>24</sup> Abel's inarticulateness is a manifestation of both his internal self-alienation and his external isolation from the Pueblo community in which he grew up. As a result of his internal and external alienation, Abel is plunged into a crisis of identity that paralyzes and silences him. In this chapter and the next I will argue that, in *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday explores the relationship between two sources of identity—imagination and blood memory—by juxtaposing Abel's inability to speak with the speech of two orators in the novel. The first, John "Big Bluff" Tosamah, overtly challenges Euro-American views of language and speech even while



his actual rhetorical practice shows him to be either entangled in or appropriating them. The second, Ben Benally, is a seemingly assimilated Navajo who is, almost in spite of himself, a traditional healer drawing on tribal chantways and stories in ways that reflect a non-western model of oratory. Tosamah and Benally have distinctive oratorical styles that are derived from different ways of constructing Native identity, and Momaday suggests that the contrasting approaches of the two characters operate differently not only on Abel but also on the reader:

In a way, it's fair to say that the White man, if he listens to any of these characters, will hear Tosamah. The Indian, if he hears any of these characters, will probably be most receptive to Ben Benally. When Ben Benally talks of witchcraft in the traditional world and sees the sun rise on the red mesas, that's the reality of the Indian. Tosamah does both things. He speaks for both worlds, and he does it eloquently, you know. But you never know where he is in relation to the reality of any given moment. He wears masks. (Weiler interview 172-73)

Momaday asserts here that Tosamah's language is in some way more inclusive, able to encompass both White and Indian worlds, whereas Benally's language, because it is linked more specifically to Navajo culture and the land that serves as the foundation for that culture, is more exclusive and pitched to a Native audience. Although I will be arguing that Momaday uses Tosamah to explore the role of imagination in the construction of identity and Benally to explore the role of blood memory, the two concepts, like the two orators, are not antitheses but complementary facets of a single, complex process through which Abel eventually constructs an identity that is dynamic and yet rooted in land and tribal heritage.

This healing process is reflected in the four-part structure of the novel, which begins with “The Longhair” (a stereotypical epithet that Tosamah often uses to refer to Abel), and then progresses to “The Priest of the Sun” (Tosamah), “The Night Chanter” (Benally), and finally, in circular fashion, back to “The Dawn Runner,” another reference to Abel, though this time in terms which suggest his ritual re-integration into Pueblo culture. It is the two orators who mediate the transformation in Abel from the first to the final sections of the novel. Susan Scarberry-García, in her analysis of *House Made of Dawn*, asserts that “healing constitutes both the matter and the mode of the novel’s being” (1), and points out that “It is possible to think of the structural composition of *House Made of Dawn* as analogous to the process of Abel’s healing, because both are dependent on the slow process of accretion to create meaning and wholeness” (110). The renewed sense of wholeness for both Abel and the reader is effected by and inscribed in the novel’s circular structure, which is a traditional image of completeness and rebirth, and also in its four-part structure, since in many Native cultures, and especially in the Navajo chantways, a fourfold repetition is central to effecting a request or completing a ritual (Witherspoon 22), in part because a fourfold repetition is associated with the totality represented by the four directions.

The fact that Tosamah and Benally are integral parts of the novel’s structure of healing and are both orators (Tosamah obviously so in his function as a Peyote roadman, and Ben, more subtly, as a narrator drawing on Navajo chantways) suggests that Abel’s healing process is ultimately rhetorical. The identity that is being constructed is neither purely linguistic, rooted solely in the imagination, nor essential, rooted solely in the blood; rather, it is an articulation of the self with the social and natural world that is effected through language, especially story. In his collection *In the Bear’s House* Momaday recounts a story originally told by a Piegan

woman named Thab-san. A strange boy suddenly appears one night in the Piegan camp; although he speaks a language no one understands, “the child was perfectly unafraid, as if it were at home among its own people.” The next morning the child is gone, and everyone is troubled until “it came to be understood that the child never was.... ‘After all,’ said an old man, ‘how can we believe in the child? It gave us not one word of sense to hold on to. What we saw, if indeed we saw anything at all, must have been a dog from a neighborhood camp, or a bear that wandered down from the high country’” (93). Within this story, human identity, or even humanness itself, is not an essentialized attribute, but a form of social interaction mediated by language. Communication *is* identity (and here we might recall again Kenneth Burke’s assertion in *A Rhetoric of Motives* that rhetorical action is primarily a process of identification, of using language to effect consubstantiation, the defining of a common substance [20-21]), so unless there is a linguistic relation between at least two people, the claiming of or attribution of identity is not possible. Though the child seemed to be “at home among its own people,” only shared language would have granted it existence among them. Witherspoon points out that in Navajo culture, “An infant is not considered to be alive until it has uttered a sound, and there is no customary burial or period of mourning for an infant who dies without uttering a sound” (53) because the silent infant does not even evince the presence of the vegetative “small wind” soul that makes it emit what Father Bernard Haile describes as the “post natal cries for nourishment, which approximate the call: *šimá* ‘my mother’” (qtd. in Witherspoon 30). Again, it is language, even in its most primal form, that grants the child existence and makes him or her human. Even after the child gives its cry, it does not achieve full humanity until it has mastered a language; it is a caller, an animate being who makes sound but does not have a language, rather than a speaker (Navajo *yá/fti’i*, “one who speaks”;

Witherspoon 79). Abel's inarticulateness therefore does not just alienate him from others, but removes him from existence, and his healing requires not only the re-acquisition of speech, but the sharing of it with others: "in a profound sense our language determines us; it shapes our most fundamental selves; it establishes our identity and confirms our existence, our human being. Without language we are lost, 'thrown away.' Without names—and language is essentially a system of naming—we cannot truly claim to be" (Momaday, "American West" 103).

For Momaday, the relationship between language and identity is mediated by the imagination: "Language is the stuff of the imagination. The imagination is the creative aspect of language...it enables us to create and re-create ourselves in story and literature" (Preface 2). Momaday suggests that people who are unable to construct a concrete link with their cultural heritage "must imagine who they are and where they come from. Having the facts at hand is less important, in my opinion, than is having the desire to satisfy one's curiosities through imagining.... The facts are not very important. The possibilities are everything" (Woodard 4). In *The Names*, Momaday's mother, born Mayme Natachee Scott, decides as a young woman to reclaim the Cherokee heritage that had its origin some sixty-five years earlier in her great-grandmother, Natachee:

That dim native heritage became a fascination and a cause for her, inasmuch, perhaps, as it enabled her to assume an attitude of defiance, an attitude which she assumed with particular style and satisfaction; it became her. She imagined who she was. This act of the imagination was, I believe, among the most important events of my mother's early life, as later the same essential act was to be among the most important of my own. (25)

The reflexive nature of imagination is embodied in the fulcral word “became.” Scott’s imagined self may have begun as a personal choice that “became” (in the sense of “suited”) her, as a persona she assumed for performative reasons, but, ultimately, the word “became” implies an existential transformation in who she is—she becomes the role she assumes and is not only empowered by it but also, to a degree, determined by it. In that sense, as Momaday states, her imagining of herself was an “essential act.” Momaday suggests that this act of self-creation is integral to being human: “Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined” (“Man” 167). Abel’s return to Jemez after the war is not in itself enough to heal him because, although he lives with Francisco and participates in ritual events at the feast of Santiago, such as the chicken pull, Abel cannot imaginatively re-create himself within the community. This failure is both caused by and reflected in his inability to communicate, as language and imagination are mutually dependent:

His return to the town had been a failure, for all his looking forward. He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it. And yet it was there still, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past and the words had taken hold of the moment and made it eternal. Had he been able to say it, anything of his own language—even the commonplace formula of greeting “Where are you going”—which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to

himself; but he was dumb. Not dumb—silence was the older and better part of custom still—but *inarticulate*. (53)

Abel needs to become articulate (or articulated) if he is to appear “whole to himself” and reintegrate himself into his community, but, after his return from the war, he is enmeshed in a divisive mindset that is at odds with the holistic worldview of Pueblo culture. Jemez is a community whose resistance to Spanish and American colonialism consists not in opposition but in appropriation: “They have assumed the names and gestures of their enemies, but have held on to their own, secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting” (Momaday, *House* 52-53). As a young man, Francisco, whom Fray Nicolás first sees as a perfect example of Christian conversion, embodies this appropriative tendency, much to Nicolás’s disgust: “He is one of them & goes often in the kiva & puts on their hides & does worship that Serpent which even is the One our most ancient enemy. Yet he is unashamed to make one of my sacristans & brother I am most fearful to forbid it...he lays hold of the paten & the Host & so defiles me in the sight of my enemies” (46).<sup>25</sup>

Francisco maintains his integrity in the face of colonialism by strategically adopting the colonizers’ practices and undermining the dichotomous colonial mindset, but Abel, in contrast, is riven internally and alienated externally, rejecting rather than appropriating what he sees as Other. His murder of the albino Juan Reyes Fragua,<sup>26</sup> like his conflict with the police officer Martinez, is a disastrous act of opposition that serves as an enactment of Abel’s longstanding desire to destroy the parts of himself he cannot accept; it leads only to further division, resulting in the removal of Abel from Jemez and a deepening of his self-hatred. Schubnell even suggests that “It is possible that Abel recognizes himself in the figure of the albino, a mixture of Indian and white. Viewed in this light, Abel’s act of destruction is an attempt to annihilate

his own confused self” (120). Reyes, in his whiteness, malignancy, and unnaturalness, represents to Abel the Euro-American culture that has traumatized him, and the albino’s strength only increases the more that Abel directly resists him, even during the murder: “The white hands laid hold of Abel and drew him close, and the terrible strength of the hands was brought to bear only in proportion as Abel resisted them. In his terror he knew only to wield the knife” (74). Abel’s act is the consummation of the oppositional mentality that prevents him from imagining himself as a whole person; by defining himself in opposition to what the albino represents, Abel inserts himself into the dichotomous narrative that gives the albino his power. As Gayatri Spivak suggests, “‘the subject’ implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups” (28). Because Abel chooses violence over speech, the murder represents a failure of language, and because he chooses to define himself in opposition to rather than in relation to another, it is a failure of imagination; as Louis Owens asserts, “In attempting to destroy evil, Abel has become one with it, accepted its seed” (*Destinies* 103). Gerald Vizenor, whose postmodern critical theory on the trickster figure in Native American culture I will use to explore the figure of Tosamah, states that “My opposite...is not the white man. My opposite is the methodology that separates” (qtd. in Blaeser 42). Vizenor is far from advocating assimilation; instead, he is proposing to undermine the binary system underlying colonialism by using a rhetoric that destabilizes oppositional roles.

### **John on John: The Unfolding of the Word**

In an interview with Dagmar Weiler, Momaday draws an explicit parallel between John “Big Bluff” Tosamah and Abel:

I think of Tosamah as being uprooted and lost. He and Abel are poised somewhere apart from their traditional world. They are also apart from the other world, but they have fashioned an existence in that no man's land. And Tosamah has done it better than most people because he's shrewd and a cynic and takes advantage. He exists. He wears masks. He knows how to take a bad situation and make the best of it. (172)

Although Tosamah, like Abel, is displaced, he lacks neither language nor imagination. Tosamah, whose epithets include "Orator, physician, Priest of the Sun, son of Hummingbird" (98), is a character who "was fascinated by language, took it upon himself to deal in language, to be a spokesman of a kind; to represent his culture in language" (Momaday, Morgan interview 50). As we shall see, Tosamah is also a trickster figure, and as a trickster orator, he embodies a playful attitude toward language and employs a distinctive, self-referential rhetoric. Indeed, given the slippery nature of language, trickster, whom Patricia Clark Smith describes as a "ragged, four-legged verb" (192) is often identified with language itself, and Momaday uses Tosamah to show how the indeterminacy of language can allow subaltern rhetors to undermine the master narratives that marginalize them. Babcock and Cox write that trickster tales "are at the same time a form of metanarration, for telling stories is, after all, coyote's *modus vivendi*" (101), and Tosamah as both an orator and a character is the source of a complex intertextuality that serves as an implicit commentary on the polysemous nature of story, and especially on the relation of the oral tradition to written texts. For Tosamah, words are a mask behind which there is no face, and that absence of essence is the source of his freedom. Gerald Vizenor, in *Manifest Manners*, suggests that the "postindian warrior" does not counter the lies of the dominant culture with truths of his own because, by doing so, he



reinforces the essentialist scheme of truth and falsehood even as he attempts to define himself against the negative depictions promulgated by Euro-American society. Rather, he constructs “simulations of survivance” whose performativity destabilizes the whole concept of truth: “The postindian arises from the earlier inventions of the tribes only to contravene the absence of the real with theatrical performances; the theatre of tribal consciousness is the recreation of the real, not the absence of the real in the simulations of dominance” (5). The postindian does not define himself against the “absence of the real,” nor does he create another essential reality which would be equally restrictive, but rather, paradoxically, “recreates” a reality that has not yet existed by appropriating the putatively essential identities of the past while foregrounding the imaginative, performative aspects of his assumed identity, simultaneously claiming and refuting his subjectivity. His rhetoric of resistance moves beyond the oppressor to encompass the entire social and mythic structure that governs the relationship between oppressor and oppressed.

Tosamah is archetypally postindian, a paradoxical trickster who finds his existence in language. Momaday writes that Tosamah “wore black like a cleric; he had the voice of a great dog” (80). The first clause suggests a connection with the sacred, or, more accurately, with the *trappings* of the sacred, while the second undermines the decorum associated with the clerical and invokes, through a description of how Tosamah uses language, the trickster figure Coyote. Tosamah, like Coyote, is a transgressor who disrupts set categories, including the sacred and profane;<sup>27</sup> through his oratory he not only destabilizes those around him but also undercuts himself. The very setting of his church, the Los Angeles Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission, embodies Tosamah’s performative, provisional nature, from the ironic “Be kind to a white man today” on his mission sign, to his theatrical entrance from behind a black screen, to the dais on

which the crescent altar stands, which is “made out of rough planks of various woods and dimensions, thrown together without so much as a hammer and nails” (80). Derrida suggests that “There is...a critique of language in the form of *bricolage*, and it has even been possible to say that *bricolage* is the critical language itself” (236); the dais is an instance of material *bricolage* that supports the sacred and yet overtly demonstrates that its foundation is a construction of found materials. In the same way, the gesture of Tosamah’s assistant, Cruz, who “stepped forward on the platform and raised his hands as if to ask for the quiet that already was” (80), initiates Tosamah’s sermon and yet foregrounds its status as a dramatic or masked performance by making what would have been an illocutionary motion a purely performative one. Like Cruz, Tosamah is always one step removed from himself.

When Tosamah announces, in his Saturday night sermon, “I have taken as my text this evening the almighty Word itself” (82), he invokes a self-reflexivity that destabilizes his words even as he speaks them. He says, in effect, “I have taken as my text, my text.” In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday asserts that “A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things” (33), and Tosamah’s sermon on John’s text echoes that assertion: “Far away in the darkness there was a single sound. Nothing made it, but it was there; and there was no one to hear it, but it was there...it took hold of the darkness and there was light; it took hold of the stillness and there was motion forever; it took hold of the silence and there was sound” (81). Arnold Krupat offers a critique of Momaday’s privileging of the word in *Rainy Mountain* that is relevant to Tosamah’s sermon on the Word:

Although the Gospel according to John may agree that the “word gives origin,” inasmuch as “In the beginning was the Word,” this is hardly what Native American cultures have believed nor is it what Momaday’s own practice

reveals. Words have power; they may indeed be sacred. But they do not come from “nothing”; “nothing” is yet another category of the West whose Native American equivalents would be hard to specify. Nor is the power of a word purely autonomous (“in and of itself”). What power there is in Momaday’s own words, for example, comes from their relation to the words of others.... What is fascinating to me is the way in which Momaday’s autobiographies attempt to assert the independent word and the single voice while yet demonstrating...that words are always interdependent, that other voices always sound. (Krupat 186-87)

Krupat claims that Momaday’s conception of the autonomous Word reflects his “commitment to a controlling monologue” (186), but in *Rainy Mountain* and *House Made of Dawn* Momaday is not so much severing language from its social context as asserting the fundamental power of words to create and control reality. In the sense that reality is brought into being by language, words come from “nothing,” but the Word in Momaday’s works is *originary*, not autonomous. Tosamah later says, “The Word did not come into being, but *it was*. It did not break upon the silence, but *it was older than the silence and the silence was made of it*” (86). The Word is not monologic, but contains within itself destabilizing contradictions—even silence itself—and therefore it inevitably unravels, in the process giving birth to a multifarious creation that engages in interminable and indeterminate dialogue. The word in the oral tradition transcends grammatical and functional categories, functioning simultaneously as thing and event. As Gladys Reichard points out, “The Navajo believe, in common with many American Indians, that thought is the same, or has the same potentiality, as word. To thought and word they add deed, so there is no use trying to differentiate ‘reality’

from religious belief by means of these words—thought, word and deed—since they are so closely related in practice which always goes back to supernatural decree for validation” (*Prayer* 9). Linda Hogan asserts that “The song or word in oral tradition is responsible for all things, all actions” (176), and this is because the word is both potential and actuality, thought and action, a paradoxical entity that cannot simply exist autonomously but is compelled by its own internal dynamics to create a polyvocal, shifting reality. Tosamah captures the reflexive nature of origin and creation in his chiasmic reversal of John’s text: “In the Word was the beginning; ‘*In the beginning was the Word*’” (86).

This compulsion toward multiplicity is also illustrated in the delivery and content of Tosamah’s own sermon, which begins formally with an exordium that introduces and amplifies John’s text, *In principio erat Verbum*. Tosamah uses as the bridge between his exordium and the body of his sermon the statement, “It was almost nothing in itself, a single sound, a word. . . . It scarcely was; but it *was*, and everything began” (81), immediately beginning the speech proper as if to imply that the sermon itself is a creation proceeding from the originary Word invoked in the exordium. But the transformation that takes place in the orator before he launches into the body of his sermon manifests the inherent instability and contradictoriness of the originary word:

Just then a remarkable thing happened. The Priest of the Sun seemed stricken; he let go of his audience and withdrew into himself, into some strange potential of himself. His voice, which had been low and resonant, suddenly became harsh and flat. . . . for a moment there was a look of amazement, then utter carelessness in his face. Conviction, caricature, callousness: the remainder of his sermon was a going back and forth among these. (81)

Like the invisible man, Tosamah finds himself seized by the Word and discovers that it does not grant him an essential being but rather disrupts any stable sense of identity by raising a cacophony of mutually-qualifying voices—the sacred Word, in its unraveling, creates the profane multiplicity of Legion. Tosamah becomes the Word, not only at the level of the narrative but at the level of Momaday’s text, full of strange potentials that contradict and undermine one another; the Christian sense of the Word as something that rationalizes and legitimizes belief in a monotheistic deity is disrupted in favour of a more complex, ironic, unstable construction—still the Word, but delivered, so to speak, out of the corner of one’s mouth.

Tosamah objects in his sermon to John’s association of the Word with God because the Word, for Tosamah, represents what Momaday has in another context, speaking about the capacity of the imagination to construct identity, called “infinite possibility” (Woodard 4). Momaday uses the same phrase to describe the existence of the protagonist of his well-known story “The Arrowmaker”<sup>28</sup>: “The arrowmaker is preeminently the man made of words. He has consummate being in language; it is the world of his origin and his posterity, and there is no other. But it is a world of definite reality and infinite possibility” (“Man” 61). Language is infinite in possibilities because it inevitably turns in on and destabilizes itself, frustrating meaning-making even as it provokes the search for meaning. Speaking with Charles Woodard, Momaday says of “The Arrowmaker,” “I still don’t understand that story in all its dimensions. I believe that it is so rich that it becomes like Borges’s *Book of Sand*. It is an infinite kind of story, it seems to me. I haven’t come to the end of it, and I don’t know that I ever will” (115). The arrowmaker is made of words, but the meaning of the text is inexhaustible because “the story of the arrowmaker returns in a special way upon itself. It is about language, after all, and

it is therefore part and parcel of its own subject; virtually, there is no difference between the telling and that which is told” (“Man” 60). This linguistic reflexivity allows the story of the arrowmaker to function as more than a disembodied text because the reader cannot dissociate the events within the text from the actual experience of reading it—the text enacts and describes the reader’s encounter with its language, giving it a complexity that forestalls any attempt at interpretive closure.

Tosamah, like the teller of “The Arrowmaker,” reflexively enacts what he speaks of. Tosamah criticizes John for his inability to simply accept that “In the beginning was the Word” without adding that “the Word was with God, and the Word was God”:

Don’t you see? Old John *had* to go on. That cat had a whole lot at stake. He couldn’t let the Truth alone. He couldn’t see that he had come to the end of the Truth, and he went on. He tried to make it bigger and better than it was, but instead he only demeaned and encumbered it. He made it big and soft with fat. He was a preacher, and he made a complex sentence of the Truth, two sentences, three, a paragraph. He made a sermon and theology of the Truth....

Now, brothers and sisters, old John was a white man, and the white man has his ways. Oh gracious me, he has his ways. He talks about the Word. He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents. He adds and divides and multiplies the Word.

And in all of this he subtracts the Truth. (83)

It soon becomes apparent that this is, after all, John (“Big Bluff” Tosamah) commenting on John, and that the former John is as copious as the latter. Tosamah’s comments on John serve as an implicit critique of his own oratorical practice: “There was nothing more to say, but he

went on. He had said all there was to say, everything. . . . But he went on, old John, because he was a preacher” (82).

But is Tosamah parodying the evangelist or is he also seduced by the multifariousness of the word? Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez suggests that “Tosamah, with all of his words, struggles to find meaning within them underneath the deadening layers of his seemingly endless sermons” (57), and asserts that “Tosamah tells us how discourse has destroyed story, meaning, and those who become lost in discursive black holes. Yet, like the attorneys at Abel’s trial, Tosamah sees myth and story, the sacred and faith, as dead relics of the past. . . . Ironically, Tosamah, too, in his sermon about the dangers of language, destroys himself with each word that he uses to assert his own discursive presence in the world” (58). Brill de Ramírez insightfully identifies Tosamah’s obsession with the word and the self-reflexive nature of his sermon, but Tosamah’s ongoing self-destruction through language is also a process of unending self-creation. Tosamah undermines his criticism of John’s multiplication of the word through his own verbosity, but through his self-contradiction he also demonstrates that the Word cannot be confined to a particular version of the truth, including his own; his own attempt to capture the Word in its singularity and simplicity only demonstrates its paradoxical complexity. The conflict between content and expression in Tosamah’s speech is ironic and comical, although the exact locus of the irony and comedy is unclear: is Tosamah being consciously ironic at John’s expense (or at the expense of his audience), or is Momaday being ironic at Tosamah’s expense? This indeterminacy is central to the sermon’s effect on the reader, because, if the perception of irony requires a superior viewpoint, then not even the reader can claim to be outside the circle of uncertainty. Vizenor suggests that “The postindian is an ironist. . . the ironies and humour in the postmodern are heard in tribal narratives; the

natural reason of tribal creation has never been without a postmodern turn or counterpoise, a common mode that enlivened the performance and memories of those who heard the best of their own experience in stories” (*Manifest* 68). To the degree that Tosamah disrupts John’s master narrative and undercuts his own oration even as he speaks it, he enacts this postmodern turn.

Yet, as the sermon switches from exhortation to narrative, the grandmother’s story of how Tai-me came to the Kiowas is set like an eddy within Tosamah’s torrent of words. Kenneth Burke suggests that the effect of irony is more complex than mere destabilization, and his observation sheds some light on the rhetorical effect of the grandmother’s presence in Tosamah’s speech:

Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all the terms. Hence from the standpoint of this total form (this “perspective of perspectives”), none of the participating “sub-perspectives” can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another...the dialectic of this participation produces...a “resultant certainty” of a different quality, necessarily ironic, since it requires that all sub-certainties be considered as neither true nor false, but *contributory*. (Burke, *Grammar* 512-13)

For Burke, irony is not relativistic, but relational. Tosamah’s reference to his grandmother, who “never threw words away,” serves as a corrective to both John’s needless multiplication of words and Tosamah’s own oration, but the grandmother herself does not serve as the anchor of yet another master narrative because she too is contained within language. Tosamah once more enacts what he speaks of when he says that his grandmother “has learned that in words and in



language, and there only, she could have whole and consummate being” (83). Like the arrowmaker, the grandmother is made of words: she speaks by being spoken of. However, she does function as, in Burke’s terms, the “one character who is ‘adjectival,’ as embodying one of the qualifications necessary to the total definition, but is ‘substantial’ as embodying the conclusions of the development as a whole,” a figure who “may be taken as the summarizing vessel, or synecdochic representative, of the development as a whole” (*Grammar* 516). The grandmother does not transcend relational irony, but represents it. She does this because she is present as story, which neither claims nor refutes essential truths, but on the one hand demands that the listener attend to a reality that is outside of her own experience and on the other requires that the listener construct a provisional truth by bringing his or her own experience to bear on the story.

Lee Maracle says of aboriginal narrative that “Most of our stories don’t have orthodox ‘conclusions’; that is left to the listeners, who we trust will draw useful lessons from the story—not necessarily the lessons we wish them to draw, but all conclusions are considered valid. The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it” (“Preface” 11-12). Betty Booth Donahue cites Randy Jacob, a Choctaw scholar and reverend, who explains that “the well-composed American Indian text is designed to confuse the hearer or reader. In the oral tradition, good story tellers do not tell all of the story. The hearer/reader must supply the missing parts of a narrative and comprehend the point of the work by means of his or her own intellectual efforts” (qtd. in Roppolo 270). As I suggested above, the openness of the oral tradition, its requirement that the audience apply their own experiences to the story and draw their own conclusions, seems counter to the role of *narratio* in the western rhetorical tradition. In the latter, the story serves

to augment or exemplify the rhetor's overall argument, and so the audience's interpretation of the story must be constricted through either the framing of the story or the structure and content of the narrative itself. But, while each member of the audience in the Native American oral tradition may construct her own truth from the story, the social dynamics of the oral tradition ensure that various individual interpretations contribute to give the story a tribal significance which does not transcend but ironically encompasses the individual interpretations that form it. In "The Man Made of Words," Momaday famously claims that "An Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself," but (and his subsequent statement is often omitted, leading to an erroneous impression that Momaday's idea of Indianness is asocial) he is also careful to outline the social implications of his assertion: "And it is a moral idea, for it accounts for the way in which he reacts to other men and to the world in general" (49). Tosamah therefore does not present his grandmother's story as an independent, transcendent text, but contextualizes his grandmother's words by making them, in Louis Owens's words, "not 'the telling of a story' but 'the story of a telling'" (*Destinies* 235); that is, he gives the story a context by embedding it within his own story about his grandmother, so that it stands within and interacts ironically with Tosamah's own oration rather than standing alone.

The seeming simplicity and directness of the grandmother's story counters Tosamah's own turgid rhetoric, but the story is in fact the site of a complex intertextuality that transcends diegetic levels. Vizenor suggests that "The trickster is not a presence or a real person but a semiotic sign in a language game, in a comic narrative that denies presence" ("Holotropes" 204). Not only does Tosamah undermine his own oration within the narrative by telling his grandmother's story, but Momaday further intensifies the "language game" of his novel by linking the grandmother's story with his other works. The story of Tai-me, as we encounter it

in Tosamah's speech, was previously included in *The Journey of Tai-me*, a collection of Kiowa stories that Momaday published in a privately printed edition the year before *House Made of Dawn* was published, and is later included in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, published the year after *House* (36). But it first appears in Momaday's writing four years earlier, in his 1964 essay "The Morality of Indian Hating." In that essay, Momaday links the coming of Tai-me to the Kiowas' cultural survival, since the arrival of the doll in 1775 is historically associated with both the acquisition of horses and the beginnings of the sun dance; Tai-me leads to the Kiowa golden age. But, more fundamentally, the arrival of Tai-me represents a change in how the Kiowa view reality and their relationship to it: "The Tai-me myth is not an entertainment, nor even the journal of an old salvation; it is infinitely more. It is an emotional reaction to the elemental experience of being, the affirmation of an eternal reality behind all appearances" (64). The deprivation encountered by the Kiowa protagonist of the myth leads him, after four days of walking (again, the sacred number that signifies completion), to a new idea of himself, a process that Momaday also ascribes to the storyteller: "before there were horses, the storyteller is sharply aware of his own frailty; he is inhibited by the eternal prospects of pain, hunger, and despair. His mind is compelled to look beyond itself for ease; it recoils from the present world and fastens upon another" (67). By telling the story, the storyteller not only conveys but effects in the listeners the shift in perception experienced by the story's protagonist; as the Priest of the Sun, Tosamah brings Tai-me to his audience and enables them, through the ritual process of storytelling, to have what the Sun Dance finally allowed the Kiowa to have: "existence in a world that was beyond the capacity of the senses to perceive" (64).

Tai-me represents the possibility of transcending suffering through imagination, and is therefore a particularly appropriate and potent story for Tosamah to share with his displaced audience as they sit in the filthy basement that serves as their church. Though Tosamah's verbosity counters his message, he still manages, through the story of Tai-me, to manifest the creative power of the Word:

Do you see? Far, far away in the nothingness something happened. There was a voice, a sound, a word—and everything began. The story of the coming of Tai-me has existed for hundreds of years by word of mouth. It represents the oldest and best idea that man has of himself. It represents a very rich literature which, because it was never written down, was always but a generation from extinction. But for the same reason it was cherished and revered. I could see the reverence in my grandmother's eyes, and I could hear it in her voice. It was that, I think, that old Saint John had in mind when he said, 'In the beginning was the Word....' (86)

Momaday writes that the sun dance, the only occasion on which the Tai-me doll was exposed, "was a concerted expression of tribal integrity," and that it enabled the Kiowa "to partake of divinity, to send their voices—however frail—against the silence at the edge of the world" ("Indian Hating" 65). Tosamah suggests that it is not only the tale of Tai-me that is sacred, but its telling, because it is through its telling that the tribe defines and perpetuates itself, setting its voice against the silence. That is why Tosamah does not merely tell the story to his congregation, but presents it as "the story of a telling." That is also why Momaday uses the story as a node by which he links his novel to his other written works and, ultimately, to the oral tradition itself. By doing so, he effects the perspective of "story within story, the idea that

one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end” that Leslie Marmon Silko suggests is unique to Native American narrative (50)—a “perspective of perspectives,” to quote Burke, that does not reduce all stories to a single indeterminate meaninglessness, but rather ironizes them so that the individual telling becomes a strand in a larger web of stories, each of which is affected by the others. In Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms, Tosamah’s appropriative, ironic oratory dialogizes the monological word of John, transforming it from a self-sufficient, isolated word to an utterance, a response that is derived from and leads to other responses, so that, “in place of a single, unitary sealed-off Ptolemaic world of language, there appear[s] the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other” (Bakhtin 65).

Linda Hogan suggests that the oral tradition is one in which “the word and the object are equal and in which all things are united in flux. The distinctions between the inner and the outer break down” (175). This sense of internal and external unity is echoed by Willie Ermine, who, in comparing western and aboriginal epistemologies, contrasts the external, material orientation of western knowledge with the internal, spiritual orientation of aboriginal knowledge. Ermine emphasizes that, whereas the external orientation of western culture has often resulted in a stress on atomism and individualism, the internal orientation of aboriginal cultures is traditionally manifested not as a self-enclosed solipsism, but as a holistic foundation for the building of community:

Ancestral explorers of the inner space encoded their findings in community praxis as a way of synthesizing knowledge derived from introspection. The Old Ones had experienced totality, a wholeness, in inwardness, and in effect created a physical manifestation of the life force by creating community. In doing so,

they empowered the people to become the 'culture' of accumulated knowledge.

The community became paramount by virtue of its role as repository and incubator of total tribal knowledge. (104-05)

As Tosamah ends his sermon on the Word, he effects through his language the union of inner and outer, imagination and creation that characterizes John's Word. Tosamah has created through language an alternate vision of the universe that confirms the integrative power of the imagination: "He stepped back from the lectern and hung his head, smiling. In his mind the earth was spinning and the stars rattled around in the heavens" (87). And, by dialogizing John's Word in his own sermon, he has made it something that is not only listened to, but also spoken, both by himself and his audience; in Ermine's terms, his creative act of the imagination has made his community the repository of an internalized tribal knowledge that allows them to temporarily transcend the oppressive circumstances of the urban world in which they live.

But, trickster orator that he is, Tosamah cannot help undercutting his vision of union with a final benediction that invokes a selfishness directly at odds with the drift of the sermon: "'Goodnight,' he said, at last, 'and get yours'" (87). The ironic closure can function as a comment on his audience's probable failure to live out the consequences of the union his sermon has effected, or a suggestion that what is truly worth getting is, according to what the audience has just heard, something beyond what selfish desire leads to. But it also deflates Tosamah's own authority. Speaking about the role of teasing in Indian humour, Vine Deloria states that "Gradually people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility and at the same time advocating a course of action they deeply believed in. Men would depreciate their feats to show they were not trying to run roughshod

over tribal desires” (147). In his closure, Tosamah mitigates his oratorical mastery through his ironic closure, suggesting that he himself is not to be identified as the one who embodies unity. The audience, having heard the Word, must find its own way of living it.

### **Peyotism and the Recovery of the Oral: Momaday as Trickster Author**

Though Momaday characterizes Tosamah as a character who, like Abel, is “in some ways pathetic” and “very displaced” (Owens interview 186), Tosamah thrives in the interstices. Kimberley Blaeser, speaking of the characters in Gerald Vizenor’s later fiction, states that they “tend to have internal rather than external tribal connections.... His characters are frequently displaced urban dwellers who not only can’t, but also don’t always want, to go home again. They may have an imaginative rather than an actual connection to place” (200-01). Like the characters Blaeser describes, Tosamah’s connections to tribe and place are imaginative. As a Kiowa, he has no reservation to go home to, and as a participant in the Indian relocation program, he is subject, like Abel and Benally, to assimilative forces that try to undermine his cultural identity. But, though Momaday has characterized relocation as a program that was based on the premise that “the Indian becomes a white man by virtue of living in the presence of white men” and suggested that it gave Native Americans only “incomplete existence in two worlds and security in neither” (“Indian Hating” 72), Tosamah is no tragic victim. Vizenor’s statement that “The trickster is a sign, a healer and comic liberator in narratives, not an artifact or a real victim in historical summaries” (“Holotropes” 205) suggests that the trickster transcends tragedy by undermining the monological discourses that seek to define him in static, binary terms, as included or excluded from any particular world. Rather, to use a term Vizenor applies to mixed-blood existence, the trickster *wavers* between opposites (“Vizenor” 174), and in that wavering shows opposition itself to be a construction, a trap he escapes not by rejecting

one element of the antithesis, which only reinforces the opposition, but by performing the difference so that its constructed nature is manifested. In his sermon, Tosamah does not merely oppose his dialogical Word to John's monological Word, his truth to John's, but performs the difference between the two Words so that the opposition is undermined—his criticism of John's Word partakes of its fat, not only asserting but embodying the idea of dialogue. Just as the Word not only proceeds from the silence but contains it, so the words in Tosamah's sermon proceed from and contain John's, resulting in an ironic perspective that is comic and inclusive rather than tragic and exclusive.

Because his identity is mediated through language, Tosamah is always enmeshed in what Burke calls “the paradox of substance,” the destabilizing inability to define an essence without reference to something else, usually an opposite (see *Grammar* 35-38), a concept that Derrida later captures through his neologism *différance*. Tosamah's role as a Peyote priest is related to his trickster function, for Peyotism itself is a religion that challenges binaries as it wavers between Native spirituality and Christianity. The relationship between tribal and Christian elements in Peyotism varies tribally, and even within tribes,<sup>29</sup> but discrepant interpretations of Peyotism suggest that it cannot be easily contained within ethnological metanarratives. Ethnobotanist Edward F. Anderson suggests that Peyotism is a synthesis of Christian and tribal elements that represents a tacit acceptance of colonial status:

Peyotism helped to resolve the conflict between cultures through an integration of nativistic power, curing, and vision concepts with elements of Christian ideology and culture...peyotism was still distinctly Indian, though it contained sufficient elements of the white culture to meet certain new conditions and to



appear to be accommodative; in a sense, it could be seen as a sign of compromise, conciliation, and passive acceptance of the dominant culture. (33)

But David F. Aberle, in his classic study on the reception of Peyotism among the Navajo, recounts how Peyotism was fiercely resisted by both orthodox Christians (especially Euro-American missionaries) and tribal traditionalists, and sees the Peyote religion not as a synthesis but as a rejection of both Native traditionalism and Christianity:

It is an effort at personal integration , achieved through a ritual and symbol system which is self-consciously *not* that of the dominant culture, and *not* that of the peyotist's native culture. It cannot be that of the dominant culture, because that culture is rejected in significant aspects. It cannot be that of the native culture because it no longer works: the old integration of subsistence technology, social organization, and ideology cannot operate, for reasons having to do with relationships to the dominant culture. (*Peyote* 340)

The two narratives forwarded by Anderson and Aberle are antithetical: one presents an integration of binaries that elides difference, while the other presents a dual rejection that leads to a separation from both cultures. However, the interaction between Native and Christian concepts of the Word in Tosamah's speech at the mission suggests that the relationship between the two cultures in Momaday's depiction of Peyotism is far more complex than either synthesis or rejection—Tosamah avoids the dilemma of assimilation versus separation (or, in Aberle's terms, a dual rejection leading to atomistic individualism) by performing ironically the roles of both evangelistic preacher and Native storyteller.

Through his speech, Tosamah constructs an imagined identity that is based on language rather than blood, on a rhetorically-constructed, provisional ethnicity rather than a purely tribal

affiliation.<sup>30</sup> For Tosamah, the instability of language and of identity is not an isolating source of tragic indeterminacy but a resource that allows him to work in the comic mode, constructing communal identities not through the imposition of static traits but through an oratory that creates a hermeneutical community always in search of but never arriving at meaning, since the slipperiness of language is the foundation of comedy, just as the inexorable authority of the word (the initially ambiguous but ultimately unavoidable significance of the oracle or hubristic statement) is the foundation of tragedy. Vizenor points out that “comic situations are not possible without a group, without a communal experience. To do otherwise comes close to psychopathology or schizophrenia, to walk around telling your own stories and laughing at yourself. That would be the tragic mode, which is the primary literary interpretation that has been used to interpret almost all of Native American culture, literature, and song. The tragic mode. It celebrates individualism” (“Themes” 72). The Native audience listening to the ethnographer’s tragic narrative about them is both trapped within and sealed off from the text because it inscribes their powerlessness and their status as objects of study; the orator’s comic narrative, however, is told not just *about* the audience, but *to* it, and it requires the audience’s participation as subjects to complete itself.

The conflict between the restrictive anthropological vision and the unbounded vision of the imagination is also played out in Momaday’s description of Tosamah’s peyote ritual. Vizenor asserts that the trickster is not so much a character as a liberatory disturbance in the text, and Tosamah functions here, as he did in his sermon on John, as a force that disrupts language through an ironic intertextuality, although in this case Tosamah appropriates the words of the key ethnological text on Peyotism, Weston La Barre’s *The Peyote Cult*. In the fifth expanded edition of his book, released the year after *House Made of Dawn* was published,

La Barre himself asserts in a preface, perhaps with some irony, that his book has become a foundational text for the religious movement he first set out to study:

The present study has been so far accepted as authoritative by Indians themselves that when new tribes acquire the peyote cult, I am told, they consult the book you hold in your hand for the proper ritual details. I am not entirely comfortable with this situation. It means that, perhaps unfortunately, the peyote rite has changed in the last thirty years almost not at all—added to which an awesome responsibility for theological accuracy rests on the shoulders of a youthful graduate student who never in his most grandiose moments had calculated being the author in a religion of the book. (vii)

La Barre's statement inscribes a reflexive circle that doubly authorizes his text, and doubly objectifies the objects of his study. Vine Deloria, criticizing anthropologists in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, asks, "A warrior killed in battle could always go to the Happy Hunting Grounds. But where does an Indian laid low by an anthro go? To the library?" (81). Apparently so. The intention and effect of La Barre's landmark study (the fieldwork for which was undertaken in the 1930s) was to establish the Native American Church as a *bona fide* religion deserving of protection under the United States Constitution, and in that sense it was empowering for Peyotists, even as it was disempowering for Native traditionalists who were fighting against Peyotism within their reservations and communities. Though La Barre denies any higher ambitions, his status as Peyote prophet is the logical perfection of the Boasian strain of anthropology that informed his work—if the perfect anthropological study completely and objectively captures the culture that is its object, then the ultimate success of his book is demonstrated when the objects of the study now define themselves using the terms supplied by

the text itself, continually reflecting and effecting its statements. The authority of the text is inviolable because it manufactures the subjects that attest to its authority, and the petrification of the traditions described reflects their transformation from dynamic orality to static text. Whether, of course, Peyotists are actually using La Barre's text in such a manner is open to speculation, but the way La Barre frames the relationship of object to text establishes his authority without overt assertion, since it is the Peyotists themselves who grant it. Even the reader who holds La Barre's book in his hands is circumscribed by the text and confirms its authenticity—the shift to direct address establishes a rapport between writer and reader, but only for the purpose of reinforcing the dependence of the latter on the former.

Momaday could not have read La Barre's 1969 preface before writing *House Made of Dawn*, but he (and Tosamah) had certainly read an earlier edition of La Barre, as is demonstrated by Tosamah's opening address in the Peyote ceremony:

Tosamah, orator, physician, Priest of the Sun, son of Hummingbird, spoke:

“Peyote is a small, spineless, carrot-shaped cactus growing in the Rio Grande Valley and southward. It contains nine narcotic alkaloids of the isoquinoline series, some of them strychnine-like in physiological action, the rest morphine-like. Physiologically, the salient characteristic of peyote is its production of visual hallucinations or color visions, as well as kinesthetic, olfactory, and auditory derangements.’ Or, to put it another way, that little old wooly booger turns you on like a light, man. Daddy peyote is the vegetal representation of the sun.” (*House* 96-97)

As he did with John's word, Tosamah appropriates and ironizes La Barre's text, lifting his scientific description of the peyote plant directly from *The Peyote Cult* (7). Momaday here

anticipates La Barre's comment that, like the evangelist John, he had become "the author in a religion of the book," implying through his destabilizing treatment of both La Barre and John that the languages of the ethnologist and the evangelist are in some respects not far removed from each other. The monological, authoritative Word lies behind the objective recording of the anthropologist, since the correlative of perfect objectivity toward the observed is the transcendent subjectivity of the ethnological observer who, as La Barre suggests, considers "the search for meaning...dubious" and therefore presents the reader "only with strictly verified and verifiable facts" (xiii-xiv) that are categorically not the products of interpretation. The shift in registers within Tosamah's speech here offers an implicit critique of the "factuality" of La Barre's description; in contrast with the ethnologist, the roadman assumes a personal intimacy with peyote that transcends the need for religious or scientific decorum. His seemingly sacrilegious reference to peyote as "that little old wooly booger" evinces Tosamah's indifference to binary distinctions such as sacred versus profane (essential categories that structure ethnological observation), an indifference further reflected in Tosamah's own appearance at the ritual as a "holy, sinister sight" (97). Momaday's use of an explicit dialogue tag doubly supports Tosamah's own ironies—first, after a formal announcement that Tosamah is going to speak, the words spoken are not Tosamah's, but La Barre's, their scientific register rendered absurd by its incongruity with the list of titles that announce the speaker. But when Tosamah finally shifts registers, there is no sense that he is necessarily speaking in his "own" voice, as the incongruity remains, this time between the formal list of his titles and his colloquial tone. Again, Tosamah does not explicitly counter La Barre's words, but puts them "another way," destabilizing them so that they become a performative mask rather than a set of objective, authoritative pronouncements.

The difference between culture as an archive of observations and facts and Momaday's own emphasis on cultural identity as a product of imagination and language structures the subsequent description of the peyote ceremony, which moves from an external point of view that echoes La Barre's anthropological diegesis, to an internal point of view that mimetically places the narrator and reader within the ceremony, culminating finally in the prayers of the characters themselves, given without narratorial intrusion. Tosamah does not say much in this section, but the patterns that govern his rhetoric are reflected in Momaday's own writing, so the narrator, who at this point is indistinguishable from the implied author, comes to play the role of peyote priest, granting vision to the reader as Tosamah does to the characters, though in the case of the reader, part of the healing is the attainment of freedom from an objectifying ethnological perspective (Susan Scarberry-García's insightful study closely relates the healing effects of the Navajo chantways within the novel to the effect of the novel itself on the reader, but does not examine in detail the similar role of the Peyote ceremony here). Examining the relationship between Tosamah and Momaday, Kenneth Lincoln suggests that "Trickster is at play here," because Tosamah's name echoes Momaday's second Indian name, "Tsotohah," the meaning of which ("Red Bluff") even parallels Tosamah's second given name, Big Bluff; Tosamah, suggests Lincoln, is "a parody of the artist as peyote priest" (268 n46). Like Tosamah, Momaday appropriates La Barre's words for the first part of his description of the peyote ceremony, allowing his own description to assume an ethnological air: "There was a fine groove which ran the length of the [moon-shaped] altar; the groove symbolized the life of man from birth, ascending from the southern tip to the crest of power and wisdom at the center, and thence in descent through old age to death at the northern tip" (Momaday 97, La Barre 47 [with slight modification]); "the drum was a potbellied, cast-iron, three-legged No. 6 trade

kettle with the bail ears filed off” (Momaday 97, La Barre 45). Momaday even goes so far as to include an incongruous numbered list of the paraphernalia in Tosamah’s satchel, undercutting the list with the playful alliteration of the first item, “A fine fan of fancy pheasant feathers” (98), perhaps parodying La Barre’s unintentional alliteration when describing the same item in *The Peyote Cult*: “fringed pheasant feather fan” (47).

But at the moment the celebrants eat their peyote buttons, the point of view of the narration suddenly shifts from an external focalization that describes the trappings of the ceremony to an internal focalization that at first contains traces of diegesis—“Everyone was looking at [the fire], and after a while there was terrible restlessness, a sheer wave of exhilaration in the room. There was no center to it; it was everywhere at once” (98)—but gradually becomes pure mimesis, a totally internal focalization where the narrator no longer distances the reader from the experiences of the participant:

At last there was nothing in the world but a single point of light, brilliant, radiant to infinity; and from it there arose in the radiance wave upon wave of purest color, rose and red and scarlet and carmine and wine. And to these was added a sudden burst of yellow: butter and rust and gold and saffron. And final fire—the one essence of all fires from the beginning of time, there in the most beautiful brilliant bead of light. (99)

Those present at the ceremony move, through their visions, from a state of alienation that reflects their cultural and economic marginality to a perception of wholeness in which they recover a connection to tribe and land. This renewal is reflected most explicitly in the shifting sound of the drum that was described so prosaically by the narrator at the beginning of the ceremony: “The drumbeats gathered in the room and the flame quivered to the beat of the drum

and thunder rolled in the somewhere hills” (99). Like the drumbeats, the consciousness of the participants expands beyond the squalid basement of Tosamah’s urban mission and comes to reconnect with the land, even if it is the “somewhere hills” of the imagination. The images used in the peyote ceremony echo those used when Francisco enters the kiva during the Feast of Porcingula in Walatowa: as Francisco climbs the ladder up to the kiva entrance, he presses “the whole surface of his body against the slanting poles and rungs of the ladder, so that even the weight of his chest and shoulders amounted to nothing almost and there was *no center* to it” (69; emphasis added), and, standing above the entrance to the kiva, he hears “the great rafters of the kiva vibrate...with the sound of thunder and drums” (70). In the same way that the ceremony at the kiva creates or harmonizes with the rainstorm that finally breaks the draught around Jemez, so the peyote ceremony is linked with rain: “The gourd danced in Tosamah’s hand, and there was a rushing and rolling of rain on the roof, a rockslide rumbling, roaring” (99). In all these images there is a bridging of antitheses: between the human and the natural, the mundane and the sacred, internal desire and external manifestation. For Tosamah’s congregation, the distance between basement and kiva, urban setting and traditional land, is bridged by the peyote ceremony; for Momaday’s readers, it is bridged through language. And, just as the congregation moves from alienation to connection as they focus on the flame and father peyote, so the reader moves from a perspective external to the characters to an internal perspective that mimetically invokes the experience of seeing the flame, shifting the relationship of reader to character so that the text is not a description, but an experience.

This shift from external description to internal experience parallels a shift from the textual to the oral that occurs throughout the passage. Walter Ong suggests that “Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer.... By



contrast with vision, the dissecting sense, sound is...a unifying sense. A typical visual ideal is clarity and distinctness, a taking apart.... The auditory ideal, by contrast, is harmony, a putting together” (72).<sup>31</sup> Momaday’s initial description of the ceremony reflects La Barre’s “religion of the book,” both in its appropriation of La Barre’s words and in its focus on representing the observable aspects of the ritual. After the celebrants take the peyote, the visual images become increasingly figurative, the words less representational and more poetic, until the language of the passage becomes not a representation of the world but a world in itself; as in poetry, the aural begins to impinge on the written. Finally, as the individual participants at the meeting pray aloud, orality is foregrounded—unlike the dialogue in the rest of the book, the prayers are rendered in dialect, conveying to the reader not only the sense but the sound of the supplicants. Indeed, the simplicity of the speeches seems designed to keep the reader’s focus on sound rather than sense, so that the speakers are known not so much by what they say but by how they speak: Henry Yellowbull prays, “Give us laughter and good feelings always. Listen, I want to honor you with my prayer. I want to give something, these words. Listen”; Cristóbal Cruz rambles, “This here shore is a good meetin’, huh? I know we all been seein’ them good visions an’ all, an’ there’s a whole lot of frenhood an’ good will aroun’ here, huh?”; and Napoleon Kills-in-the-Timber laments, “Our childrens are need your help pretty damn bad, Great Spirit. They don’ have no respec’ no more, you know? They are become lazy, no-good-for-nothing drunkerts. Thank you” (100). The spontaneous oral dialect of the prayers contrasts with the reified “religion of the book” that La Barre presented, and Momaday, through the shifting narrative strategies of the passage, has not only offered a critique of the ethnological perspective but has transformed the reader from a ethnological observer to a participant sharing in the character’s ritual experience. It is at this point, where decrepit basement and sacred kiva

blur together, each serving as a womb for the rebirth of the oral and the sacred, that Momaday also crosses the Kiowa-based peyote ritual with Navajo chantway, introducing Ben Benally and having him, under the influence of the peyote, exclaim, “Look! Look! There are blue and purple horses... a house made of dawn...” (101; ellipses in original). Both the horses and the image of the house, which are from Navajo chantways, are expanded upon in the “Night Chanter” section of the novel, but their introduction at this point in the text serves to signal the preliminary healing effects of the peyote ceremony on a character who is at neither Tosamah’s sermon nor the peyote ceremony: Abel.

### **Language and the Dialectic of Healing**

Depending on which aspect of Momaday’s novel they choose to stress, critics have described Tosamah as an urban shaman who saves Abel or as a lost soul who torments him. Linda Hogan presents Tosamah as a positive figure who embodies the unifying power of language; in his sermon on John, Tosamah “speaks as an inspired poet. As mythically the word created the earth, Tosamah’s language creates vision. He is inspired by the language that speaks through him and by its capacity to recover, mentally, the world from which people have become divided.... Language, speaking through Tosamah, restores him to unity with the world” (172-73). Susan Scarberry-García goes further, suggesting that the creative, unifying power that language grants Tosamah, manifested oratorically in the sermon on John and ritually in the peyote ceremony, allows for Tosamah to partially heal Abel as he lies bleeding on the beach from his encounter with Martinez: “the healing properties of Tosamah’s ceremony are literally being spiritually extended to the ‘outside world.’ For at the same time that the ceremony is taking place, Abel is bleeding on the beach, recognizing that ‘something was going on’; he felt a ‘tremor,’ a ‘faint vibration.’ Then he experiences the old men, the

runners after evil from home, running in the night ritually rebalancing the forces of witchcraft with good” (107). The structure of the “Priest of the Sun” section of *House Made of Dawn* is based on juxtaposition: scenes of Abel stranded on the beach alternate with scenes of Tosamah delivering his sermon on John, performing the peyote ceremony, and telling his story of the journey to his grandmother’s grave (really Momaday’s story, as I will discuss below). Bonnie TuSmith states that “the use of juxtaposition in this chapter, in which a splicing technique utilizes Tosamah’s sermon on the Word to articulate Abel’s inchoate state, effectively communicates the novel’s theme on language. Basically, it is in white society that Abel loses his connection to the Word” (117).

The relationship between Tosamah and Abel in the “Priest of the Sun” section is therefore not explicitly given in the plot of the story, but is rather suggested through the parallel storylines of the section. If we grant that Tosamah’s powers as an orator—manifested not only in his ceremony, but also in his sermon and his final story about going to his grandmother’s grave—do in some way give Abel the will to rise from the beach and begin his torturous journey home, the connection between the two storylines must be made by the reader. In the next chapter, I will suggest that a similar dynamic of implied causation exists in the “Night Chanter” section of the novel; however, because Ben’s narration gives the “Night Chanter” section a consistent focalization, the effect is more subtle. The “Priest of the Sun” section, more than any other, seems in its elusive fragmentation and shifting points of view to embody the high modernist aesthetic. But Tosamah’s appropriative approach applies even here, or perhaps especially here, for, as Louis Owens suggests, *House Made of Dawn* is “a Trojan-horse novel, an unmistakably modernist, though deeply metaphysical, novel in the mainstream tradition that nonetheless contain[s] within its shell of modernist sophistication a thoroughly

‘Indian’ story and discourse” (*Mixedblood* 69). As Barbara Babcock notes, a fragmented, episodic organization “tends to be characteristic of all trickster tales: the trickster’s effacing of spatial, temporal, and social boundaries is embedded in the very structure of the narrative that violates commonly held parameters such as unity of time, place, and action or plot” (167). Just as Abel must be able to construct an image of wholeness that comprehends but does not efface the different facets of his own identity, the reader must exercise a kind of negative capability that allows for the two streams of the story to be intertwined, but not conjoined, for the actions of Tosamah in the “Night Chanter” section of the novel render any straightforward characterization of Tosamah as a healer problematic. This paradoxical state of fragmentation and union is reflected in the image of moon on water that grips Abel as he lies on the beach: “He could not understand the sea; it was not of his world. . . . It bent to the moon, and the moon made a bright, shimmering course upon it, a broad track breaking apart and yet forever whole and infinite” (87). For both Abel and the reader, it is language and the imagination that allow the fluid perception of wholeness, and Abel’s inability to achieve this perception is linked to his inability to understand the power of language and its potential role in his own healing: “‘Beautyway,’ ‘Bright Path,’ ‘Path of Pollen’—his friend Benally talked of these things. But Ben could not have been thinking of the moonlit sea. No, not the sea, not this” (87). As TuSmith suggests, the two story-lines in the “Priest of the Sun” section are related through their contrasting approaches to language, but throughout the section Abel also undergoes a shift in perception that allows him to rise from the beach and begin the painful journey home, a shift that is enabled by a new attitude toward language and that reflects Tosamah’s healing role as orator and priest.

Abel's stasis and inarticulateness are embodied by his presence on the beach, his inability to move or to cry for help. Like the stranded fish on the beach who "writhe in the light of the moon" (79), Abel is a man out of his element, isolated from the medium that gives him life, his cultural and familial community. Yet Abel's isolation is not only geographical, but internal; even while he is in Walatowa, Abel's inability to speak, to situate himself within the language of his community, prevents him from healing either his social alienation or his self-alienation and leaves him vulnerable to being defined in the terms set by the dominant Euro-American culture. Tosamah's sermon on the monological nature of John's Word is immediately reinforced by Abel's memory of his treatment during his trial, during which he realizes that, "Word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, *their* language" (90). In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault writes that "The soul is the prison of the body" (30), meaning that carceral institutions use language to create absolute essences or subjecthoods in order to effect and rationalize control over the prisoner's body. Tosamah presents and employs an ironic rhetoric of indeterminacy, but the court that tries Abel does not accept Father Olguin's argument that words are always contextual and that they create rather than describe events. Olguin says, "Homicide is a legal term, but the law is not my context; and certainly it isn't his" (90), but the prosecution asserts "the facts"—and here the legal rhetor claims an objectivity similar to that of the Boasian ethnologist—stating that "*Murder* is a moral term. *Death* is a universal human term" (90). The argument is not over Abel's story, but over terms, because story is a context that allows each word to modify the others, and the prosecution would like to effect the fixity and closure that the very etymology of the word *term* implies (from the Latin *terminus*: boundary, limit).

Abel is both victim and participant in this formation of, to use Vizenor's phrase, terminal creeds—essentialized identities that imprison the subject and define him in terms of absolute criteria, either positive or negative. In fact, his presence on the beach is a direct result of his decision to react toward the police officer Martinez as he did toward the albino Reyes, confronting evil on its terms rather than his own (the two malevolent figures are linked through snake imagery; Reyes is constantly described in serpentine terms and Martinez is known as *culebra*, the snake). Even as he recalls how the court disposed of him through words, Abel's own dichotomous vision of the world still compels him to dispose of the white man, even at the cost of his own destruction: "They must know that he would kill the white man again, if he had the chance.... A man kills such an enemy if he can" (90-91). Abel's attribution of absolute otherness is a projection of his own self-alienation, and his fractured identity is further manifested on the beach, when he thinks that "His body, like his mind, had turned on him; it was his enemy" (89). Tosamah's treatment of John and Momaday's treatment of La Barre eschew this attribution of otherness; they destabilize from within instead of employing a direct resistance that reinforces the absolute antitheses underpinning the dominant culture's monological power. Homi Bhabha, examining how marginalized populations react to the hegemonic national identities constructed by more powerful elements of society, suggests that "The minority does not simply confront the pedagogical, or powerful master-discourses with a contradictory or negative referent. It interrogates its object by initially withholding its objective. Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity" (155). Both Tosamah and Momaday, by insinuating themselves into the discourses of Christian theology and ethnology, transform absolute terms back into living words, the

meanings of which are not given but provisionally derived from their linguistic and social contexts. In contrast, Abel's desire to define himself in rigid opposition to whiteness renders him inarticulate and alienates him from community and self.

In his sermon on John, Tosamah employs an appropriative rhetoric that allows him to destabilize the monological rhetoric of John's Word without defining himself in resistance to it, and just as Tosamah's critique of John's monological Word is reinforced by the language at Abel's trial, so the indirect resistance of Tosamah's oratory is supported by Abel's vision of the runners after evil:

He could see them in the distance, the old men running after evil.... They passed in the night, full of tranquility, certitude. There was no sound of breathing or sign of effort about them.... The runners after evil ran as water runs, deep in the channel, in the way of least resistance, no resistance.... They were whole and indispensable in what they did; everything in creation referred to them. Because of them, perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them. They ran with great dignity and calm, not in the hope of anything, but hopelessly; neither in fear nor hatred nor despair of evil, but simply in recognition and with respect. Evil was. Evil was abroad in the night; they must venture out to the confrontation; they must reckon dues and divide the world. (91-92)<sup>32</sup>

The runners after evil neither deny evil nor govern themselves in opposition to it. They confront it, but not by attempting to conquer it. Evil, for the runners, is not an Other; rather, it is an integrated part of the landscape they flow through, a force that is shaped by and exists in conjunction with a field of other forces, all of which influence one another and shape the fluid

contours of human experience. The certitude of the runners is born not of a knowledge of absolute good or evil, but of a tranquility that enables them to negotiate the shifting context in a way that manifests neither resistance nor hope—knowing that evil and good are relational states rather than absolute terms, neither they nor their landscape are static. In contrast, Abel’s association of evil with whiteness results in a stasis that nearly destroys him. Momaday points out that the man Abel murders is not a white man, but “an albino Indian who is a witch”: “He is a white man, or rather a ‘white man’ in quotes, in appearance, but in fact he is neither white nor man in the usual sense of these words. He is an embodiment of evil like Moby Dick, an intelligent malignity” (qtd. in Schubnell 97). Abel was correct to sense Reyes’s malignity, but mistaken to treat it as an autonomous essence associated with whiteness, or a reified thing outside of him to be erased or killed, since by objectifying evil and defining himself in opposition to it, Abel both paralyzes himself and reinforces his self-alienation. Abel’s association of evil and whiteness no doubt stems from the injustice that Euro-American society has inflicted on him, including the colonization of Jemez, his experiences in the war, and the poverty and powerlessness of relocation in Los Angeles. But Abel’s sense of alienation precedes his war experience: “He had always been afraid. Forever at the margin of his mind there was something to be afraid of, something to fear. He did not know what it was, but it was always there, real, imminent, unimaginable” (102). The exact nature of this fear will be examined further in the next chapter, but for now it is sufficient to note that Abel’s desire to localize this inchoate fear leads him, Ahab-like, to project it onto a single external figure that can be pursued and destroyed.

In contrast, Francisco encounters the albino while hoeing his corn and also senses evil, but he does not fix the malignant presence as an alien Other or oppose it; rather, he accepts its



presence and continues to act on his own terms: “He was too old to be afraid. His acknowledgement of the unknown was nothing more than a dull, intrinsic sadness, a vague desire to weep, for evil had long since found him out and knew who he was. He set a blessing on the corn and took up his hoe” (60). Abel’s construction of evil is also associated with his inarticulate silence, his inability to situate himself within the oral world of the Jemez Pueblo. Walter Ong writes that “Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable, but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent. . . . There is no way to stop sound and have sound. I can stop a moving picture camera and hold one frame fixed on the screen. If I stop the movement of sound, I have nothing—only silence, no sound at all” (32). The oral tradition is inherently dynamic, and in it words are not discreet entities but a medium through which both speaker and world are created: “Oral folk have no sense of a name as a tag, for they have no idea of a name as something that can be seen. Written or printed representations of words can be labels; real, spoken words cannot be” (Ong 33). Both the runners after evil, who follow the channels of no resistance, and Tosamah, who dialogizes John’s Word by insinuating himself within it rather than countering it, reflect the dynamic nature of the oral tradition, in which words are relational, their fluid meanings derived from their linguistic and social contexts. But Abel, by treating evil as a rigid term, a visually-distinct whiteness which is held at a distance rather than a presence which is part of his environment, becomes paralyzed and silent. Terms have fixed meanings, but, as Abel discovers, the monologism of terms alienates both the words and the speaker who speaks them from the context in which they exist; only in the fluid motion of the runners, in which movement is matched to context, is there real meaning: “Because of [the runners], perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them” (91).

Tosamah's sermon on John intervenes between the initial image of Abel lying broken on the beach and Abel's visions of the court and the runners. The two perspectives on the Word that Tosamah presents in his sermon are reflected in the two visions of language that are manifested by the court and the runners, and it is his transition from one vision to the other that allows Abel to see himself differently and eventually to rise from the beach. That linguistic transition is also embodied in his memories of Milly, who at first "believed in tests, questions and answers, words on paper" (94). Like the court, Milly first tries to capture Abel through words, and Abel's early memories of her are littered with bureaucratic forms and reductive psychological profile tests (92, 94). But as he lies on the beach, he also remembers how their relationship changed, and how she eventually came to believe not only in abstract concepts such as "Honor, Industry, the Second Chance, the Brotherhood of Man, the American Dream" (94), but also in him personally. Momaday repeatedly uses Abel's relationship with Milly to provide the transition points from Abel's storyline to Tosamah's: Abel's memory of making love with Milly is used as a bridge from the beach to the peyote ceremony (95-96), and Milly's story of her daughter's death not only provides the final impetus for Abel to rise and walk home, but also precedes Tosamah's own story about his grandmother (109-10). The description of Milly during the lovemaking scene stresses the whiteness of her body, implying that Milly is challenging Abel's association of whiteness with otherness, though the violence in their lovemaking suggests that for Abel sex is as much an expression of rage as love or passion: "His nostrils flared to the odor of her body, and he was brutal with her" (96). Earlier in the section, Abel's wandering mind juxtaposes the memory of Angela's body ("Angela put her white hands to his body. Abel put his hands to her white body") with the memory of the albino's dead body ("he could remember the white man's body, how it lay limp and lifeless in

the night rain, bright like phosphorus almost”) (89). These two memories of whiteness, one a loving reciprocity and the other a murderous objectification, along with his memories of Milly, all suggest that Abel, while he lies on the beach, is beginning to see both whiteness and evil as complex traits whose meaning cannot be absolutely assigned.

But it has not escaped some critics that, while Tosamah, or the orientation toward language that Tosamah represents, may be in some way responsible for Abel’s escape from the beach, Tosamah is also partially responsible for Abel’s presence on the beach. At a poker game, Tosamah goads Abel, “not directly, you know, but he started talking about *long-hairs* and the reservation and all” (141), until Abel lunges drunkenly at him. When everyone laughs at Abel, “that seemed to take the fight out of him. It was like he had to give up when they laughed; it was like all of a sudden he didn’t care about anything anymore” (141); subsequently, Abel begins to be absent from his job and gives up on assimilating into urban society. Martinez’s first unprovoked attack on Abel further isolates Abel, and Benally describes the incident in terms of Tosamah’s previous verbal attack, remarking that Abel “couldn’t forget about it. It was like that time at Tosamah’s place, you know?” (154). Tosamah’s effect on Abel raises questions not only about the nature of trickster, but about his rhetoric and the antifoundationalism that underlies it. Brill de Ramírez suggests that Tosamah’s “words take up so much space that there is no room for anyone else’s” (55) and asserts that he employs a “silencing discourse” that is combative rather than conversive:

Within the discursive or dialogic oppositionality evidenced throughout much of the novel, individuals struggle to assert their own significance in the world as signifying subjects rather than as passive, and therefore less significant, objects. We see this embattling approach in the character of Tosamah, who incessantly

asserts his own subjective status in the world through a concomitant reactive objectification of white people and Indian people unlike himself (e.g., reservation Indians like Abel). Such dichotomized hierarchies that differentiate and privilege subjects over objects represent a Western code of separation and ranking that is alien to conversively informed traditions, such as those of the Pueblo and Navajo peoples. (54)

Brill de Ramírez suggests that the Native American oral tradition characteristically manifests what she calls a conversive orientation: “conversive structures and strategies (such as the privileging of relationality over individuality, domains in which meaningfulness is defined relationally rather than semiotically, voice shifts that reflect the presence and necessity of participatory listener-readers, and repetition for learning rather than for memorization) are the literary manifestations of conversivity as represented in the oral tradition” (6). In her view, Tosamah fails to effect this conversive approach because the empowered subject position he adopts is dependent on the objectification of Abel. This approach does highlight Tosamah’s role in Abel’s isolation in a way that the portraits of Tosamah as healer do not, but it elides the constant contradiction that marks Tosamah as a trickster orator, and the fact that Trickster always finds himself caught in the web of his own discourse. Babcock recounts a tale about the Winnebago trickster, Wakdjunkaga, in which the trickster kills some ducks and asks his anus to watch them while they roast. When he wakes up to find that a fox has stolen the ducks, Wakdjunkaga punishes his anus with a burning stick and eats part of his own intestines (169). Both the unstable irony of Tosamah’s sermon and the self-cannibalism of Wakdjunkaga’s story show that although the trickster may indeed attempt to construct a superior subject position, he

always discovers to his misfortune that he is inescapably implicated in the system he is trying to control, and his efforts redound on him.

Louis Owens points out that Tosamah, in spite of his facility with language, is as much a fish out of water as Abel is (110); even as Tosamah tries to assert his superiority to Abel through his language, he seems to in some way envy Abel's stoic silence, which serves to emphasize the unstable foundation of the Priest's own identity. By constantly undermining himself, trickster demonstrates the reciprocal way in which deviance and order create each other, and the constructed nature of the antithesis between center and margin: "As Durkheim pointed out regarding crime in *The Division of Labor in Society*, deviant forms of behavior are a natural and necessary part of social life without which social organization would be impossible. Most generally, most semiotic systems are defined in terms of what they are not. Marginality is, therefore, universal in that it is the defining condition as well as the by-product of all ordered systems" (Babcock 157). The trickster is a figure who sets in motion a fertile dialectic between chaos and order, a dialectic in which Abel is unable to participate so long as he is immobilized by his oppositional mindset. Vizenor states that "The trickster upsets the balance, if for no other reason than to keep people alert to their own survival and powers to heal" (qtd. in Blaeser 136). Tosamah's provocation destabilizes Abel, but it also introduces him into a dynamic cycle of healing that will eventually return him to Walatowa, where he will achieve a wholeness that Tosamah, as a marginalized trickster, cannot. That is not, of course, Tosamah's intention, but it is characteristic of trickster that the results of his actions rarely match his intentions, and that the unintended outcome often occurs at his own expense.

The shift in how Abel frames external signs such as whiteness or evil therefore reflects and effects an internal transformation, for Abel's compulsion to define whiteness in a fixed,

oppositional manner is also a reflection of his desire to construct a secure, stable identity for himself in order to compensate for his continued alienation from the Jemez community and his traumatizing experiences in the war. Just as Tosamah's willed surrender to the Word during his sermon leads to a dissolution of his identity, so Abel's newfound perceptual fluidity results in a disintegration of the antitheses that underlie his own identity. Before, Abel "could not understand the sea; it was not of his world" (87), but after he sees the runners against evil and begins to reflect on his relationship with Milly, he finds that "His whole body was breaking open to the roar of the sea" (96). Both Tosamah's rhetoric and Abel's healing in this section embody a *via negativa*, a dissolution of essential, reified categories. But is this *via negativa* itself sufficient for healing? Is it even a positive thing? Tosamah embodies the role of language in creating identity, but he also demonstrates that the indeterminacy of language requires identity to be relational and performative rather than absolute. This postmodern perspective on identity is, for many Native American critics, problematic. Craig S. Womack, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, argues that postmodern skepticism toward history does not yet have a place in Native studies: "It is way too premature for Native Scholars to deconstruct history when we haven't yet constructed it" (3). Womack also quotes correspondence from Abenaki poet Cheryl Savageau:

I never even encountered the word 'essentialist' before coming to grad school, and then it was thrown at me like a dirty word, mostly because I wrote something about Native writers and the land in a paper.... It's just now, when we are starting to tell our stories that suddenly there is no truth. It's a big cop out as far as I'm concerned, a real political move by the mainstream to protect itself from the stories that Native people, African Americans, gay and lesbian

folks...are telling. If everybody's story is all of a sudden equally true, then there is no guilt, no need to change anything, no need for reparations, no arguments for sovereign nation status, and their positions of power are maintained. (3-4)

Cherokee author Jace Weaver echoes the same suspicion: "It is no coincidence that just as postcolonial peoples find the power to assert their own autonomy and personhood, the postmodern theorists of continental Europe and their Amer-European disciples proclaim an end to subjectivity. It serves once again to preserve the myths of the conquest and the literature of dominance" (140-41).

At first, it may seem odd that a critical and philosophical movement dedicated to disrupting the metanarratives underpinning western culture would be rejected by the very people who were colonized by that culture—after all, European colonization of America and other areas is an outgrowth of the ideologies that assert the inherent superiority and unity of western culture. However, writers such as Womack, Savageau, and Weaver sense that postmodernism's corrosion of essential identity does not stop with western civilization, but overflows to encompass all cultural identity, creating an inverse liberalism that effaces ethnicity not through the assertion of underlying similarity but through the imposition of universal difference, a dispersion in which all communal identities are social constructions without any ontological foundation. Against Gayatri Spivak's previously-quoted assertion that "the subject' implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups" (28), Benita Parry insists that "Spivak in her own writings severely restricts (eliminates?) the space in which the colonized can be written back into history," and asserts that postcolonial critics such as Spivak and Homi Bhabha "are submerged in a shared programme marked by the exhorbitation of

discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socioeconomic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis” ( 40, 43). If the deconstructive orientation and appropriative rhetoric that allow colonized people to escape the colonizers’ master narrative ultimately redounds on them, undermining their efforts to create alternate narratives, are they truly liberatory or ultimately disempowering?

As a trickster orator who destabilizes his own discourse even as he speaks it (here we might think again of Wakdjunkaga consuming his own entrails), Tosamah embodies this conundrum. His description of Abel’s life and trial evinces an unstable irony that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to determine his intended target: “You take that poor cat.... They gave him every advantage. They gave him a pair of shoes and told him to go to school. They deloused him and gave him a lot of free haircuts and let him fight on their side. But was he grateful? Hell, no, man. He was too damn dumb to be civilized” (131). Is Tosamah seriously criticizing Abel here or parodying the attitude of the systems that “let him fight on their side” and then, when he returned home, marginalized him? Based on Tosamah’s later treatment of Abel and Benally’s remark that Tosamah is “always going on about Relocation and Welfare and Termination and all” (159), we might think that we should take Tosamah’s statement at face value. On the other hand, the tone and content of the passage undermine its overt meaning—surely shoes, school, delousing, haircuts, and battle do not constitute “every advantage.” In a conversation with Charles Woodard, Momaday suggests that an aboriginal person would find Tosamah’s statements in this scene funny (32-33) but, as with Tosamah’s sermon, we cannot determine if the irony here is verbal or dramatic, intentional or unintentional. When Tosamah describes Abel’s trial, the abrupt shifts in point of view and



voice do not privilege either Abel or the court, but rather embody the absurd collision of the Euro-American and Pueblo worlds:

*A snake*, he said. He killed a goddam *snake*! The *corpus delicti*, see, *he threatened to turn himself into a snake*, for crissake, and rattle around a little bit.... Can you *imagine* what went on at that trial? There was this longhair, see, cold sober, of sound mind, and the goddam judge looking on, and the prosecutor trying to talk sense to that poor degenerate Indian: ‘Tell us about it man. Give it to us straight.’ ‘Well, you honors, it was this way, see? I cut me up a little snake meat out there in the sand.’ Christ, man, that must have been our finest hour, better than Little Bighorn. (132)

By assigning the court’s register to Abel (“*corpus delicti*”), and Abel’s register to the prosecutor (“Tell us about it man”), all the while engaging in an ironic understatement that highlights the unbelievability of Abel’s assertions, Tosamah intensifies the absurdity of the exchange. The passage is an interesting example of anti-dialogism: the mixing of voices here does not lead to a sense of mutual dialogue, but rather reinforces the incommensurability of the speakers. As Catherine Rainwater suggests, “a Euro-American trial is irrelevant to a deed committed by a traditional Indian in a Native context” (96). However, Tosamah not only captures the irrelevance of the trial to Abel, but the unbelievability of Abel’s story to the court. A true trickster, he aligns himself with neither one side nor the other, but performs their difference in a comic manner; recall Momaday’s statement that Tosamah “speaks for both worlds.... But you never know where he is in relation to the reality of any given moment. He wears masks” (Weiler interview 172-73).

What, then, does the juxtaposition of Tosamah's oratory and Abel's suffering on the beach ultimately suggest about the relationship of language to healing? One might conclude that, to the degree that Abel's realizations reflect Tosamah's destabilizing rhetoric, Abel has merely become a man whose identity is as broken as his body. After all, as Vizenor suggests,

tricksters are not moral or functional. Tricksters are not artifacts. Tricksters never prove culture or the absence of culture. Tricksters do not prove the values that we live by, nor do they prove or demonstrate the responses to domination by colonial democracies. . . . Tricksters only exist in a comic sense between two people who take pleasure in a language game and imagination, a noetic liberation of the mind. ("Themes" 70)

And yet Vizenor also asserts that trickster consciousness is "an ideal healing, because it disrupts the opposites and that creates the possibility for discourse that's communal and comic" (qtd. in Blaeser 162). Benally had spoken to Abel previously about the chantways, had tried, along with Milly, to provide Abel with a discourse and a community of healing. But Abel, gripped by self-hatred and rationalizing his alienation by projecting it onto an absolute Other, was unable to take advantage of the resources available to him. Instead, he becomes Tosamah's fool; spurred on by the Priest of the Sun, he re-enacts with Martinez the self-destructive drama of resistance he had already played out with the albino. On the beach, though, Abel's visions give him insight into the nature of evil and his relationship to it, a "noetic liberation" that is reinforced for the reader by Tosamah's trickster rhetoric, which disrupts and undermines seeming opposites. Louis Owens suggests that Vizenor's depiction of the trickster as a figure who constantly disrupts linguistic or cultural stasis implies more than just the indefinite jouissance of postmodernism:

Embodying contradictions, all possibilities, trickster ceaselessly dismantles those imaginative contradictions that limit human possibility and freedom, allowing signifier and signified to participate in a process of “continually breaking apart and re-attaching in new combinations.” In “Trickster Discourse” Vizenor quotes Jacques Lacan, who warns us not to “cling to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever.” At the same time, however, trickster shows by negative example the necessity for humanity to control and order our world. Within the straightjacket of a fixed, authoritative discourse the self is made lifeless...within the unordered infinitude of pure possibility, the self deconstructs schizophrenically, the way trickster’s body is continually coming apart in the traditional stories. Through language, stories that assert orders rather than order upon the chaos of experience, a coherent, adaptive, and syncretic human identity is possible without the “terminal” state of stasis. Every such utterance then becomes not “the telling of a story” but “the story of a telling,” with responsibility falling upon the teller. (*Destinies* 235)

Without becoming Tosamah’s fool and becoming entangled in the trickster’s indeterminacy, Abel would not have been able to participate in the dialectic between chaos and order that trickster embodies in his language and enacts within the tribe. As Owens suggests, this reciprocal relationship between chaos and order is negotiated through story, and more specifically by the process of storytelling, in which the meanings of words are both defined and complicated by their linguistic and social contexts.

After the passage describing Tosamah's peyote ceremony, which in its narrative structure restores the ceremony from the textual to the oral, Abel begins to move beyond his own visions and to reach out mentally to Milly, to not merely witness the workings of his own mind but to make them into a story for her. He calls out repeatedly to Milly (101, 104, 106), and when he remembers goose-hunting with his brother, Vidal, he addresses her directly: "*Oh Milly the water birds were beautiful I wish you could have seen them I wanted my brother to see them...please I said did you see them how they pointed with their heads to the moon and flew through the ring of the moon*" (106).<sup>33</sup> Abel is no longer remembering, but telling; he is no longer isolated, vainly attempting to construct an identity for himself by excluding an Other, but sharing his story with an audience, engaged in a mutual construction of self and other. Although Milly is not actually there, Abel's gesture toward story bespeaks a new attitude toward self, language, and other that transcends absence. Abel's very attempt to convey his experience as story both reflects and effects an internal transformation from the objective to the relational, for in the oral tradition of storytelling, teller, audience, and text engage in a dynamic process of reciprocal creation. Momaday suggests that storytelling is "a realization of oneself in language for the audience and the speaker.... The storyteller and his audience, that's a sacred relationship.... When the storyteller tells his listeners a story, he creates his listener, he creates a story. He creates himself in the process" (Givens interview 89-90).

Momaday's placement of Milly's story immediately after Abel's own attempts at storytelling suggests that Abel's new relational orientation is also reflected in his willingness to be an audience, to allow himself to be created by another's story. Milly's story is one that Abel has already heard, but only now is he really ready to be an audience for it, to have it work its transformational power on him so that he can begin to heal. The fragmentary structure of the

“Priest of the Sun” section reinforces the mutuality of the story’s creation; the abrupt shift to a first-person point of view marks a shift in focalization from the narrator to Milly herself, but within the overall structure of the section, which reflects the disjointed working of Abel’s mind as he lies on the beach, the story can also be read as one of the memories that appear to him, with Abel in effect retelling Milly’s story to himself in her voice, assuming the role of both teller and audience. Milly’s narrative reflects many of the elements of Abel’s own life. Like Abel, Milly’s father adopts an oppositional mindset that results in social isolation, self-alienation, and self-hatred, although the focus of her father’s objectification is not whiteness, but the land itself. As he works his dry, unfertile fields year after year, “*Daddy began to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own very personal and deadly enemy*” (108), and, like Abel, Milly’s father becomes petrified by his Othering: “*I watched him, sometimes saw him at sunrise, far away in the empty land, very small on the skyline, turning to stone even as he moved up and down the rows*” (108). Milly’s father provides Abel with an image of his own isolation from the land, although Abel’s alienation is an effect of inarticulateness rather than a futile attempt to raise crops in barren soil: “He was alone, and he wanted to make a song out of the colored canyon...but he had not got the right words together” (53).

Nonetheless, the images of drought in Milly’s story also echo the oppressive lack of rain that accompanies Abel’s arrival in Walatowa, a dryness that reflects Abel’s repressed hatred and ends only when Abel finally manifests his internal torment by murdering Juan Reyes. Like Abel, Milly is removed from the landscape in which she grew up, is isolated from her family, and has suffered the death of a loved one. She senses their mutual alienation immediately: “He was saying something, trying to tell her why he had come; and suddenly she

realized how lonely they both were, how unspeakably lonely” (107). It is not that Milly’s story offers an explicit resolution to Abel’s own problems; rather, the very act of creating the story together effects an identification that counters the isolating effects of personal tragedy for both of them. If, as Burke suggests, the essence of rhetoric is identification, then Milly’s story is rhetorical in its effect: as a storyteller, she brings about the transformation in Abel that she failed to achieve as a social worker, for immediately after Milly describes Carrie’s death—“*I love you so much,*” *she whispered, and she did not wake up again*”—Abel makes a reciprocal realization: “He had to get up. He would die of exposure unless he got up” (110). While the content of Milly’s story obviously resonates with Abel, it is the *process* of storytelling, the relational re-creation of the self that encompasses both teller and audience, that ultimately enables Abel to stand up and begin “a long and tortuous journey through dark alleys and streets” (110) that will return him to the apartment he shares with Benally and, ultimately, to Walatowa.

### **From Language to Blood Memory**

The universe is made of stories,  
not of atoms. (Rukeyser IX, 3-4)

Abel’s rising from the beach and his movement away from a paralyzing oppositionality are foreshadowed by Tosamah’s blowing of the eagle-bone whistle during the peyote ceremony: “in the agony of stasis they heard it, one shrill, piercing note and then another, and another, and another: four blasts of the eagle-bone whistle. In the four directions did the Priest of the Sun, standing painted in the street, serve notice that something holy was going on in the universe” (101). Tosamah’s ritual blasts of the whistle in the streets of Los Angeles signal that the sacred can survive even within the oppressive confines of an urban environment, just as

Abel can recover his will to survive even after the vicissitudes of relocation. Abel's journey back to Walatowa is foreshadowed as well by Tosamah's final oration, "The Way to Rainy Mountain," which links the personal with the tribal and transforms suffering into story. From the previous night's sermon on John to the present night's, Tosamah has shifted from exposition to story, and in the process he abandons the aggressive irony that characterized his sermon on John, as if the inherently provisional, constructed nature of narrative frees him from having to engage in the complex games required to destabilize modes of discourse which are more putatively "true" (In this sense Tosamah seems to embody Theodor Adorno's thesis that only art can present truths without falling into essentialized, and therefore false, ideologies: "In illusion there is a promise of freedom from illusion"; qtd. in Inwood 8.). Tosamah still functions, trickster-like, as a disturbance in the text, however, because Momaday is still working intertextually, though in this case the writing he is appropriating is his own.

Tosamah's second sermon first appeared as the essay "The Way to Rainy Mountain" in the magazine *Reporter* in 1967, the year before *House Made of Dawn* was published, and it subsequently appeared in Momaday's book *The Way to Rainy Mountain* in 1969.<sup>34</sup> Momaday has commented on his tendency to re-use material from other pieces, saying "I like to build upon things and carry them on. Because I'm writing basically one story, I carry it on from book to book" (Woodard 132-33). This idea that all stories are actually a part of one story echoes Silko's description of storytelling as "something that comes out of an experience and an understanding of that original view of Creation—that we are all part of a whole; we do not differentiate or fragment stories and experiences. In the beginning, Tse'itsi'nako, Thought Woman, thought of all things, and all of these things are held together as one holds many things together in a single thought" (50). By representing the same piece in different contexts,

Momaday emphasizes that Tosamah's sermon is not an isolated text, but a node at which various narrative strands meet to form part of a larger web. The sermon links together different elements of Momaday's oeuvre so that the reader begins to view each work in terms of the others, as parts of a whole rather than as discreet texts.

And, like Momaday's appropriation of La Barre's text on Peyotism, the intertextuality of Tosamah's sermon challenges the autonomy of the written text. In an interview with Kay Bonetti, Momaday states that he doesn't mind when oral stories are transcribed "so long as you understand that when you do transcribe from the oral tradition...it's not by any means the end of the oral tradition. One can keep telling the same story, for that matter, again and again, and it will always be a unique performance. It will never be the same thing twice. So to write it down is simply to place it in another tradition" (146). Repetition is a source of both conservation and innovation within the oral tradition: because a story only exists as it is being told, its preservation depends on repeated tellings, but each recounting of an oral story is also unique because the teller, audience, and context differ, even if only slightly, from telling to telling. In contrast, one does not conventionally re-use written texts without significant alteration; once they are set down, they tend to be viewed as fixed products which are independent of the context of production and reception. Momaday, through Tosamah, treats his written text, "The Way to Rainy Mountain," as if it were an oral text, and by repeating it in different contexts, he demonstrates that his text, like an oral story, is not fixed but dynamic, interacting with its various contexts to produce different meanings. In *Reporter*, "The Way to Rainy Mountain" is a largely autobiographical essay linking Momaday's personal journey toward his grandmother's grave with the tribal journeys of the Kiowas; within Momaday's mixed-genre work, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday's essay becomes less an



autobiographical account and more of a meditation on the relationship between myth, tribal history, and personal story, a relationship that is explored further through the juxtapositional three-part structure of each of the book's following sections. Put into the mouth of the trickster priest Tosamah, the text serves as an exploration of the role of language in establishing cultural and personal identity, and a commentary on Abel's own process of survival. Each shift in context modifies the meaning of the story, so that a full understanding of its significance requires that it be interpreted not only within its immediate context, but in terms of its history within Momaday's oeuvre. Momaday thus imparts to his written text some of the dynamism associated with the oral tradition.

Momaday thought Tosamah was a suitable character to speak his text because of the priest's facility with language:

This section is of course also the introduction to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, which is as you say autobiographical. I had wanted to say some things about the Indian world, and he [Tosamah] became the logical vehicle for it. I could talk about my grandmother and put the words into his mouth. These things were more appropriate for Tosamah, than, I think, for other characters in the book simply because he was what he was—he became himself a kind of oracle in the book; he thought of himself in those terms. He was fascinated by language, took it upon himself to deal in language, to be a spokesman of a kind; to represent his culture in language. And so I took advantage of him in that way. (Morgan interview 50)

Momaday himself plays the trickster by taking advantage of Tosamah, destabilizing the categories of fiction and autobiography in a way that makes the truth of the sermon a function

not of its historical accuracy but of its imaginative power. By publishing the text as a fictional sermon, Momaday also makes the text explicitly rhetorical, though unlike Tosamah's sermon on John, which partakes of the eristic style of western rhetoric even while it critiques it, Tosamah's second sermon is entirely narrative and contains no direct appeals—as with traditional oral storytelling, the audience must participate in constructing the story in order to determine its meaning, and the sermon guides them in their participation, since it is in part a story about the power of story. For the Sermon on John, Momaday specifies a particular audience whom Tosamah addresses, but for the second sermon, Momaday provides, as in the Peyote ceremony, a formal introduction ("*Tosamah, orator, physician, Priest of the Sun, son of Hummingbird, spoke*"; 112), but no setting or audience, so the reader is put into the position of addressee and is required to provide a context for the sermon from either her own experience or from the novel itself.

Given the process that Abel has gone through on the beach, the sermon, whose chiasmic structure crosses a historical story of cultural decline with a personal story of cultural recovery, speaks to the role language plays in allowing the individual to transcend cultural tragedy. The death of the grandmother, Aho, who was born when "the Kiowas were living the last great moment of their history" (113), parallels the decline of the Kiowa, and the speaker's retracing of the Kiowas' journey back to her grave allows him to rejoin his heritage by framing it within story. The transformation in the speaker's perception from the beginning to the end of the sermon is manifested in his description of the land; at the beginning of the sermon, there is a sense of alienation that parallels Abel's own initial isolation: "Loneliness is there as an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one hill or one tree or one man*" (112). But at the end of the sermon, Tosamah describes a

vision of cyclical re-creation that encompasses the entire world: “The sun rose out of the ground.... The orange arc grew upon the land, curving out and downward to an impossible diameter. It must not go on, I thought, and I began to be afraid; then the air dissolved and the sun backed away. But for a moment I had seen to the center of the world’s being. Every day in the plains proceeds from that strange eclipse” (120). It is language, and particularly story, that allows Tosamah’s shift from isolation to holistic perception, and Tosamah’s personal vision of the sun is echoed by the Kiowa’s tribal “journey toward the dawn” (114), which allowed them to escape from the enclosed vision of the mountains to the open horizon of the plains, where “Creation was begun” and the sun has “the certain character of a god” (113, 115). Story does not negate tragedy, but gives it meaning and context, and the merging of the personal story with tribal history and myth allows Momaday (via Tosamah) to finally say, “There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother’s grave. She had at last succeeded to that holy ground” (120). It is because the grave is situated within legend that Aho’s death can be perceived as a succession, and it is because Abel, through the agency of first Tosamah and then Benally, comes to see his own life as a story that he can eventually, at the end of the novel, join the runners after dawn in a scene whose sunrise reflects the one at the end of Tosamah’s sermon. Sitting in his grandmother’s abandoned cabin the previous night, Tosamah looks at the full moon and sees a cricket a few inches away: “My line of vision was such that the creature filled the moon like a fossil. It had gone there, I thought, to live and die, for there of all places was its small definition made whole and eternal” (119). Like the moon, story provides an encircling frame, an angle of vision that allows for even the smallest, most transient things to be seen holistically and in a sacred light.

At the core of the sermon, and at the transition point where the Kiowa leave the mountains and become a people of the plains, is the Kiowa myth of the seven sisters and their bear brother (115-16). Scarberry-García suggests that “This story, for Tosamah, explains the Kiowa’s relationship with the physical landscape” (48), and points out that the motif of transformation and the rise of the sisters into the sky atop Devil’s Tower (called *Tsoai*, or “Rock Tree,” in Kiowa; Momaday “Revisiting” 122) relate to the Kiowa’s complete transformation from a people of the mountains to a people of the plains. But above all the myth emphasizes the absolute necessity of story, without which humanity cannot relate to or live on the land. Tosamah says that “There are things in nature which engender an awful quiet in the heart of Man; Devils Tower is one of them,” and then states, in sentences which are not in the other versions of the “Rainy Mountain” text, that “Man must account for it. He must never fail to explain such a thing to himself, or else he is estranged forever from the universe” (115). Just as story produces an identification of teller with audience, so it produces an identification of teller with universe; as we shall see in the following chapter on Benally’s oratory, identification through story is a central part of the rhetoric of Navajo chantways. Indeed, speech plays a pivotal part in the bear story itself—the brother is “struck dumb” and turns into a bear, but the sisters are saved when “the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air” (115-16). Inarticulateness turns the brother into a destructive force, but the speech of the tree transforms the danger posed by the mute bear into a means by which the sisters transcend the mundane and rise into the sacred, where they become the stars of the big dipper.

Tosamah emphasizes the tribal significance of the story: “From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky” (116), and, in his essay

“Revisiting Sacred Ground,” Momaday writes, “The storyteller, that anonymous man who told the story for the first time, succeeded in raising the human condition to the level of universal significance. Not only did he account for the existence of the rock tree, but in the process he related his people to the stars” (123). Both Tosamah and Momaday emphasize that myth is not merely a primitive mode of explanation that is focused on the past, but a form of symbolic action that functions in the present, continually re-orienting human beings toward the universe and each other, and in that sense myth is rhetorical.<sup>35</sup> Like the bear myth, Tosamah’s sermon not only recounts the story of his own journey and that of the Kiowas, but offers the audience a way of seeing itself in which personal tragedies assume a greater historical and mythical significance. Within Momaday’s novel, Abel himself is associated with the bear; it is Abel’s inarticulateness that makes him a destructive force (though his social marginalization turns that destructiveness inward, so he becomes both the bear and the one threatened), and it is the ability to speak that will enable him to frame his pain in a way that will heal it. Abel’s inarticulateness is more profound than a mere inability to remember the words or structures of his first language; it is his inability to relate his experience to a broader context, to transform it into a story he can tell to another.

As a trickster orator, Tosamah employs a rhetoric that continually undermines absolutes from within; within the “Priest of the Sun” section, his orations implicitly indicate both the nature of Abel’s paralysis and the new orientation toward language and the self which can initiate Abel’s process of healing. As a character, Tosamah’s provocation leads Abel to once more manifest externally his internal self hatred, but this time the result is not, as with the murder of Juan Reyes, a physical imprisonment that reflects Abel’s continued self-entrapment, but a breaking of the body that mirrors the painful shattering of Abel’s oppositional

subjectivity. Gerald Vizenor writes that “The trickster arises in imagination and the trickster lives nowhere else but in imagination” (“Themes” 68). As a displaced Kiowa living in Los Angeles in the 1950s, the imagination is the only resource Tosamah can draw on to survive: “While Abel can go home again, and Benally at least retains the world of his Navajo people intact within his imagination and memory, Tosamah—like the peripatetic trickster/creator of Native American mythologies—has nothing except imagination and language out of which to fashion his world” (Owens, *Destinies* 110). But, as both Babcock and Owens point out, the trickster functions as a part of a larger dialectic between chaos and order, and, at the end of the “Priest of the Sun” section, Abel has only experienced one side of the dialectic; although released from the static mindset that paralyzed him, he is still left with the question of his own identity. I suggested earlier that Momaday employs two complementary orators in his novel, Tosamah and Benally, in order to manifest the dialectical process by which Abel is healed. Tosamah, as a trickster orator, embodies the roles of language and imagination in the creation of the self, but within Momaday’s works there is another facet in the construction of identity that seems, at first, antithetical to the unrestricted freedom of language but is, within the novel, complementary to it: blood memory. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday writes that “The imaginative experience and the historical express equally the traditions of man’s reality” (*Rainy Mountain* 4). By negotiating between imagination, which is liberatory but potentially destabilizing, and blood memory, which is grounded but potentially essentialist, Abel ultimately enacts a dialect of identity that avoids both the schizophrenic deconstruction of the self and the imprisoning adoption of an essentialized subjectivity.

## Chapter 5: A Rhetoric of Ritual and Blood

In N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, both the Kiowa peyote priest Tosamah and Abel's Navajo friend Ben Benally produce oratory that effects Abel's healing, although, oddly, the majority of that speech is not directed at Abel. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Susan Scarberry-García suggests that Tosamah's peyote ceremony is a factor in Abel's healing, even though Abel does not actually hear the prayers while he is lying injured on the beach (107-08), and other aspects of Tosamah's oratory in the "Priest of the Sun" section are also implicitly associated with Abel's decision to rise off the beach and make his way back to the apartment he shares with Ben. Similarly, Ben's narrative in the "Night Chanter" section of *House Made of Dawn* is told about Abel rather than to him, and Ben's memories of the reservation are not, so far as the reader knows, ever conveyed to Abel, though Abel's statement that Ben has spoken to him about "'Beautyway,' 'Bright Path,' 'Path of Pollen'" (87) leaves open the possibility that the stories Ben tells in the "Night Chanter" section of the novel have also been told to Abel. Yet, even without concrete evidence that Abel hears the speeches of Tosamah and Ben, it is difficult to avoid the impression that they do influence Abel's healing even if he is not actually present for them: the juxtaposition of Tosamah's speeches with Abel's rising from the beach, or of Ben's stories with Abel's ability to finally return home and properly prepare Francisco's body after his death, however distant in time or space the events might be, compels the reader to see causal relations that transcend the direct effect of one character's speech on another character.

At the level of story (to use the word as Gérard Genette or Seymour Chatman use it, referring to how events relate chronologically and spatially from within the fictional world of the novel), we cannot justify our impression, but at the level of discourse (the arrangement of

the events as they are represented in the actual text of the story), we cannot avoid it. In his “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” Roland Barthes writes that the ordering of cardinal functions, or key turning points in the text, creates in the reader an inescapable sense of causation regardless of the logical chronological or spatial relationships between events, and that this translogical sense of causation is what powers narrative:

The mainspring of narrative activity is the very confusion of consecution and consequentiality, what comes *after* being read in the narrative as *caused by*; the narrative would in this case be a systematic application of the logical error condemned by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, which might well be the motto of Fate, of which the narrative is in fact merely the “language”; and this “squeezing together” of logic and temporality is achieved by the armature of the cardinal functions. (108-09)

As this chapter demonstrates, Momaday’s use of narrative causation in the “Night Chanter” section of his novel, because it operates outside of the expected relationships of cause and effect, reinforces the Navajo belief that ritual language has the power to cause changes that transcend its immediate context. Ben’s recitation of a prayer from the Nightway to Abel, and Abel’s delayed response at the conclusion of the novel, would be enough to identify Ben as the night chanter of the section’s title, but this chapter will show that other elements in Ben’s narrative are as significant as his prayer in furthering Abel’s process of healing, whether or not Abel hears them. Momaday writes that “A word is intrinsically powerful. If you believe in the power of words, you can bring about physical change in the universe. That is a notion of language that is ancient and it is valid to me” (Woodard 86). Further, this sense of causation is just one effect of a more primary act of faith on the part of the narrative audience, for, as



Barthes asserts, narrative demands that the listener or reader, for the duration of her participation in a story, imagine a world replete with meaning, where all elements, including the order of the story's events, function to actuate the narrative as a whole: "a narrative always consists of nothing but functions: everything in it, to varying degrees, signifies...everything has a meaning, or nothing does" (104). Or, to rephrase Barthes's statement from another perspective, when we approach a narrative, we treat everything within it as if it were imbued with meaning, even if we are not exactly sure what the meaning is—we adopt an orientation that *assumes* meaning. Ben, as a night chanter and orator, draws on the dynamics that underlie Navajo chantways, healing rituals in which both the chanter and patient invoke and become the *Diyin Dine'é*, or Holy People, that existed in the primal time of the Navajo creation. This dynamic of identification allows the patient not only to hear the origin myths but to occupy or re-actualize them, so that, as both audience and protagonist, she inhabits, for the space of the ritual, a world imbued with meaning. Ben's stories function as a form of ritual oratory that recasts both Abel and him as participants in myths that are grounded in the Navajo landscape, and Momaday's juxtaposition of Ben's stories with Abel's return to Jemez compels us to believe that Ben's orations play a central role in Abel's reconnection with the Pueblo landscape.

Gary Witherspoon, describing the centrality of language in Navajo culture, explains that, in many versions of the Navajo creation myth, the Holy People who were present at creation, and who eventually become the inner forms of all material and abstract reality, create the worlds by first thinking them into being and then realizing their thoughts through speech, songs, and prayers. Thought creates form, and speech allows for form to be imposed on substance—the two elements work together, with thought inhabiting speech in the same way

that the Holy People inhabit the elements of the material world: “the consummation or realization of the thoughts of the Holy People did not occur until they were spoken in prayer or sung in song. Thought, the inner form, and speech, the outer form, represent the two basic components of ritual creation or restoration” (31). In fact, in the versions of the Blessingway creation myth recorded by Father Berard Haile, thought and speech are created by the Holy Person First Man out of his medicine bundle before the fifth world, the Navajo land and cosmos, is created:<sup>36</sup>

“Of all these various kinds of holy ones that have been made, you the first one will be [represent] their thought, you will be called Long Life,” he was told.

“And you who are the second one, of all Holy People that are put to use first, you will be [represent] their speech, you will be called Happiness,” he was told.

That much so happened. “You will be [found] among everything [especially ceremonial affairs] without exception, exactly all will be long life by means of you two, and exactly all will be happiness by means of you two.... In all holy places [where ceremonials originate] without exception you will be going about.” (Wyman, *Blessingway* 398; interpolations in original)

In Slim Curly’s version of the creation myth, the two created beings, thought and speech, are described respectively as a boy and girl of unsurpassed beauty. First Man says of the pair, “This is the only time that any of you have seen them, from now on none of you will see them again. Although they are right around you, even though they are taking care of your means of living [sustenance] to the end of your days right around you, none of you will ever see them again” (Wyman, *Blessingway* 112).

In Navajo epistemology and mythology, thought and speech precede the creation of the Navajo world, originating it and controlling its shape and nature so that it reflects the twin ideals of *s2'ah naagháii* (long life) and *bik'eh hózh=* (happiness):

Navajos do not postulate the possibility that language may distort reality or our perception of reality. Such a proposition goes directly contrary to the Navajo scheme of things. This world was transformed from knowledge, organized in thought, patterned in language, and realized in speech (symbolic action). The symbol was not created as a means of representing reality; on the contrary, reality was created or transformed as a manifestation of symbolic form. *In the Navajo view of the world, language is not a mirror of reality; reality is a mirror of language.* (Witherspoon 34; emphasis in original)

Because all things are connected in an unbroken web which is mediated by language, a ritual or story may promote healing even in the absence of the stricken person by acting on the broader context in which he exists. The names that First Man gives to thought and speech, the two beings he created, are, respectively, *S2'ah Naagháii* (Long Life) and *Bik'eh Hózh=* (Happiness); when combined together, these names form a benediction or principle which is central to Navajo life and thought, glossed by Gladys Reichard as “according-to-the-ideal-may-restoration-be-achieved” (*Religion* 47). The Navajo word *hózh=* is central to Navajo thought; translated by Haile as “Happiness,” it is traditionally rendered as “beauty” (when Ben ends his Nightway chant to Abel with “In beauty it is finished” [130], *hózh=* is the word he would use in Navajo), but its meaning is so broad as to be untranslatable in English by a single word. Like the Greek *arete*, it encompasses both moral and aesthetic excellence, embodying all that is good to the Navajo people, but it also refers to a harmonious or beautiful environment:

“Positive health for the Navajo involves a proper relationship to everything in one’s environment, not just the correct functioning of one’s physiology” (Witherspoon 24).

Abel’s spiritual illness, linked to his alienation from his own community and to his trauma from both the war and his relocation to Los Angeles, is a sign of a larger imbalance in the world that is manifested through war and colonization, and the central function of sacred language is to restore balance and order, not only in the individual but in the world of which he is a part. And, just as Abel’s illness is a sign of a discord that encompasses and yet exists beyond him, so his healing is both a sign of a larger restoration of balance within the world of the novel, effected by the rhetoric of Tosamah and Ben, and a symbolic action on Momaday’s part which seeks to embody or effect *hózh=* in the world that is external to the novel.<sup>37</sup>

Scarberry-García suggests that the “imbalances of person and place” associated with modernity “can be at least symbolically reconstituted through the vital imagery and event structure of indigenous stories that tell of the dynamic symbiotic relationships in a given place over vast stretches of time,” and points out that “Critics such as Paula Gunn Allen, Lawrence Evers, Linda Hogan, and Elaine Jahner, among others, have noted that healing takes place both inside and outside of Momaday’s novel, that the power of the narrative extends to the reader” (1-2). Indeed, the prominent Laguna Pueblo writer and critic Paula Gunn Allen states that “I wouldn’t be writing now if Momaday hadn’t done that book. I would have died.... It told me that I was sane...and it brought back my *land* to me” (“Mesa” 11).

Abel’s sickness and his healing are not merely individual matters; rather, they are a function of how he, as an individual, relates to his spiritual, social, and natural contexts.

Speaking of Navajo healing rituals, Sam Gill states,

it must be observed that the physical symptoms of the sickness which motivate the act and their physiological causes are not the primary field intended to be affected by the prayer act. It is not directed toward physical symptoms or to their physiological causes but rather toward the establishment of relationships with spiritual entities, the holy people. The illness suffered is attributed to the impairment of spiritual relationships. The physical symptoms of illness are only the manifestation of this situation. (122)

In the “Priest of the Sun” section of Momaday’s novel, Tosamah breaks Abel spiritually, as Martinez does physically. By provoking Abel to act out his internalized dualism, the peyote priest functions as a poultice that draws to the surface the hidden poisons Abel was able to contain only by paralyzing himself and rendering himself mute. As Ben says, Tosamah “likes to get under your skin; he’ll make a fool out of you if you let him” (159). Scarberry-García posits that “It is possible to think of the structural composition of *House Made of Dawn* as analogous to the process of Abel’s healing” (110), and the fragmented narrative of the “Priest of the Sun” section of the novel reflects Abel’s broken spirit and body, as well as the Tosamah’s destabilizing rhetoric. In the “Night Chanter” section, however, Momaday draws on other narrative strategies that reflect Abel’s reconstitutive healing, a movement toward wholeness that is effected through Ben’s rhetoric, which is not an ironic image of eristic western oratory but rather a representation of Navajo ideas about the relationship between narrative, power, and language.

Tosamah is obviously an orator: as a priest, he addresses a congregation, and his mode of speaking, particularly in his sermons, ironically echoes the conventions of western oratory. Like the white man, Tosamah “deals in words, and deals easily, with grace and sleight of

hand” (*House* 83), even if his stated intention is to criticize the Euro-American devaluation of language. That is, in good part, why Momaday suggests that “the White man, if he listens to any of these characters, will hear Tosamah” (Weiler interview 172). Ben, on the other hand, is not at first glance oratorical; his section of the novel seems to be a rambling amalgam of personal narration, prayer, and myth addressed to an unknown narratee or to himself. Indeed, Ben’s status as a night chanter seems almost ironic, given his assimilative mindset and his statements about the undesirability of returning to his home land. Ben asserts that life in Los Angeles is “better than anything you’ve ever had; it’s money and clothes and having plans and going someplace fast,” while “if you went home there would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of old people, going no place and dying off” (139-40). Ben’s isolation and aimlessness belie his faith in the American dream (a faith he and Milly share), as do his vivid evocations of his earlier life on the reserve. Like Tosamah, Ben is a character in the grip of competing cultural narratives, but whereas Tosamah’s appropriative rhetoric pits one narrative against another in order to undermine essentialism itself, Ben allows the Euro-American and Navajo world views to remain in a paradoxical juxtaposition, on the one hand asserting that “once you find your way around [Los Angeles] and get used to everything, you wonder how you ever got along out there where you came from. There’s nothing there, you know, just the land, and the land is empty and dead” (158), and on the other remembering how, as a child, he was “*right there in the center of everything, the sacred mountains, the snow-covered mountains and the hills, the gullies and the flats, the sundown and the night, everything—where you were little, where you were and had to be*” (138). If Tosamah’s reaction to the antinomies of urban existence is a mutually destabilizing conflation of seeming contraries, Ben’s reaction is a kind of negative capability in which each world view is held in suspension,

isolated from the other. He endures by splitting himself, repeating with equal conviction the narratives supplied to him by Euro-American and Navajo cultures, though in practical terms the material prosperity that is promised him is illusory and the cultural centeredness that his childhood offers him is essential for his survival.

But, although Ben does not question the Euro-American master narrative of material progress, he repeatedly manifests a pattern in the “Night Chanter” section of translating his purely personal narration into another mode of narrative that evokes both myth and ritual: his story of the “49” on the hill leads to his reciting of the Nightway prayer (129); the narration of how he first met Abel leads to the story of his early life with his grandfather (136); thoughts of Milly lead to memories of returning home and meeting Pony at a squaw dance at Cornfields (146); and Angela’s arrival at the hospital leads to her recitation of the bear story she created for her son, and then to Ben’s recital of his own bear myth (163-64). Like Tosamah, who in his sermon gives meaning to the cultural decline of the Kiowa and to his grandmother’s death by framing them within his own journey story, culminating in the perpetually creative rebirth of the sun, Ben takes his stories of urban alienation and, by relating them to mythical narratives, gives them a significance that transcends the tragic and sets them within a larger web of stories that implies wholeness. In fact, the central story that represents Ben and Abel’s hopes of renewal is first told to Abel at the beginning of the “Night Chanter” section and then repeated at its very end, giving the section as a whole a circular structure which makes it a kind of liturgy—a circle of completeness and restoration within the larger circular structure of Momaday’s entire novel. Like Tosamah’s story, Ben’s story to Abel is a story of creation; he first tells it while Abel is recovering in the hospital from his beating by Martinez, and then repeats it the night before Abel returns to Jemez:

I started to talk about the way it was going to be. We had some plans about that. We were going to meet someplace, maybe in a year or two, maybe more. He was going home, and he was going to be all right again. And someday I was going home too, and we were going to meet someplace out there on the reservation and get drunk together. It was going to be the last time, and it was something we had to do. We were going out into the hills on horses and alone. It was going to be early in the morning, and we were going to see the sun coming up. It was going to be good again, you know? We were going to get drunk for the last time, and we were going to sing the old songs. We were going to sing about the way it used to be, how there was nothing all around but the hills and the sunrise and the clouds. We were going to be drunk and, you know, peaceful—beautiful. We had to do it a certain way, just right, because it was going to be the last time. (128-29)

Ben's story is more than just a way of placating or giving hope to Abel—it is transformative, effecting change in both Ben and Abel through a rhetorical process of identification that is characteristic of Navajo healing rituals. In *Navaho Religion*, Gladys Reichard describes how a Navajo chanter actually becomes the Holy People he sings about:

though by effort and training he may get control of supernatural power, he is not a success until he *is* that power. Before taking up the singer's course he is human; while learning to sing he identifies himself with the mythological heroes who experienced dangerous adventures in order to gain the power of the chant.... According to a basic principle of Navajo ritual, identification, the



chanter incorporates within himself the entire complex of godly notions and even has the power to make others like himself, that is, like gods.<sup>38</sup> (6)

This process of identification also includes the patient, as “Most devices of the ritual aid in identifying the patient with the powers invoked” (Reichard, *Prayer* 19). In Navajo chantways, the Holy People are persuaded or compelled to heal the sick individual through a process of mutual identification in which the patient himself becomes a Holy Person, and the context the patient exists in is transformed to reflect the condition of *hózh=* that existed at the creation of the world: “Curing rites...reenact the creation of the world through myth, song, prayer, and drama, and place the patient in this recreated world, closely identifying him with the good and power of various deities.... Ritual identification with them neutralizes the contaminating effect of dangerous things or evil deeds and restores one to the good and harmony of *hózh=*” (Witherspoon 25). Gill points out the centrality of creation myths in Navajo ritual, and in Native American life in general: “The events of creation are somehow paradigmatic, and the knowledge given in the creation stories permeates the life of the people” (18). Navajo ritual, then, is an act of re-creation; it not only identifies the patient with Holy People, but places him in an originary context in which renewal is possible.

Prayers, stories, and drypaintings associated with chantways are forms of symbolic action that effect this identification; for instance, in the Nightway, the following song is sung about *Haashch'éé/tí'i*, a Holy Person whose name is most often translated as “Talking God”:

Now *Hastséyalí* I walk with.

These are his feet I walk with.

These are his limbs I walk with.

This is his body I walk with.

This is his mind I walk with.

This is his voice I walk with. (Matthews 76)

That this process of identification is rhetorical in the classical sense (as an instance of suasive language) is recognized by Reichard, who even categorizes the Holy People according to whether they are persuadable, undependable, or unpersuadable (*Religion* 53). Ritual, for the Navajo, is not magical in the sense that words have a direct effect on material reality; rather, ritual language that seeks to heal is directed at the holy ones who are the inner forms of all material things—recall Gill’s statement that ritual is really about the establishment of relationships. For the Navajo, the universe is filled with personalities, and ritual language is a form of symbolic action that seeks to restore harmony by rhetorically appealing to the Holy People who dwell within all things to use their power for the benefit of the patient: “Navajo ritual is not designed to control the elements directly; it is designed to control the Holy People, who are the inner forms and controlling agents of those elements” (Witherspoon 35). In the Navajo Blessingway, Changing Woman, the Holy Person who is most closely tied to the earth because she continually experiences a cyclical aging and regeneration (Reichard, *Religion* 407), places the Holy People within material things, and informs her children, the Navajo War Twins, that they should “address your petitions to all things, none excepted.... And the Holy People that live in charge of various things, these you should petition properly, the proper songs to them should be sung” (Wyman, *Blessingway* 239).

The term “identification” also, of course, evokes Kenneth Burke’s concept of rhetoric, his assertion that rhetoric is a form of symbolic action that effects identification or “consubstantiality” between interlocutors, a sharing of substance. Substance, for Burke, is not essential or self-sufficient, but relational or contextual, because the essence of any object or

subject can only be defined in terms of other elements within its context, a paradox conveyed by the very etymology of the word itself—while denoting a self-contained essence, the Latin root of substance, *substare*, means “to stand or be under”: “though used to designate something *within* the thing, *intrinsic* to it, the word etymologically refers to something *outside* the thing, *extrinsic* to it. Or, otherwise put: the word in its etymological origins would refer to an attribute of the thing’s *context*, since that which supports or underlies a thing would be a part of the thing’s context” (*Grammar* 23). In Burke’s view, rhetoric effects consubstantiality by modifying the terministic screen (or network of symbols) that the audience uses to define its context; because symbols can never completely reflect reality, but rather inevitably select certain aspects to foreground while deflecting or eliding others (*Grammar* 59), a shift in a terministic screen can lead to an altered perception of the context itself or of the relationships between the elements it encompasses. The resultant changes in substance or identification that accompany the new contextual relations in turn produce new attitudes or actions: “For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (*Rhetoric* 21). From a Burkean perspective, the symbols, whether verbal or material, that are used in chantways to effect identification between the Holy People, the chanter, and the patient function rhetorically because they shift contextual relations to effect new forms of consubstantiality that are more reflective of balance and order. Even the names of the five worlds, stacked one on top of the other in levels, that form the Navajo cosmos reflect the role of language in creating new contexts: the first underworld is called *saad [a’i]*, or “first language,” the second *saad naakii*, “second language,” and so on (Witherspoon 33-34).

Yet symbols themselves are no more autonomous than the things whose substance they define because, as Leslie Marmon Silko writes, “language *is* story” (50)—that is, all words derive their substance from story, which relates them contextually to one another, and to the human and natural worlds. Burke himself suggests that any terministic screen grows out of an originary “representative anecdote,” a paradigmatic story that attempts to reflect reality and which “contains *in nuce* the terminological structure that is evolved in conformity with it. Such a terminology is a ‘conclusion’ that follows from the selection of a given anecdote” (*Grammar* 60). Paradoxically, stories are made of words, but words, insofar as they are infused with relational substance and function rhetorically, spring forth from story. In my introduction to chapter four, I outlined the centrality of story in Native American rhetoric, but story also is central in Native American epistemology. In the oral tradition, a story is not a text that exists apart from the teller and audience, but a context, a dynamic manifestation of the relationship between teller and audience. Indeed, the story brings the teller and audience into being, and it brings into being the world in which they both exist, because it defines a series of relationships that allow subjects and objects to be substantiated. Jeanette Armstrong says that, in the Okanagan language, “Reality is very much like a story: it is easily changeable and transformative within each speaker. Reality in that way becomes very potent with animation and life. It is experienced as an always malleable reality within which you are like an attendant at a vast symphony surrounding you, a symphony in which, at times, you are the conductor” (191).

And, because story is a form of human exchange, it makes knowledge itself contextual, a conduit of relation rather than an abstract set of facts or theories. Lee Maracle contrasts the western concern with decontextualized knowledge with the Native American convention of

presenting knowledge in the form of story, which, because she is speaking out of an oral tradition, Maracle associates with oratory:

We all strive to be orators. An orator is simply someone who has come to grips with the human condition, humanity's relationship to creation, and the need for a human direction that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all things under creation. No brilliance exists outside of the ability of human beings to grasp the brilliance and move with it. Thus we *say* what we think. No thought is understood outside of humanity's interaction. So we present thought through story, human beings doing something, real characters working out the process of thought and being.... If it cannot be shown, it cannot be understood. Theory is useless outside human application. ("Oratory" 238-39)

Knowledge in a traditional oral context is not merely a knowledge of a thing. It is also always a knowledge of where we stand in relation to the thing. Maracle argues that story "humanizes" knowledge, but she is not implying by her statement the assumption of a purely anthropocentric viewpoint; rather, knowledge, filtered through story, effects the relationship of humans with the larger context of creation. Story rhetoricizes knowledge because through it, knowledge becomes a means of constructing increasingly complex forms of consubstantiation not only within the human world but between the human world and creation. As we shall see, this makes the creation story a particularly potent genre, since, when it is told in a ritual context, it not only describes events at the beginning of time but reframes the teller, audience, and world so that they are re-substantiated in terms of the original state of the cosmos. If, following Owens, it is true that in the oral tradition every telling of a story is also always the

story of a telling (*Destinies* 235), then it is equally true that in the oral tradition every creation of a story is also the story of a creation.

Ben's story, told at the beginning of the section to Abel and then again at the end of the section to an unspecified narratee, is, like the chantways, an invocation of a creation story that is itself re-creative. It specifies not only the state that Ben and Abel will be in—Abel will be “all right again” (128), and the two of them will be “peaceful—beautiful” (129)—but also the context in which they will meet. Geographically, they are back on the reserve, in the hills, and the time is just prior to sunrise, which symbolizes the beginning of time. The songs Ben and Abel sing associate the setting with the time of creation, when “there was nothing all around but the hills and the sunrise and the clouds” (129), an originary time when the universe is full of unlimited potential. In “On Indian-White Relations,” Momaday writes,

One of the most beautiful of Navajo prayers begins “Tsegi yei! House made of dawn...” And my father remembered that, as a boy, he had watched with wonder and something like fear the old man Koi-khan-hodle, “Dragonfly,” stand in the light, his arms outstretched and his painted face fixed on the east, and “pray the sun out of the ground”.... His words made one of the sun and earth, one of himself and the boy who watched, one of the boy and generations to come. Even now, along an arc of time, that man appears to me, and his voice takes hold of me. There is no sunrise without Koi-khan-hodle's prayer. (52)

Ritual language confounds cause and effect. In Ben's creation story, do he and Abel sing the sun up, or do they sing in anticipation of and reaction to the rising sun? These questions, which imply a linear conception of time and causation and a rhetoric of influence, are irrelevant in a mythical context—what matters is that orator and audience, singer and sun, language and

world become identified with one another, consubstantial. In another context, Momaday says to Charles Woodard, “That’s what makes storytelling—mythmaking—so interesting. Through storytelling, we can project ourselves outside the confinements of time” (Woodard 197). Ritual language employs a rhetoric of articulation and reciprocity in which control becomes a meaningless concept, because control implies a disarticulation of those events and existents which have become indissolubly merged through ritual. When Francisco, as he is dying, remembers his first time beating the drum for a ceremonial dance, he recalls it as a “perfect act”: “*He had no need of seeing, nor did the dancers dance to the drum. Their feet fell upon the earth, and his hand struck thunder to the drum, and it was the same thing, one motion made of sound*” (181). Language here does not effect identification so much as it manifests an already-existing unity, a perfection which may be forgotten but never ceases to exist. Describing the enactment of myth in Navajo ritual, Farella writes that “We can describe this process as historical, but it is really ahistorical in the sense that what happened is continually happening. That is, the ritual is not a re-enactment; it is a cyclical repetition or continuation. One could say, then, that the process exists across time, which is simply another way of saying that it exists outside of time” (156).

In Ben’s story, this perfection allows for the transformation of both Ben and Abel according to *hózh=*—the story is both an exorcism and a rebirth, as they “get drunk for the last time” (128), riding toward a re-creation which will heal the pain that, until now, has been numbed only by alcohol. The effect of language within Ben’s story becomes transposed outside of the story, as it comes to affect Ben and, in particular, Abel: “You know, I made all of that up when he was in the hospital, and it was just talk at first. But he believed in it, I guess, and the next day he asked me about it. I had to remember what it was, and then I guess I started

to believe in it, too” (129). The story demonstrates how language not only reflects but creates reality, and provides a context in which Ben and Abel can re-imagine themselves. The power of the story to project its dynamic extradiegetically is also reflective of the role that Navajo creation myths play in the chantways, for, as John R. Farella suggests, the sacred stories are “metalogues” in which “the stories which are instruction have as their primary theme diyinii [Holy People] themselves being instructed” (27); in fact, Reichard describes how many of the myths involve protagonists who undergo isolation and hardship, culminating, after the acquisition of ritual knowledge, in the hero himself becoming one of the Holy People (*Religion* 55). The stricken patient, therefore, becomes identified with the Holy People not only in terms of their present powers, but in terms of the healing and transformation the Holy People undergo within the myths. The chanter realizes the myth by enacting the rituals within it, and the patient becomes identified with the figures in the myth who move through knowledge toward wholeness and health.

Like the Navajo myths, which describe and legitimize the chantways of which they are a part, the events of Ben’s story also describe a ritual, evidenced in his final statement that “We had to do it a certain way, just right, because it was going to be the last time” (129): within the story, the actions of Ben and Abel have to reflect the state of perfection they intend to produce and, reciprocally, the perfection of their actions will itself be a sign that the ritual has been successful. Sacred language is always, in Lloyd Bitzer’s terms, a form of symbolic action whose purpose is to respond to the exigencies of a particular rhetorical situation (221), but it also, to use Biesecker’s terms, creates the rhetorical situation by producing subjects and defining relations between them. For both sides of this reciprocal process, meaning cannot be divorced from effect. Gill suggests that, for the Navajo, prayers and myths never exist apart



from their telling within a particular context, and that the significance of sacred language must therefore be expressed not in semantic but in pragmatic terms:

Navajos referred not to what prayers mean or what concepts or doctrines they contain, but rather to what powers the prayers have when intoned in the proper setting. Indeed, they often spoke of the prayers as *persons*. They spoke of what prayers do, rather than what beliefs and ideas they express.... Prayers are never texts, in the Navajo view; they are always acts that are performed for someone for some felt need. (Gill 149-50)

Ben's unexpected belief in his own story is evidence that, while intention may precede language, it is also created by it. Speaking of Black Elk, and of storytelling in general, Momaday says that to the extent the storyteller "re-creates his vision in words, he recreates himself. He affirms that he has existence in the element of language, and his affirmation is preeminently creative. He declares in effect: *Behold, I give you my vision in these terms, and in the process I give you myself*.... He inhabits his vision, and in the telling his vision becomes timeless. The storyteller and the story are one" ("Vision" 27). Like the Navajo chanter who becomes identified with the mythological figures in the songs that he sings, Ben has himself been transformed, caught up in the rhetorical process of identification effected by his narrative.

The mythical status of Ben's story and its function as part of a healing ritual is further reinforced by its positioning within Ben's narration, since his story is preceded by a description of the dancers (albeit drunken) who have started a stomp dance during Abel's final night in Los Angeles, and is followed by Ben's recitation of the prayer for restoration from the Nightway, which, in its initial image of the "House made of dawn" (129), recapitulates the motif of perpetual re-creation and the image of the originary sunrise. Like Ben's story, the prayer is

performative, in John Austin's sense of the word, not only describing but enacting the events expressed in its discourse; to recite the prayer is to bring about a state of identification with the Holy Ones, and to recreate the world. As Sam Gill, in his study of Navajo prayer, suggests, "The structure of the prayer is identical to the effect the prayer seeks, the restoration of health" (122), and the Nightway prayer evinces this union of structure and effect, description and enactment, moving from the creation of the world, expressed in the initial blazon of constituents that comprise the cosmos, to the repeated requests for restoration, and then to the declaration of the prayer's immediate success:

This very day take out your spell for me.

Your spell remove from me.

You have taken it away for me;

Far off it has gone.

Happily I recover. (130)

From the present, the prayer then moves into the future, proclaiming the recovery of *hózh=*, expressed in the restoration of movement, which is a central motif in Navajo culture and language,<sup>39</sup> and in the harmony of the restored patient with a fecund and beautiful natural context: "Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk/Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk/Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk./Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk" (130). The final benediction, "In beauty it is finished," is performative both within the context of the prayer itself, drawing it to a close, and also externally, bringing about a final state of beauty in the patient that reflects the beauty and completeness of the prayer itself. The "House Made of Dawn" prayer is drawn from the Nightway myth of the Stricken Twins, two brothers of unknown paternity, one blind and one lame, who go to the various dwellings of the

Holy People, asking to be healed. After many setbacks, the brothers acquire the proper gifts and are healed, find out that their unknown father is in fact a Holy Person, *Haashch'éé/ti'* (Talking God, who is associated with the sun), transmit the rites the Holy People taught them to the people of the earth, and are finally made Holy People themselves (see Matthews, *Night Chant* 212-65). Abel, blinded by his internal pain, immobilized by his physical injuries, and haunted by his uncertain paternity, closely resembles the twins, and just as they wander far from their homeland in search of restoration and eventually return to become part of the land itself, so Abel, through Ben's stories, prayers, and support, returns to Jemez with the rites that will allow him to begin the processes of healing, reintegrating into his community, and reconnecting with the landscape. Ben's role as chanter and Abel's role as patient are, of course, somewhat irregular, since a full Nightway requires nine days to perform, and the context in which Ben and Abel enact the rite is far from traditional. Nonetheless, as Scarberry-García points out, when Abel, at the very end of Momaday's novel, finally repeats the words of Ben's prayer, as the patient in a Nightway is supposed to repeat the prayers of the chanter, it is exactly nine days after he hears Ben recite the prayer on the hill (33). Just as Tosamah, with his fourfold blowing of the eagle bone whistle in the streets of Los Angeles, asserted that a land-based spirituality can survive even within an urban environment, so Ben shows that the effects of ritual language can transcend a hostile context by identifying those who are oppressed or ill with a broader mythical one.

### **Style, Identity, Ontology**

Like Tosamah, Ben is a character who is scarred by his urban experience and who attempts, in his oratory, to negotiate between an alienating Euro-American context and a centering Native American tradition. Tosamah masterfully appropriates the attitudes and

language of the dominant culture, but, just as the trickster so often goes too far and is caught up in his own foolery, so Tosamah does not seem to be in complete control of his own irony. His bitter word play seems at times a thin skin that barely covers intense feelings of self-loathing. When Tosamah says of Abel, “He turned out to be a real primitive sonuvabitch” (131), it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell if he is speaking from a position of dismissal, envy, or an unstable interaction of the two, and this internal instability is reflected in his public orations, which ironically blur different registers so that cultural boundaries and rhetorical genres are destabilized. In contrast, Ben’s unresolved juxtaposition of world views is unintentionally ironic; his insistence that life in Los Angeles is infinitely preferable to life on the reserve is belied both by his own isolation and poverty, and by the intensity of his memories of his childhood, but Ben seems unaware of his internal contradictions. Whereas Tosamah often employs a rhetoric that mixes registers, Ben shuttles back and forth between two modes of narration, one reserved for Abel’s story, and the other reserved for stories about life on the reserve, and this split suggests that, while Ben is in some ways assimilated, he has also maintained a link with his Navajo heritage and with the land that Tosamah, whose connection with culture and land is totally a matter of imagination, has not been able to. As Ben states, Tosamah cannot really understand Abel’s condition, and especially his state of primal fear, which is associated with supernatural evil: “being so scared of something like that—that’s what Tosamah doesn’t understand. He’s educated, and he doesn’t believe in being scared like that. But he doesn’t come from the reservation. He doesn’t know how it is when you grow up out there someplace.... You grow up in the night, and there are a lot of funny things going on, things you don’t know how to talk about” (132-33). Tosamah mocks Abel’s claim that the albino turned into a snake, and would be incapable of understanding the effect of Nicolás *teah-*

*whau*'s curse on Abel or his fear of the wind moaning in the hole of the rock (12), but Ben knows very well the fear of witchcraft and the relationship between the land and spiritual health, and he also knows how place can determine the tacit presumptions that influence how people perceive and respond to their circumstances: "I guess if we all came from the same place it would be different; we could talk about it, you know, and we could understand" (135). Tosamah, trickster-like, blends the sacred and profane so that the categories, though they are still employed, become problematized, but Ben keeps the sacred and profane as distinct as the two landscapes he occupies, one urban and the other natural. He operates in two different worlds with two different modes of language and two distinct ideologies.

As in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, where different fonts are used for three different voices or modes of speaking, Momaday distinguishes the two modes of Ben's speech typographically, using italics for the stories based on the reserve. But, more significantly, he also shifts the register Ben uses.<sup>40</sup> In the portions of the section that are memories of life on the reservation, the informal, general "you" that Ben often uses suddenly becomes more concrete and personalized, apparently referring to Ben himself, so that Ben becomes both the teller and the audience for his story: "*And you knew that your grandfather was there, looking out for you*" (136). In an interview with Bettye Givens, Momaday suggests that storytelling is "a realization of oneself in language for the audience and the speaker. That's one of the ancient traditions of language far older than writing. The storyteller and his audience, that's a sacred relationship.... When the storyteller tells his listeners a story, he creates his listener, he creates a story. He creates himself in the process" (89). Ben here engages in an act of autopoiesis, transforming himself and his context through his own narration, harkening back to a time when he was "*little and right there in the center of everything*" (138), a phrase which is not only

metaphorical, referring to a internal sense of peace and order, but also geographical and mythical, referring to the Navajo reservation, which is bounded in four directions by sacred mountains (George Blueeyes, a Navajo storyteller and teacher, writes, “*These mountains and the land between them/Are the only things that keep us strong*” [Rockpoint 2]). Ben’s phrase echoes Abel’s realization of spiritual and geographical isolation as he lies immobile on the beach: “He had lost his place. He had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void” (92). Unlike Abel, Ben still has access to language, and he is therefore able, however temporarily, to center and unify himself, to recreate in words the place and person he was when he was living in *hózh=*. The part of Ben that is still linked to his Navajo background and the part that is acculturated and living in Los Angeles remain distinct and yet are brought together temporarily as teller and audience within the context of the stories he tells himself, just as storytelling serves within an oral culture as a way of binding together the individual members of a community, or of granting a broader perspective and significance to the day-to-day experiences of the people by placing the incidents within a mythological context. Ben’s addressing of himself in the second person manifests a painful internal division, but the dynamic of his storytelling effects a tentative unification that Abel is not yet ready to achieve.

The unusual second-person narration has other effects as well, for traces of the universal, informal “you” still cling to the pronoun, giving Ben’s story the air of an assertion: this is how you would react if you were placed in these circumstances; this is the way you would live correctly in this particular landscape. And, of course, the “you” has a special resonance for the readers of Momaday’s novel—as in the Navajo chantways, we are invited to identify ourselves with the protagonist, to occupy, however tentatively, the position of the

unnamed narratee who undergoes the transformational experiences described in Ben's stories, and to partake of the renewal that accompanies them. In addition to the shift in person, the rhythm and style of Ben's speech changes in the reservation stories. The verbal ticks that mark Ben's regular speech ("You know," "I guess") disappear, the language becomes saturated with vivid imagery invoking all the senses, and the cadence of the prose changes, becoming more regular, with frequent polysyndeton giving it a dignified, almost biblical air that is reminiscent of Hemingway: "*And sometimes the flakes came in and melted on the floor around the fire, and you were glad there was a fire. You could hear the wind, and you were little and you could get way down under the blankets and see the firelight moving around on the logs of the roof and the walls, and the floor was yellow and warm and you could put your hand in the dust and feel how warm it was. And you knew that your grandfather was there, looking out for you*" (136), or "*And then the train will head south and east and down on the land, and the sun will come up out there and you can see a long way out across the land*" (148). The paratactic structure of Ben's sentences not only establishes a formal rhythm, but gives the passages an oral flavour (hypotaxis, as Ong notes, being more characteristic of written prose [37-38]), so that Ben becomes through his memories a storyteller working within the oral tradition and conveying, with appropriate care, his own personal myths. When he remembers life on the reservation, Ben's language becomes more evocative, or intentional; he ceases to merely convey incidents, as he does in the rest of the "Night Chanter" section. Not that there isn't art in Ben's telling of Abel's story; there is, but because the prose is effective for the reader almost in spite of Ben's rambling narration, the art is Momaday's, not Ben's. But when Ben recounts his memories, he is far more careful and deliberate in his use of language, like the Kiowa chief and orator Satanta, whose speech Momaday praises as "direct and simple," in contrast to the

language of speakers who, because they are self-conscious or careless, “wants always to approach the truth from a distance or at an angle” (Woodard 94). Like Satanta, whose participation in an oral culture impressed upon him the responsibilities associated with the use of language, Ben, in his reservation stories, shows through his careful description that he is aware of the importance of words. Momaday has warned that

writing engenders in us certain attitudes toward language. It encourages us to take words for granted.... But in the oral tradition one stands in a different relation to language. Words are rare and therefore dear. They are jealously preserved in the ear and the mind. Words are spoken with great care, and they are heard. They matter, and they must not be taken for granted; they must be taken seriously and they must be remembered. (“Native Voice” 15)

In the passages of the “Night Chanter” section that refer to Navajo land, Ben adopts the ethos of the oral storyteller and becomes an orator speaking to a public of one in a spare, measured style that invests his personal memories with due significance and respect.

Ben’s Senecan style contrasts with Tosamah’s own way of speaking, which, as Dagmar Weiler suggested in an interview with Momaday, “is a little convoluted.... There is this hipster language, such as you hear in caricatures of almost all Black preachers” (172). Tosamah’s oratory, particularly in his sermon on John and his opening of the Peyote ceremony, is far less formal than Ben’s. Tosamah assumes a variety of seemingly incompatible rhetorical stances spanning “conviction, caricature, [and] callousness” (81), deliberately flouts decorum (the evangelist John is “That cat” [82]; Peyote is a “little old woolly booger” [97]), and rapidly shifts without warning between levels of diction or even entire registers, from the anthropologizing of La Barre to the storytelling of his grandmother. In a sense, Tosamah is far



more present as a speaker during his oration than Ben is in his, but his vivid presence is paradoxical because it is not Tosamah as a subject that either the audience at the Rescue Mission or the reader encounters so much as subjectivity itself in the process of being perpetually constructed and exploded through language, just as trickster himself is so often dismembered and reconstituted in trickster tales. Even when Tosamah's mode of speech most closely resembles Ben's, as in his recounting of his grandmother's story or his narrative about returning to his grandmother's grave, we cannot be certain that he is not, as Momaday puts it, "wearing masks" (Weiler interview 173), for the measured tones and respect for the land are difficult to reconcile with his sermon on John or his comments about Abel. Tosamah is not a fixed individual but a constantly renewed potentiality, and he demonstrates the unbounded power of the imagination and language to construct subjectivity and confound the static categories that the colonizer assigns to the colonized. In the process of trying to accommodate itself to his rhetoric, Tosamah's audience, like Abel, also realizes the role of language in constructing identity and the potential of the imagination to create new identities. But Ben offers something else to Abel, and the different roles that the two characters play in Abel's healing are reflected in their different styles of oratory.

In his *Rhetoric of Religion*, Kenneth Burke suggests that

The subject of religion falls under the head of *rhetoric* in the sense that rhetoric is the art of *persuasion*, and religious cosmogonies are designed, in the last analysis, as exceptionally thoroughgoing modes of persuasion. To persuade men towards certain acts, religions would form the kinds of attitudes which prepare men for such acts. And in order to plead for such attitudes as persuasively as possible, the religious always ground their exhortations (to

themselves and others) in statements of the widest and deepest possible scope, concerning the authorship of men's motives.

In this sense, the subject of religious exhortation involves the nature of religion as a rhetoric, as persuasiveness. (v-vi)

Burke suggests that terms associated with religion are an especially potent resource for understanding language, since it is precisely at the point where language approaches the ineffable that its characteristics and limitations become most evident: "In being words about so 'ultimate' or 'radical' a subject, it almost necessarily becomes an example of words used with thoroughness" (vi). Extending Burke's observation, the words used to persuade or influence divine forces might also be considered the *ne plus ultra* of rhetorical action, since they are based on and reinforce presumptions which not only concern the relationship of human beings to each other, but the relationship of the human to the absolute. David Aberle, in his study of Peyotism among the Navajo, contrasts the styles of prayer used in Peyotism and traditional Navajo chantways:

The peyotist's prayers combine a stress on spontaneity with a relatively stable pattern within which this spontaneity is sought. There is no fixed order in the sequence of blessings requested, and of course what is sought varies from meeting to meeting and speaker to speaker.... Traditional Navajo prayers, on the other hand, have a rigidly fixed formula. Errors and departures from that formula may result not only in the failure of the prayer to achieve its ends, but in damage to the patient or to the singer. They are compulsive formulae, the correct use of which compels the favorable action of the spiritual powers.... The prayers of the peyotist, then, express a feeling of helplessness. The language

and the tears clearly indicate this. But the prayers are intended to alleviate the anxiety of helplessness through the aid of an all-powerful God. The ritual incantations of traditional Navaho ceremonialism, however, compel, rather than appeal to the spirit world. (153-54)

It is a truism that rhetorical discourse is always adapted to the audience, and underlying these two styles of prayer is a difference in the conception of the divine audience. As Aberle points out (195-96), for the Peyotist, the divine power is transcendent, existing outside of nature, and humanity is itself a part of nature. The divine power is also omnipotent, which means that, although it is open to humble appeals, it is not compellable, and it is morally perfect, and therefore always justified in its actions and worthy of worship. For the traditional Navajo, however, divine power is immanent, since the Holy People are the inner forms of all natural phenomenon, and, although the Holy People are powerful, they are not omnipotent and can be compelled through rituals to act on behalf of a patient. Furthermore, the violations that cause the Holy People to turn against a person are not a matter of moral transgression but of ritual contamination, a failure to observe any one of the many social taboos within Navajo culture: “If a man were to commit murder, he might have ghost trouble—but so might he if he worked in a hospital or happened to burn wood from a hogan where someone had died” (Aberle 196).

The spontaneous, emotional prayers of the Peyotist reflect the centrality of her individual communion with her God, and they also serve as a sign to God of the sincerity and fervour of her devotion, since the efficacy of her prayers depends in good part of the state of her soul. In contrast, the strict form of Navajo prayer and ritual reflects a relationship with the divine that is mediated through history, culture, and tradition, since it is the violation of cultural taboos that disturbs the relationship with the divine and culturally prescribed rituals

that repair it. Even a devout heart cannot compensate for a mistake in a ritual; instead, the ritual, however far along, must be abandoned and the potential damage contained by the performance of yet another ritual, the Blessingway (Reichard, *Prayer* 12; Matthews, *Legends* 24; Wyman, *Blessingway* 5).<sup>41</sup> Perhaps one could say that, just as there is no word in Navajo for religion because the religious and social realms are unified rather than distinct (Kluckhohn and Leighton 122), so there is no gap between the moral and the social, or the spiritual and the natural. For the Peyotist, God can exist without humanity or nature, and so there is no predictable way to ensure the effectiveness of a prayer, but for the traditional Navajo, all beings, whether divine or material, are part of a unified web, and are subject to the principles that allow the web to exist. The chantways, properly performed, allow the chanter and patient to realize the patterns in the myths that led to the creation of the world and the healing of its inhabitants, but in order to effect this identification, the chant must be perfect.

Although Tosamah is a rather eccentric example of a peyote roadman and Ben is in many ways an uncharacteristic night chanter, the patterns of ritualistic rhetoric identified by Aberle and others do help to explain their respective roles as orators in the novel. For Tosamah, it is not God but the Word itself that is transcendent; when he says that John's proclamation, "in the beginning was the Word," is "the Truth, the whole of it, the essential and eternal Truth, the bone and blood and muscle of the Truth," but that the Truth became "overgrown with fat, and fat was God" (82), he implies that the originary point and underlying structure of the world is not a unified principle or a unifying being, but rather the uncontrollable prolixity of language.<sup>42</sup> As Tosamah struggles to reframe John's insights, we again see evidence of Gill's assertion that creation myths are paradigms that determine ways of perceiving and living (18), for this assertion of the Word's primacy is what gives Tosamah the

freedom, even within the economic and cultural constraints that bind him in his urban environment, to endlessly recreate himself through language.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Momaday views identity, in part, as a construction of the imagination which is realized through language; Tosamah embodies Momaday's view for the reader through his ever-shifting oratory, in which he is constantly constructing new identities, and also for Abel by tormenting him until he commits the near-fatal action that finally makes apparent to him the futility of his static, binary mindset. Tosamah makes reference to the land in his orations, but the land he refers to is also a construction of the imagination, an internalized image, realized through language, that re-centers the displaced people who attend his urban mission. Even Tosamah's journey to his grandmother's grave at Rainy Mountain is a conversion of a geographical landscape into an imaginative one. Tosamah says that the motivation of his journey was to "see in reality what she [his grandmother] had seen more perfectly in the mind's eye" (114) and, after arriving at his grandmother's grave, Tosamah says, "Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away" (120). Having traced the journey of the Kiowa and made their story his story, he now sees the landscape in the same way she does, in the mind's eye, and through his narrative, his congregation also partakes of his restorative internalization. Peyotism is not associated with a particular geographical landscape or tribe; as Edward Anderson states, its "pan-Indian emphasis" resulted in a reconfiguration of aboriginal identity, a movement away from the concrete specifics of a particular geography or set of blood relations to a more abstract conception of ethnicity that more closely resembles Benedict Anderson's imagined community: "The cult provided a definite sense of racial importance to a people in a transitional state.... Identity as an ethnic rather than a tribal group provided a new measure of

dignity and confidence” (34). Associated with this new emphasis on ethnicity rather than tribalism were the development of syncretic religious ceremonies that could accommodate members from different tribes, and a shift from set rituals in which social structures mediated the relationship to the divine to spontaneous prayers that directly linked the individual to the divine.

*House Made of Dawn*, with its mixture of Pueblo, Navajo, and Kiowa culture, manifests ethnicity rather than tribalism; in this way, it reflects its author, a mixed-blood Kiowa with Cherokee and Euro-American heritage, raised in part in a Pueblo community. In conversation with Charles Woodard, Momaday says that his own idea of himself is more pan-Indian than specifically Kiowa; while he attributes this more generalized sense of identity in part to the Kiowa’s lack of a land base and to his upbringing among different Native tribes, including the Jemez Pueblo and the Navajo, he also suggests that a general decline of the reservation system and increasing cross-tribal interaction leads many young Native Americans to identify less with their tribes and more with a general sense of Indianness (Woodard 37-38). From Momaday’s perspective, history is not a determinative matrix that grants an essential identity; rather, history merely supplies the material from which the imagination can work. Momaday, looking back on his later childhood, writes in *The Names*:

I invented history.... The past and the future were simply the large contingencies of a given moment; they bore upon the present and gave it shape. One does not pass through time, but time enters upon him, in his place. As a child, I knew this surely, as a matter of fact; I am not wise to doubt it now. Notions of the past and future are essentially notions of the present. In the same

way an idea of one's ancestry and posterity is really an idea of the self. About this time I was formulating an idea of myself. (*Names* 97)

Like the youthful Momaday, Tosamah is always formulating ideas of himself. Yet, for Tosamah, the beginning is always the Word, and, as his oratory reveals, any act of the imagination, whether it be the creation of a landscape or of an identity, is always as tentative and unstable as the medium through which it is realized. Tosamah is liberated by language, but his hostility to Abel and other “long-hairs” from reservations betrays an envy of their connection to community and land, and suggests that to some degree he perceives himself, to use Sartre's potent phrase, as “condemned to be free” (41), unable to arrest the process of displacement that grants him his power of subversion. Owens asserts that, “While Abel can go home again, and Benally at least retains the world of his Navajo people intact within his imagination and memory, Tosamah—like the peripatetic trickster/creator of Native American mythologies—has nothing except imagination and language out of which to fashion his world” (*Destinies* 110). Like Aberle's Peyotist, whose prayers are unbound by cultural constraints because their audience transcends the specifics of a particular social milieu, Tosamah, for whom the fecund word precedes all else, does not display any set form or stance in his speech. One might say with some justification that instability and irony are themselves the only constants in Tosamah's rhetorical efforts as he attempts to disrupt the dominant Word of Euro-American culture without simply reversing the terms of its domination.

For Ben, however, language, is not transcendent; however powerful and creative it might be, it is rooted in a very real landscape: *Diné Bikéyah*, Navajo country. Reichard explains that the idea of land in Navajo chantways is very concrete, and that knowledge of divine matters requires an intimate knowledge of the geographical land:

The Navajo believe that the geography of this world is duplicated from the lowest world to this and into each world of the sky and lands beyond the sky.... Every myth fully recorded has a long list of place-names.... A satisfactory understanding of this geographical symbolism would involve exact knowledge of every rock and tree of the Navajo territory, a correlation of the numerous ceremonial names for each place and an understanding of the mythological significance of each. (*Prayer* 26)

From a Navajo perspective, then, it is not the landscape “in the mind’s eye” that is most perfect. Instead, a specific knowledge of the actual landscape is necessary in order to understand and control the divine forces that are immanent within it. If Tosamah’s conception of the originary Word reflects the Peyotist’s transcendent deity, then Ben’s use of language reflects the traditional Navajo idea of the organic link between the natural and the divine. In the Blessingway myths that describe the creation of thought and language, both figures, like the other Holy People, are made inner spirits of the earth when the fifth world is created (Wyman 398); in Slim Curly’s version of the myth, they become the voices of birds as well as humans (Wyman 112). The implication is that thought and speech not only influence physical reality, but are themselves immanent in or derived from the land, which, in its totality, embodies the idea of *hózh=*. Writing from the perspective of another indigenous tradition, Okanagan writer and critic Jeanette Armstrong describes her own understanding of the relationship between language and landscape: “As I understand it from my Okanagan ancestors, language was given to us by the land we live within...it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die” (175-76).



Armstrong is not here merely speaking of language in a metaphorical sense, but of an actual link between human languages and the landscapes in which they are developed:

The language spoken by the land, which is interpreted by the Okanagan into words, carries parts of its ongoing reality. The land as language surrounds us completely, just like the physical reality of it surrounds us. Within that vast speaking, both externally and internally, we as human beings are an inextricable part—though a minute part—of the land language.

In this sense, all indigenous peoples' languages are generated by a precise geography and arise from it. Over time and many generations of people, it is their distinctive interaction with a precise geography which forms the way indigenous language is shaped and subsequently how the world is viewed, approached, and expressed verbally by its speakers. (178-79)

Like the Navajo, who believe that thought and language are embedded in the land and must be drawn from it, Armstrong suggests that each landscape supplies a language that inhabitants must learn if they are to survive in it and continue to be a part of it.

This centrality of the land in the creation of language, and subsequently in the creation of identity, is embodied in another prominent concept in Momaday's work which seems at first antithetical to imagination—blood memory. Chadwick Allen asserts that blood memory “appears in all of Momaday's significant work to date, and in many ways... has become his literary and imaginative signature” (178). In his description of the landscape around Walatowa in *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday develops the concept of “tenure in the land,” first applying it to the animals in the landscape, and then to the Pueblo people themselves, as opposed to the latecoming animals and people who have “an alien or inferior aspect, a poverty of vision and

instinct, by which they are estranged from the wild land, and made tentative” (52). On the one hand, Momaday privileges the imagination and language, reinforcing through the character of Tosamah his statement that “An Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself” (“Man Made of Words” 49). On the other hand, Momaday’s conception of blood memory provocatively suggests that, through prolonged exposure to a particular landscape over generations, an essential identity becomes encoded in the very genes of different peoples: “the Kiowa carries in his blood the meaning and full development of the plains culture” (qtd. in Schubnell 148).

Arnold Krupat, in *The Voice in the Margin*, takes Momaday to task on both fronts. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Krupat accuses Momaday of an asocial monologism for emphasizing the transcendence of the Word, and he also accuses him of racism for formulating the idea of blood memory, characterizing Momaday’s remarks on blood memory as “The newer fashion in mystification,” and asserting that critics who excuse or ignore such remarks suffer from an “inability to believe that someone as talented and intelligent as Momaday could actually mean the absurdly racist things he says. I don’t know what Momaday actually means: the evidence of his writing, however, is overwhelmingly if unfortunately racist in its statement” (13-14). There is indeed evidence in Momaday’s works that suggests he considers blood memory to be a physical reality. In the essay, “On Indian-White Relations,” Momaday suggests, without any apparent irony, that “The Indian and the white man perceive the world in different ways,” and remarks upon “the existence of intrinsic variables in man’s perception of his universe, variables that are determined to some real extent on the basis of his genetic constitution” (50-51). When Charles Woodard asks Momaday in an interview how it is he can

speak in such a matter-of-fact way about the first people crossing the Bering straight into America, Momaday replies,

It is part of my racial memory.... I think that each of us bears in his genes or in his blood or wherever a recollection of the past. Even the very distant past. I just think that's the way it is.... I've known old people who bear what one of my friends calls "the burden of memory," and it's not simply memory of what happened in their lifetimes. It goes far beyond that. In the case of the Kiowa, it's a remembering of the migration. A remembering of coming out of the log. A remembering of crossing the Bering land bridge. (Woodard 20-21)

Momaday's remarks are provocative, but Krupat errs when he treats these two perspectives on identity in isolation—he identifies the two motifs, but doesn't consider how odd it is that they are both present throughout Momaday's work, given that they are seemingly antithetical. Imagination and blood-memory do appear as twin themes in Momaday's work, but almost always in a dialectical relationship. As Allen points out (186), when Momaday describes his birth in *The Names*, he juxtaposes a notarized birth document certifying that he is "of 7/8 degree Indian blood" with the story of "a day in the life of a man, Pohd-lohk, who gave me a name" (42). A similar juxtaposition occurs at the beginning of the autobiography, where Momaday first presents a genealogical tree containing pictures and drawings of his ancestors, with his picture at the bottom, and then begins the text proper of the autobiography with the statement "*My name is Tsoai-talee. I am, therefore, Tsoai-talee; therefore I am*" (i). Is it genealogy or language that is the origin of Momaday's story, and of Momaday himself? In *House Made of Dawn*, the figures of Tosamah and Ben embody, respectively, the twin perspectives of imagination and blood-memory, but the two orators are also complementary

figures who show how imagination and blood-memory are intertwined: it is Tosamah, after all, who says that though his grandmother “lived out her long life in the shadow of Rainy Mountain, the immense landscape of the continental interior—all of its seasons and sounds—lay like memory in her blood. She could tell of the Crows, whom she had never seen, and of the Black Hills, where she had never been” (114), and it is Ben who recognizes the centrality of language in constructing reality when he says that the relocation people aren’t much help because “They have a lot of *words*, and you know they mean something, but you don’t know what, and your own words are no good because they’re not the same; they’re different, and they’re the only words you’ve got” (139). Though Tosamah worships the Word and lives by it, he nonetheless asserts the centrality of his grandmother’s tribal heritage in the formation of her identity, and though Ben survives in Los Angeles by drawing on his link to the Navajo people and their landscape, he nonetheless recognizes that it is language that allows him to realize that connection.

Further, Abel’s sickness involves both imagination and blood, and his healing requires their dialectical integration. While Abel’s self-alienation and dislocation from his community are exacerbated by his war experiences, Abel’s position within Jemez is ambiguous even before he leaves for war, most immediately because of his unknown father: “His father was a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal somehow foreign and strange” (11).<sup>43</sup> Abel’s unknown father raises questions about the role of blood in constructing identity. Abel’s mother is, of course, absent as well, killed by the same unnamed disease that later claims his brother Vidal, but Abel knew his mother and knows that through her he is linked to Francisco and Walatowa itself. Abel’s missing father represents a gap in the blood that prevents him from defining himself in purely familial or even

tribal terms and leads, especially after the trauma of his military service, to a destructive indeterminacy of identity. Imagination should rush in to fill the gap between Abel and Francisco, but even as a child Abel lacks the substance of imagination: language. Given Abel's broken blood-line, the question of whether he has tenure on the land is intimately linked with his ability to speak, to assume the language that the land offers to him, but when he first arrives in Walatowa, he is unable to speak to his grandfather, and unable to speak from or to the land: "He wanted to make a song out of the colored canyon, the way the women of Torreón made songs upon their looms out of colored yarn, but he had not got the right words together. It would have been a creation song" (53). As opposed to Ben, Abel is unable to recreate himself or his landscape through words, and so he remains incomplete.

Robert M. Nelson suggests that in the works of Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and James Welch, "the physical landscape functions...as a dependable constant: the land as a place provides them with a referential framework that lies, undistorted by the imaginative operations of either the writers or their protagonists, 'outside' the postmodern temperament but, as things develop in each of these fictions, as the basis for recentering of self-consciousness as well" (6). Nelson asserts that Native American literatures often work from a set of cultural assumptions about the land that runs counter to the linguistic bias of western society and, especially, of contemporary literary criticism:

Generally speaking, literary criticism resists the notion that the land has a life of its own and tends instead to proceed as though vitality were a quality imposed on the land by human imagination but not vice-versa. This sort of preemption of significance, or privileging of the human imagination, is one of the dangerous shortcomings of the Euroamerican humanistic tradition in general and of a

conventional humanistic approach to this literature in particular: presupposing and then magnifying the shaping power of people in these stories limits our ability to recover the *pre*-human context of the human condition in these stories.

(8)

From Nelson's perspective, the exclusive privileging of imagination, language, or social context is a form of solipsism that blinds critics (and, possibly, Euro-Americans in general) to the primacy of the land in Native American lifeways and literature. Tosamah's mode of speaking and healing, based entirely on language and the imagination, might meet the approval of a postindian critic such as Gerald Vizenor, but it is also potentially subject to the criticism of writers like Womack, Savageau, and Weaver (see Chapter 4), who object that the postmodern dissolution of subjectivity is a kind of inverse assimilation, in which the imposition of a universal difference, founded in linguistic instability, delegitimizes the efforts of colonized peoples to define themselves. Tosamah's destabilizing rhetoric is perpetually ironic, and his postindian identity is a system of personae so dynamic and complex that not even the Priest of the Sun can tell mask from face.

But, while Ben is a source of dramatic irony when he says, in direct contradiction to his own isolation and impoverishment, that Los Angeles is a place of infinite potential, his language when he remembers the Navajo world is neither verbally nor dramatically ironic, and he challenges the linguistic self-reflexivity that governs Tosamah's shifting subjectivities by embodying, explicitly and implicitly, the concept of blood memory, which asserts the primacy of land and blood in the construction of identity. Tosamah's characterizations of Abel both draw on and ironize the racist language sometimes directed at Native Americans ("longhair," "savage"), but Ben's initial orientation toward Abel is in terms of blood and land:

We were kind of alike, though, him and me. After a while he told me where he was born, and right away I knew we were going to be friends. We're related somehow, I think. The Navajos have a clan they call by the name of that place.... It's a pretty good place; there are mountains and canyons around there, and there's a lot of red in the rocks. Except for the mountains, it's like the land south of Wide Ruins, where I come from, full of gullies and brush and red rocks. And he didn't have any family, either, just his grandfather. (135-36)

It is the location of Abel's birth that, for Ben, ensures their closeness; their personal resemblances are echoed by the resemblances between the specific landscapes on which they were raised. Tosamah's landscape, filtered through language, becomes an imaginative creation, but Ben refers to a specific, concrete geographical place which, throughout generations of human tenure, creates tribal blood relationships that are more concrete than those accompanying an imagined community. Ben asserts his blood relation with Abel on a number of levels. Abel's unknown father was possibly a Navajo, and that is a potential source of common blood, but, in any case, their respective tribes also have a unique shared history. In the late seventeenth century, the Jemez Pueblo took shelter with the Navajo during warfare with the invading Spanish; while most of the Pueblos eventually returned home, some decided to stay with the Navajo, and eventually became the Coyote Pass clan (Sando, "Jemez" 422; Ellis 14).<sup>44</sup> Ben's role in the restoration of Abel is, in a sense, not only mythically but historically circular, since, like his ancestors, he offers Abel a temporary shelter from the threat of colonization prior to a journey back home.

Ben also notes that he and Abel have both lost parents and have both been raised by their grandfathers. This establishes a further connection between them, not only in terms of life

experience, since they both suffer a gap in the blood that represents the challenge of negotiating between the traditional and modern worlds, but in mythological terms, since both Navajo and Pueblo cultures have major myths in which twin brothers who do not know their true father go through a series of trials, eventually coming to know their fathers and assume their places as Holy People who are immanent in the land. Momaday draws extensively on Navajo and Pueblo mythology to link Ben and Abel. Scarberry-García has identified three myths involving twins that are especially significant to Momaday's novel: 1) the myth of Navajo Twin War Gods, Monster Slayer (*Nayénêzganí*) and Born for Water (*To 'badzístsíní*), who are, in most versions of the myth, the children of the Sun and Changing Woman, and who together slay the various monsters who live in the early days of the Navajo creation; 2) the myth from the Nightway of the stricken twins, one blind and one lame, referred to above; and 3) the myths of the Pueblo War Twins, which are similar to the myths of the Navajo Twin War Gods, and may have provided the foundation upon which the Navajo myths were created.<sup>45</sup>

Scarberry-García concentrates mostly on relating the twin myths to Abel and his brother Vidal, but it is also possible to use these myths to examine the relationship between Abel and Ben. Particularly suggestive is Reichard's statement that the elder twin of the war gods, Monster Slayer, "represents impulsive aggression, whereas Child-of-the-Water [Reichard's translation of *To 'badzístsíní* ] represents reserve, caution, and thoughtful preparation. Monster slayer kills for the future benefit of mankind; Child-of-the-Water collects the trophy and provides for its ritualistic utility" (*Religion* 448-49). As Joseph Deflyer has pointed out, Abel can be related to Monster Slayer, and Ben to Born for Water, since Ben transforms, through his prayers and stories, the aggressive actions of Abel so that they become ritualistically significant (205-11). Further, while Monster Slayer goes out to battle his foes,



Born for Water sometimes stays at home, monitoring the situation of his elder brother through a magic prayer stick which lights on fire when Monster Slayer is in danger (Matthews *Legends* 117), a situation which parallels Ben's three-day wait for Abel when he goes to confront Martinez (though, of course, Ben can only speculate about the danger Abel is in).

Further, if we assume that Abel is the elder brother and Ben the younger, it should be noted that in the Pueblo legends about the two brothers, the eldest brother regularly asserts his right to be the first to attempt a feat or trial but often fails, while the younger brother, using a less impulsive approach, subsequently succeeds. This contrast between an aggressive impulsivity and a more placid mentality is reflected, respectively, in Abel and Ben; whereas Abel is ultimately unable to meet the challenges of urban integration, Ben, who is more flexible and open, achieves a semblance of adaptation, though at the cost of a split identity. These mythological parallels reinforce the theme of relation through blood and land since the twins, who are the mixed blood children of human mothers and a divine father (the sun), become Holy People themselves after their trials, identified with various landscapes and natural forces. The myths are, in part, the stories of a recovered relationship with the land, the full realization of a heritage, embodied in the twins' parentage, that encompasses the human, divine, and natural. This reclaiming is both described and enacted through Ben's ritual recounting of his childhood memories, and, as we shall see, through Abel's funerary rites for Francisco and his final run at dawn. Finally, the very fact that Ben is a chanter for Abel makes them related, since in Navajo tradition, the chanter and the patient become relatives after the ceremony is completed, and call each other thereafter by kinship terms (indeed, if a chanter sings over his own wife, "they must thenceforth behave to each other as close relatives between whom any sexual contact would be strictly forbidden"; Kluckhohn and Leighton 137).

Thus, Ben sees himself as related to Abel through a complex, mutually reinforcing system of blood, geography, myth, and ritual that is more concrete than the abstract categories of imaged communities.

### **Memory as Ritual Oratory**

Like Navajo chantways, Ben's stories heal and transform through a multi-layered process of identification. On the most obvious level, Ben, who is currently dislocated and deluded by the gilded attractions of urban life, identifies through his memories with a younger self who is aware of the importance of both landscape and culture, and who still feels culturally centered. In this way he establishes a continuity between his current and past selves, and between his experience of modernity and his traditional culture and values, though that integration is countered by his rote recital of the Euro-American metanarrative of material success. Even if he is removed from his center, the knowledge that there *is* a center is a sign of his potential restoration, just as Abel's realization that he had forgotten that he was once at the center (92) is the beginning of his healing. But beyond this level, Ben's stories, in their content and in the way they are told, reach back to Navajo creation myths, so that he becomes identified not only with a younger self but with the Holy People who are immanent in the land, and therefore with the land itself. This identification not only confirms the existence of an original grace which is lost and might someday be regained (which is more of a linear, western conception of time, embodied, for instance, in the biblical movement from the garden to the fall to the creation of the celestial city), but actually transforms Ben's current situation so that it becomes mythical, part of an unending cycle of creation. In *The Sacred & the Profane*, Mircea Eliade contrasts mythic time with regular time:

*By its very nature sacred time is reversible* in the sense that, properly speaking, it is a *primordial mythical time made present*. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, “in the beginning.”...sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable. From one point of view it could be said that it does not “pass,” that it does not constitute an irreversible duration.... With each periodical festival, the participants find the same sacred time—the same that had been manifested in the festival of the previous year or in the festival of a century earlier; it is the time that was created and sanctified by the gods at the period of their *gesta*, of which the festival is precisely a reactualization. (68-70)

Ben, when he tells the stories of his childhood as a form of ritual oratory, is not engaging in nostalgic reminiscence, but is rather affirming that his past and present are coeval with the original mythical time of Navajo creation. When he describes how, as a child, he went out of his hogan at dawn after a night of snow and saw that “Everything was changed. It was bright and beautiful all around, and you felt like yelling and running and jumping up and down” (136), the ritual phrase “beautiful all around” connects the dawn with the dawn of creation, and affirms that sacred time is always present, invoked by Ben’s telling. The sense of time that underlies this essentially rhetorical process (rhetorical in that language is used to transform the attitudes and actions of the audience, whether that audience is human or divine) is very different from that of western rhetorical practice. Whereas *chronos*, regular time, proceeds regularly in a linear direction, and *kairos*, the time or opportunity, presents a unique historical context that the rhetor must adapt to, mythic time is neither linear nor historical. Ritual rhetoric in the Navajo tradition does not adapt itself to a particular rhetorical situation, but rather

invokes a context that transforms the identities of both rhetor and audience. As the night chanter of this section, Ben's identification with Holy People effects as well the restorative identification of his patient, Abel, with the sacred. All of Ben's memories of going home are reflections of Abel's own homecoming, which is announced in the very first sentence of the section, and Ben's mythologizing of his own situation becomes as well a mythologizing of Abel's situation. Like Tosamah, Ben does not speak directly to Abel; rather, as I have suggested above, his stories are linked with Abel's restoration through the discourse of the novel, exemplifying the principle that ritual language can effect change in agents by affecting the context in which they exist, since all agents only exist in virtue of being a part of their overall context. Characterized again in terms of Biesecker's categories, Ben effects his change not directly, through a rhetoric of influence in which he as an individual uses language to affect another individual, but indirectly, through a rhetoric of articulation in which story is used to construct a new context that allows both him and Abel to assume new subjectivities that are rooted in the landscape.

Although Ben seems in thrall to the American Dream, futilely pursuing the illusion of material prosperity even as his ghettoized existence denies him its attainment, Ben's stories of his childhood and youth on the reservation reframe his desire so that it becomes a source of cultural empowerment. Ben's attraction as an adult to the sale items in shop windows is paralleled by his wonder as a child at the items in Frazer's trading post: "*You were little and there was a lot to see, and all of it was new and beautiful*" (138). But, although his seduction as an adult leaves him disempowered, in Ben's memories his grandfather, and then Ben himself, trick the trader, bribing him with the promise of authentic Navajo artifacts and obtaining goods far in excess of their worth. In exchange for all the goods his grandfather gets, he trades one of

his rings, “*a small green stone, set carelessly in thin silver. It was new and it wasn’t worth very much, not all the trader gave for it anyway*” (138). Ben’s grandfather has mastered the art of negotiating with Euro-American society: like Francisco, Abel’s grandfather, he does not directly resist the incursion of the colonizing power, but strategically gives away only that slim part of himself that reflects the trader’s emaciated conception of Navajo identity (set in the reified world of artifacts rather than the dynamic world of social or natural interaction) in order to obtain what he needs. Years later, when Ben comes back from school and enters the trading post, he does the same thing himself, “*trading with Frazer just like an old-timer, kind of slow and easy, like you didn’t care much about it*” (147), using the lure of an old *ketoh* (wrist guard for archers) to obtain, for a time, a beautiful black horse. This ritual of seducing the trader through his own greed reflects the Navajo legend of the Gambler, another Navajo twin story, in which the sun pits two of his sons, one a virtuous young man and the other an avaricious gambler, against each other in gambling games.<sup>46</sup> The Gambler, who through his gaming comes to greedily enslave a vast number of people and does not pay appropriate tribute to his father the sun, is in many ways a figure of colonization. Indeed, after the Gambler is defeated by the virtuous son and is shot off into the sky on an arrow, his final words are, “Long ago I died in the center of the earth. My spirit will want to return there.... *Adios*” (O’Bryan 61-62), the unexpected Spanish farewell reflecting the Navajo belief that, with the Spanish invasions of the 1600s, “the people of the Gambler had come back” (Rockpoint 99; see also O’Bryan 62). Like the Gambler, the Spanish had enormous power and overweening avarice, but no real connection to or respect for the land. The only difference between the young victor and his Gambler twin, after all, is that the victor gave the appropriate offerings to various natural forces, including the sun, and it is those forces that allow him to counter the Gambler’s own

cheating. Ben tricks Frazer, another character who represents colonialism, just as the young man tricks the Gambler, using his own greed against him.

The fact that the Gambler is a twin is suggestive as well of Ben's own split identity, since Ben is, on the one hand, an assimilationist who asserts that the land is empty and the people vanishing, and on the other, a chanter who re-establishes a connection with the land and its people through his prayers and stories. Through his memories of tricking the trader, Ben identifies himself with the mythical protagonist whose collusion with natural forces allows him to defeat his oppressive twin, the Winner of Men, and also with his own grandfather, who demonstrates the wisdom necessary to survive and prosper in the face of colonialism. Ben's tale of bargaining temporarily conquers the part of himself that identifies with the materialism represented by both the Gambler and Frazer. His story serves as a kind of exorcism of the Euro-American master narrative, and the fact that Ben wants Frazer's horse in order to travel to a squaw dance also plays into this motif, since the squaw dance is the public climax of the Navajo Enemyway chant, a three or five-day ritual that was originally used to "protect warriors from the ghosts of slain enemies," but is now used "as a cure for sickness thought to be caused by ghosts of non-Navajos" (Wyman, "Ceremonial" 541).<sup>47</sup> At the time he bargains with Frazer, Ben is just coming back from school for the first time, and the dickering, during which he assumes the role of a Navajo "old-timer," is part of his decontamination from the Euro-American world and reintegration into Navajo society (in fact, Coolidge and Coolidge state that it was not uncommon for students returning from a time away at school to have the Enemyway performed for them, in order to purge them of the painful memories associated with their education [166]).

But it is not only his own homecoming that Ben recreates through story, since, between leaving the trader and arriving home to his grandfather, Ben also tells the story of Abel's homecoming: "He wanted me to tell him how it was going to be, you know.... Maybe he's out of it, you know? He's way out there someplace by now, and maybe it isn't raining and he's awake and he can see the stars and the moonlight on the land" (148). Ben intertwines his story of returning home with Abel's, and the two tales resonate with one another to form a larger whole, a pattern repeated throughout Ben's narration. Ben's homecoming story also provides a counter-narrative to Abel's return following the war, when he staggered drunkenly off the bus into Francisco's arms. In contrast, when Ben arrives home on his horse, his grandfather "*cried because your mother and father were dead and he had raised you and you had gone away and you were coming home. You were coming home like a man, on a black and beautiful horse. He sang about it*" (148). Ben's story affirms that other homecoming narratives are possible, and Ben, by linking his story with Abel's present return to Walatowa, also anticipates and (given the Navajo belief in the power of thought and language to influence reality) helps to effect Abel's successful reintegration into Jemez society. In fact, Abel's story becomes Ben's as he travels back with Abel to the landscape that grounds their shared sense of identity; even the typography, narrative perspective, and tense shift, so that for a brief time it becomes impossible to determine who the protagonist of the narrative is or from whose point of view it is being told: "*And then the train will head south and east and down on the land, and the sun will come up out there and you can see a long way out across the land*" (148). Momaday, in his turn, manipulates the structure of his novel to reinforce the power of story to effect change beyond its immediate context, preceding Abel's reconnection with culture and land with Ben's stories, so that an inescapable relation is constructed between them.

Many of the narrative aporia from the “Priest of the Sun” section of Momaday’s novel are bridged or clarified in the “Night Chanter” section, as Ben’s narration makes it apparent to the reader how it is Abel came to be on the beach and describes in more detail the relationship between Ben, Abel, and Milly. If the narrative technique in the “Priest of the Sun” section reflects Abel’s shattered psyche and Tosamah’s shifting rhetoric, then the structure of the “Night Chanter” section, where Ben’s stories interweave with the scattered threads of the previous section to form a coherent web, represents a holistic, unified vision of the world where story creates meaning from an otherwise fragmented reality (recall Leslie Marmon Silko’s statement that Pueblo storytelling “comes out of an experience and an understanding of that original view of Creation—that we are all part of a whole” [50]). Storytelling links teller and audience in the shared act of creating the story, and, since every story is derived from and anticipates all others, it also weaves into a unified web the seemingly discrete experiences beyond the immediate context of the telling, perpetually creating a new context for understanding them. Ben’s memory of his homecoming is woven into a larger story context, since it is preceded by Ben’s summary of Milly’s story about her father (144), as well as Abel’s story about a dignified old man who is dumped in a river by a horse (145). The stories of Milly and Abel are in turn set within the larger web of Ben’s complete narrative, and derive a meaning from that context that is different from their meanings in other contexts. Whereas Milly’s story in the “Priest of the Sun” section is told in the first person (though filtered through Abel’s consciousness) and is evidence of Abel’s growing ability to define himself and others in a more dynamic manner, in the “Night Chanter” section it is told in the third person, from an external perspective, and the story serves mainly to highlight Milly’s vulnerability, as well as Abel’s own potential to hurt her. Abel’s story, in its humour, reveals a side of his



character that we had not previously encountered, but, given Ben's later remarks on Tosamah's ability to "make a fool out of you" (159) it also reflects back on Abel's vulnerability to tricksterism; like the old man, who is "real *dignified*, you know, and he never smiled" (145), Abel is caught in a static mindset that allows Tosamah to unseat him. The shifting significance of the stories demonstrates how meaning is derived from the overall context in which the story is set, and it also demonstrates how stories affect one another.

Further, both of these stories reflect elements in Ben's memory of his homecoming; when Ben reveals his concern for Milly, he is reminded of Pony, the young Navajo woman he met at a squaw dance, and Abel's horse story has obvious links to Ben's own possession of the trader's horse. Ben's memory could be seen as a sublimation of his feelings for Milly and his hopes for Abel, but, rhetorically, it functions rather as a transformation of the events of his life, along with those of Milly and Abel. When Ben tells the story of his return home and his encounter with Pony, he places his own narrative, and all the other narratives it contains, in a mythological context that gives them a larger meaning and links them specifically to the Navajo landscape. As with the story he tells Abel of their future meeting, and the story of his childhood with his grandfather, the motif of dawn serves as a manifestation of the re-creative potential of story, and when he wakes up after arriving at his grandfather's home, Ben finds himself not only geographically but also spiritually centered: "*at first light you went out and knew where you were. And it was the same, the way you remembered it, the way you knew it had to be; and nothing had changed. The first light, you thought, that little while before sunup; it would always be the same out there.... It was that way on the day you were born, and it would be that way on the day you died*" (149). The moment before sunup is the moment of creation, a transformative time that is recorded in the Navajo myths and reenacted through

their ritual telling in the chantways. Yet Ben sees the dawn not as a transient moment, but as something that is paradoxically eternal, existing outside the flux of regular time. It is a perpetually occurring re-creation that song and prayer allow him to participate in and partake of; as a chanter, Ben becomes both the creator and the created, on the one hand identifying himself with the Holy People who create the land, and on the other placing himself harmoniously within creation so that he knows where he is. Witherspoon describes the reflexive nature of ritual speech, in which the speaker is both the source and beneficiary of an ordered creation: “After a person has projected *hózh=* into the air through ritual form, he then, at the conclusion of the ritual, breathes that *hózh=* back into himself and makes himself a part of the order, harmony, and beauty he has projected onto the world through the ritual mediums of speech and song” (61). Ritual singing is a symbolic act that redounds on the speaker, re-articulating him with the environment his speech creates.

As Ben rides toward Cornfields with the sun rising behind him, he prays and becomes “the Turquoise Woman’s son,” one of the Navajo War Twins riding a horse that, like the hogan of the “House Made of Dawn” prayer, represents the universe itself:

*His mane is made of short rainbows,*

*My horse’s ears are made of round corn,*

*My horse’s eyes are made of big stars.*

*My horse’s head is made of mixed waters—*

*From the holy waters—he never knows thirst. (150)*

Scarberry-García has traced the provenance of this song from its origin in the Blessingway to Momaday’s novel, and has identified it as a “song about putting together, or the means of creation” (93-95), since “This horse is formed of sacred substances, reflecting a kinship of

celestial phenomena, water, food and flesh. The singer's knowledge of these relationships empowers him toward wholeness" (12). Within a Navajo context, Ben's song is itself an act of creation, both of Ben and of the Navajo world he inhabits, since this horse is one of four, each made of a different jewel (white shell, turquoise, abalone, and jet), that stand in each direction around Changing Woman's home, representing through the substances of which they are made the four sacred mountains that define the Navajo world (see Wyman, *Blessingway* 235 and Rockpoint 2). As Ben sings his song at sunrise, he creates the world and places himself within it as a Holy Person who is immanent in the land. The mythical nature of Ben's journey to Cornfield is reinforced by the sound of the drums he hears while out on the land: "*You can hear the drums a long way on the land at night and you don't know where they are until you see the fires, because the drums are all around on the land, going on and on for miles, and then you come over a hill and suddenly there they are, the fires and the drums, and still they sound far away*" (151). Ben's experience of the drums echoes that of Angela, who, coming into the town for the feast of Santiago, finds that even while she stands in front of the drums, their sound seems "scarcely louder, deeper, than it had before and a half-mile away, when she was in a room of the rectory.... And it should not have seemed less had she been beyond the river and among the hills; the drum held sway in the valley, like the breaking of thunder far away, echoing on and on in a region out of time" (37). The drum beats manifest an essential unity that transcends distance, time, and causation, pointing to a mythical mode of existence in which events occur always and everywhere, and Ben's journey to Cornfields is framed in terms of that existence—it is an iteration of a creation myth that is perpetually occurring.

Even Ben's encounter with Pony, whose name identifies her with the sacred horse on which Ben has ridden, is mythical, and the horse songs of the Blessingway describe the transformation of the sacred horses into women:

Precisely below the south when a blue mare came through real horizontal blue  
and stood waiting for me that is it, that is it.

Transformed into a young woman her blue flute would appear with her, with  
this she would call for me as she stood waiting for me, that is it, that is it

With her blue voice she would call for me as she stood waiting for me, that is it,  
that is it,

Various jewels were attached to her as she stood waiting for me, that is it, that is  
it.

...

Now then, if on this day she makes me partner I should thereby be the winner as  
she stood waiting for me, that is it. (Wyman, *Blessingway* 256)

Pony's identification with the woman of the horse song, and with Ben's horse, is reinforced by "*the blue velveteen of her blouse*" and "*the pale new moon najahé of the corn blossom*" (151), both of which reflect the shining of the moon and fires upon the "*dark blue velvet of [the horse's] rump and flanks*" as it stands tethered close by the camps. Ben's story of himself and Pony, wrapped in her blanket and circling around the fire, is more than a pleasant recollection that allows him to temporarily escape his urban life. Like the horse, Pony herself assumes a larger, mythic significance, and Ben's dance with her represents completion and wholeness. Witherspoon writes that in Navajo philosophy, "*S'ah Naagháii* ('thought') is male and *Bik'eh Hózh* ('speech') is female" (141-42), and for creation to occur, or for the world to assume the

perfection it has at creation, thought and speech must combine. Ben's story of his dance with Pony not only represents but enacts this joining of thought and speech, allowing for creation and producing an image of order and peace that reflects the key prayer in Navajo religion, *S2'ah naagháii bik'eh hózh*= . In fact, Farella suggests that the gender dynamics underlying the prayer may imply that all beings are incomplete, and only attain wholeness through their relation with other beings (177, 181), so the dance has implications beyond thought and speech: Ben and Pony conjoined become an image of beauty, order, and harmony, just as Ben and his horse were.

The abrupt ending of Ben's story, "*And you never saw her again*" (152), presents the irruption of historical time into sacred time, and the sudden shift emphasizes the hollowness that accompanies not only the loss of Pony in the story, but the loss of the worldview she represents, since Ben immediately follows his story with a description of how he and Abel were intimidated and assaulted by Martinez, who is another figure of oppression and colonization. Distant from the land and culture that are his foundation, Ben cannot maintain the sacred perspective indefinitely, but his tellings reconnect him with it and allow him to periodically recast himself as a person who exists within the geographical and mythological Navajo world: "By symbolically becoming contemporary with the Creation, one reintegrates the primordial plenitude. The sick man becomes well because he begins life again with its sum of energy intact.... The sacred calendar periodically regenerates time, because it makes it coincide with the *time of origin*, the strong, pure time" (Eliade 105). For the Gambler, as for the trader, material artifacts, such as the ring, *ketoh*, or horse, are merely instances of capital, and Ben's own touting of the American dream reflects that reifying materialism. But through his stories Ben transforms both himself and the horse into sacred beings who participate in the

first pure moments of the Navajo world; Ben becomes the child who pays appropriate homage to the sun, instead of the Gambler. Even the dimes on Pony's moccasins, which glint as she dances with Ben, mirror and transform Ben's own current fascination with material goods, imbuing a symbol of capital with spiritual significance. Later, as he tries to figure out how to buy another bottle of wine to numb his loneliness, Ben once again recalls Pony:

*Ei yei! with a name like that, and she had dimes...dimes on her shoes.*

She's from Oklahoma, I think.

*Henry, you keep that dollar bill and those two pennies. Give me twelve shiny dimes. For old time's sake, Henry, give me twelve shiny dimes. Time's dimes, shine wine.*

Maybe the rain will let up for a while. (159)

In place of the wine, Ben thinks he would take the dimes, which are "Time's dimes" because, instead of representing his paucity of material resources, they represent the connection he has with the transcendent time that he accesses through myth. They also represent his hope of a reunion with Pony and the *hózh* = she represents, if only through the medium of story. When young women at squaw dances ask the young men to dance with them under their blankets, the men traditionally give them a dime for each dance accepted or refused (Coolidge and Coolidge 167); though Ben says flatly that he never saw Pony again, he still asks for the dimes, as if in anticipation of a reunion with her in memory. Ben's slim sentiment of hope—that the rain will let up, even temporarily—is a remnant of his memory of Pony, and of who he is when he speaks of her; it also echoes his hope that when Abel's train homeward crests the mountains, "maybe it isn't raining and he's awake and he can see the stars and the moonlight on the land"

(148). As with Ben's story of coming home to his grandfather, Ben's story of Pony is also a projection of Abel's restoration to beauty and peace.

I have argued that Ben's memories assume the form of ritual oratory—they are not just recollections, but iterations of Navajo myth that transform Ben and his context so that the urban alienation he suffers from can be healed. Further, within the context of Ben's relationship with Abel, and given Momaday's juxtaposition of Abel's suffering with Ben's memories, the stories also serve to facilitate Abel's healing, functioning, at a distance, much in the way Navajo chantways function. Ben's final memory, which coincides with Angela's telling of her own myth to Abel, draws the "Night Chanter" section to a close, preparing the way for the final repetition of Ben's story of meeting Abel on the land. Angela tells the story of a "young Indian brave...born of a bear and a maiden" who "became a great leader and saved his people" (163). Critical evaluations of Angela's myth vary widely. Lawrence J. Evers suggests that, unlike the stories told by Tosamah and Ben, which are "etiological legends tied firmly to cultural landscapes, Angela's story is as rootless as a Disney cartoon" (225), but Scarberry-García views Angela's story in a more positive light, asserting that, although Angela's alienation from her own body earlier in the novel may have reflected and reinforced Abel's alienation from the land, Angela's bear story suggests that she, "like Changing Bear Maiden, experiences a personal death and rebirth. She changes during the course of the narrative from being manipulative to nurturing" (63). The figure Scarberry-García refers to, Changing Bear Maiden, is a character in Navajo mythology who is the destructive counterpart to Changing Woman; Ben refers to her immediately after in his own story, using her Navajo name, *Esdzá shash nadle*. After marrying Coyote, Changing Bear Maiden becomes a malevolent Bear monster, but is finally killed by her younger brother, who dismembers her

body and throws the severed parts onto the land, where they are transformed into various elements that benefit the Navajo people, such as piñon nuts, cactus, porcupines, and even chantways.<sup>48</sup>

Scarberry-García suggests that Angela has been transformed in the course of the novel from a character who is alienated from the physical world and a danger to Abel to someone who is at peace with both her body and the land, and a potential source of healing for him. Like Ben, Angela attempts to restore Abel through a story that healed her, since it was her encounter with Abel, represented by the bear in Angela's story, that allowed her to finally be at peace with her body. When Angela first arrives at Walatowa, she is repulsed by her body and its pregnancy, but during her sexual encounter with Abel in Walatowa, she thinks of "badger at the water, and the great bear, blue-black and blowing" (58), and afterward, she stands at an open doorway and, like Abel at the end of the novel, "breathed deep into her lungs the purest electric scent of the air. She closed her eyes, and the clear aftervision of the rain...obliterated all the mean and myriad fears that had laid ahold of her in the past" (67). Angela attempts to engage in a reciprocal act of healing that would allow Abel to re-imagine himself as a part of a natural and mythical landscape, just as he allowed her to re-imagine herself as someone conjoined with nature, and though Evers is correct that her story is not linked to a specific geography (Ben says, "she thought it up, you know, made it up out of her own mind" [164]), it serves, as Tosamah's oratory does, as a spur for Abel to re-frame himself. And, just as Ben's oratory tends to interact dialectically with Tosamah's in order to link language to landscape, so Ben's juxtaposed myth, recounted in the voice of his grandfather, grounds Angela's more generic story and reinforces its power by relating it to a related Navajo myth of seduction and homecoming.



As with his other stories, Ben's final memory is not told directly to Abel. Ben's stories have evinced a dynamic of identification resembling that of the Navajo chantways, and this theme of identification has become more pronounced with each memory, until, in his final story, Ben explicitly evokes the figures and events of Navajo mythology, just as a Mountainway chanter might—indeed, Ben explicitly mentions *Dzil quigi*, the Mountainway ceremony, before he presents his grandfather's story. With his final memory, Ben also identifies with another character who allows him to transcend his present conditions and connect with both culture and land: his grandfather. For both Ben and Abel, their grandfathers are figures that sustain them and represent the elusive wholeness that exists beyond the gap in the blood that their missing parents impose on them. Ben's final story bridges this gap through the way in which it is told, since, in contrast to his other stories, which only referred to his grandfather and incorporated the lessons Ben had learned from him, the bear story is told in his grandfather's actual voice, without the shift to italics that had accompanied Ben's previous storytelling. As the "Night Chanter" section of his novel draws to a close, Momaday allows Ben to adopt his grandfather's voice, to identify with or become his grandfather just as a chanter identifies with the Holy People who are characters in the stories he tells; this union anticipates Abel's own identification with Francisco at the end of the novel, when grandson and grandfather both engage in the ritualistic act of running.

As with his use of La Barre, Momaday here engages in a complex intertextual game, assigning to Ben's grandfather a Navajo myth which is told in words that closely resemble the version recorded by Aileen O'Bryan in her collection of Navajo origin myths, which were in turn related to her by an interpreter, Sam Ahkeah, from tellings by his uncle, Sandoval, or Hastin Tlo'tsi hee; Sandoval in turn credits his grandmother, Esdzan Hosh Kige, with telling

him the stories (O'Bryan vii, 1). During Sandoval's recounting of the myths to O'Bryan in Mesa Verde National Park in 1928, "He would often stop and chant a short prayer, and sprinkle the manuscript, Sam, and myself with corn pollen.... He believed the Mesa Verde to be the center of the old cultures, and he said that it was fitting that the stories should be reborn, written down, in 'the Place of the Ancients'" (vii). For Sandoval, the stories were not merely texts, but symbolic acts that would ensure cultural survival, although the ritual significance of the myths is something O'Bryan cannot convey adequately, since in her printed collection the stories are decontextualized. By putting Sandoval's words into the mouth of Ben's grandfather, Momaday restores the contextual element of the telling, assigning it a speaker, audience, and purpose, and transforming the story from reified text back to ritual language which operates within the novel on Ben and Abel, and beyond the novel on the reader. And, by placing the myth in the "Night Chanter" section, where Ben restores to Abel his sense of a connection to a specific landscape, Momaday also reasserts the importance of geographical and cultural context to the story, reaffirming that storytelling is always a form of symbolic action that responds to a particular situation and seeks to effect a particular condition, even if the myth itself exists outside of time.<sup>49</sup> One might say that, in a ritual context, the purpose of story is to convert *kairos* to mythical time, changing the temporal context of the speaker and audience so that the particularities of a particular situation become subsumed and reframed within the unchanging truths that are re-instantiated by the origin myths. The completeness and circular perfection of Ben's bear story are also reflected in the prayer that follows it:

With beauty before me,

With beauty behind me,

With beauty above me,

With beauty below me,

With beauty all around me... (165)

The prayer identifies the condition of the storyteller and listeners with the restoration of the found Bear child and describes a state of order and beauty that extends out in all directions, embracing the entire world. By including the prayer in his novel, Momaday also evokes the iterative nature of mythic time—the prayer links the fictional world of the novel to the historical world of the Navajo, and ultimately to the mythic world of the Holy People, as it passes from Ben’s grandfather and Ben to Momaday himself, and then to O’Bryan, Sam Ahkeah, and Sandoval (who, O’Bryan notes, chanted the prayer as part of a ceremony he performed after telling the story of the Bear Maiden and her children), back to the Mountainway chant, which specifies in its originary stories of the Holy People why the prayer should be said.

The content of the myth that Ben conveys through his grandfather further reinforces the theme of reconnection across the generations, as it is a cyclical story of abandonment and restoration. Elder Sister abandons the boy she has with Bear, and, after being raised by Owl, the boy grows up and has a child who is also abandoned. At the story’s conclusion, Bear finds his grandchild, completing the cycle. In Angela’s story, Abel is the bear and Angela the Bear Maiden, but in Ben’s story, Abel, like Ben, is the lost son, unaware of his parentage but finally found by grandfather bear, who symbolizes the land and confirms that the abandoned child is of divine descent. Bear, when he claims his grandson, transcends all the preceding abandonments that have plagued the boy by restoring his relationship with the land, a broader context that supersedes and makes possible blood relationships; the cyclical structure of Ben’s story reflects the completeness that accompanies this shift in context. A bloodline unfolds in

linear, historical time, which is irrecoverable, but for both Ben and Abel, the break represented by their missing fathers is finally healed by situating history within myth, and by linking identity with land rather than blood.

When Abel and Vidal are young, Francisco teaches them about the black mesa, the “*house of the sun*” which for the Jemez people links time to place: “*The sun rose up on the black mesa at a different place each day.... They must know the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years, and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were, in time*” (173). When time is yoked to place, it is embedded within a stable context, and it becomes possible to assign meaning to the seemingly arbitrary events of history, to know “*the larger motion and meaning of the great organic calendar itself, the emergency of dawn and dusk, summer and winter, the very cycle of the sun and of all the suns that were and were to come*” (173), so that one experiences a sense of stability even within the unceasing flow of time. Ben’s oratory, by drawing on the creation myths, effects this joining of time and place, so that the seemingly irrevocable, linear trajectory of history bends until it orbits around the center point that is the land. Ben’s story also reconstitutes the figure of the grandfather so that, instead of representing the far side of an unbridgeable abyss, a viewpoint that is derived from a linear view of time, he functions as a figure who completes a cycle and restores identity. Ben’s adoption of his grandfather’s voice and Abel’s mirroring of Francisco’s racing both speak to a new relationship with their grandparents, an identification that is mediated through the sacred acts of storytelling and running, reflecting and effecting a renewed closeness with the Navajo and Pueblo landscapes.

The circularity of Ben's story is mirrored immediately thereafter in the overall structure of the "Night Chanter" section itself, which returns to Ben's prayer on the hill and his telling of the homecoming story in which he and Abel meet back on the land. When Ben says once again that he and Abel are going to meet on the land for "the last time" (166), it becomes apparent, within the context of the ritual rhetoric Ben has been employing throughout the section, that there will be no more meetings because Ben is describing a meeting that will never end, a mythical reunion that partakes of the first light on the land, which repeats the moment of creation every day: "We were going to see how it was, and always was" (166). While we never see their actual meeting, Abel's ability in the final section of the novel to give proper rites following Francisco's death and his final run at sunrise, which echoes the opening pages of the novel and makes the entire structure of Momaday's novel circular, suggest that Abel has managed to shift from the linear arbitrariness of history to the completeness and meaning of myth. Like a Lakota hoop dance, Momaday's novel is a dynamic interplay of circles within circles, and, Ben's narration, informed by the Navajo belief in the power of ritual language to determine reality, patterned after Navajo chantways that effect a rhetorical identification with Holy People immanent in the land, and reinforced by Momaday's arrangement of events in his novel, is a circular ritual of restoration operating with the novel's larger cycle of healing.

Although Momaday's novel as a whole comes full circle, ending as it began with Abel running alone at dawn, this final image is in many ways profoundly ambiguous. If Abel is supposed to be reintegrated into his community, why does he run alone? If he is supposed to have conquered his inarticulateness, why is he still silent at the end? Momaday writes that Abel "was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song" (185).

Momaday does not conclude his novel so much as he sets it in perpetual motion. At the end of *House Made of Dawn*, Abel is not in an ideal state where he is healed, but is instead engaged in a dynamic, unending process of healing, striving to overtake the runners ahead rather than running with them, lingering on the verge of breaking into song rather than singing. And, if we follow Abel down the path toward the dawn, we do not find ourselves at the end point of a linear trajectory toward a final state of wholeness, but back at the beginning of the novel, once more immersed in its rituals of restoration. The overall chronology of Momaday's novel, in spite of the dates attached to each major section, is not historical but mythical, and mythic time, as Eliade has described it and Momaday has represented it, is paradoxical—continually new, since ritual, which invokes mythic time, is an original enactment of an originary moment, and yet forever old, since ritual manifests a moment that already exists and always will.

Witherspoon points out that in Navajo thought, “the essence of life and being is motion” (48), and that the ultimate source of movement “is air, for air is the only substance or entity in the Navajo world that has the inherent capacity to move and to bear knowledge” (53). In Navajo ritual, newness is manifested through speech, the controlled movement of air which allows the creation to once more come alive in the present moment, and oldness is manifested in the land, which is the sign and product of the original creation and the ground for its reenactment. At the beginning and end of the novel, Abel is running but, “Against the winter sky and the long, light landscape of the valley at dawn, he seemed almost to be standing still” (2)—Abel is in motion but, within the overall context of the land, he is centered, and his restoration consists of this stillness in movement. Within the novel, Tosamah sets Abel running by mercilessly goading him until he is forced to abandon the binaries that paralyze him, but Ben sets him on the land, so that his running becomes not merely motion for its own sake, but a movement, like that of

the runners after evil, that follows the contours of the land and thereby reproduces the order, balance, and beauty of the Navajo world.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion—Toward a Modernist Rhetoric

In this final chapter, I will examine the extradiegetic rhetoric of *Invisible Man* and *House Made of Dawn*—the ways in which the novels themselves function as rhetorical statements acting on readers. In particular, I will concentrate on the relationship between rhetoric and the modernist elements of the novels, since, I will argue, one of the main challenges facing both Ellison and Momaday was to appropriate the modernist idiom without sacrificing either the rhetorical efficacy or the cultural specificity of their novels, and in fact it is this appropriation that has made the two novels so rhetorically effective for a broad range of readers. To the degree that a reader shares the cultural knowledge of the characters within the novels, the line between intradiegetic and extradiegetic rhetoric is blurred; that is, the positive depiction of culturally-specific forms of rhetoric within a work has in itself a powerful effect on some readers because it implicitly validates and reinforces the cultural patterns that underlie the alternative rhetorics. As Susan Scarberry-García points out, to the informed reader, Momaday's novel not only depicts Abel's ritual healing, but is itself a text, drawing on sacred stories and prayers, that can heal (119-20). A similar claim of reflexivity might be made for Ellison's novel; it portrays a young orator's gradual progress toward a vernacular rhetoric that encompasses both rhetor and audience, but it is also a performance which itself enacts the vernacular, fusing elite and popular culture into a sermonic narrative directed at the ideal American reader whom Ellison characterizes in his essay, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station." Seymour Chatman, attempting to clarify the meaning of the phrase "rhetoric of fiction" within Wayne Booth's work, suggests that rhetoricians studying fiction need to distinguish between two types of rhetoric in artistic works: the "aesthetic rhetoric" that influences the reader's reception of a work as an artistic product and the "ideological rhetoric" that influences the



reader's reception of ideas that the work expresses about the external world (*Coming* 189). That is, rhetorical analysis of art cannot simply treat a work as a dramatized argument about the world, but must also take into account the rhetorical relationship of the reader with the artistic work itself. Chatman's distinction helps to prevent reductive rhetorical readings of literature, but its splitting of the aesthetic from the ideological elides a central issue: in a context where the validity of artistic forms is itself a topic of controversy, aesthetics *is* ideological. This issue, which weighs especially heavily on many ethnic-American authors, whose use of indigenous artistic forms is often integrally linked to cultural advancement, and on ethnic-American readers, who may seldom read works that reflect their own cultural and linguistic practices, is particularly evident in the relationship between modernism and ethnic-American writing.

As the term "modernism" is defined in a variety of ways, and is even pluralized in some contemporary analyses so the critic can distinguish between different modernisms, I should specify what I mean by the term, and justify my own sense of it, though a complete theoretical overview of modernism is beyond the scope of this chapter. In a restricted sense, and with reference mostly to fictional prose, I am following common critical practice which identifies modernism with the repudiation of various formal conventions that traditionally obtained between writer and reader, ranging from overarching elements such as unified or linear plot, verisimilar presentation of characters and setting, and consistent narrative perspective, to more local features such as standard syntax, grammar, and diction. In a broader sense, I am identifying modernism with a set of attitudes towards the relationship between art and society that downplays the representational and social functions of art in favour of an emphasis on formal experimentation and the independence of art as a field, and of the artistic object itself.

This independence is sometimes framed as an aestheticism that is arhetorical, apolitical, and ahistorical, but critics such as Steve Giles (174), Michael Levenson (2), and Sara Blair (157-58) suggest that the pure aestheticism promoted by some practitioners and critics of high modernism is in fact a strategic fabrication, and that modernists were in reality employing new, sublimated modes of rhetoric to argue for a transformed politics and new ways of interpreting and engaging with history. Michael Bell asserts that “Modernism is importantly not aestheticist, it is rather a turn against an earlier generation’s aestheticism, but it uses highly self-conscious aesthetic means to do so” (26), and Wayne Booth, analyzing the rhetoric of modernist fiction, asserts that, while modernist dogma may have outlawed explicit rhetorical appeals, rhetoric did not disappear, but merely became embedded within the artistic techniques employed in the text; in the place of overt appeals, the modernist substitutes a disguised rhetoric that operates on the reader even as it proclaims the irrelevance of the audience (116). The independence of art and of the artist’s individual vision, which is to be expressed regardless of its social utility, are topoi that establish the dominance of the artist and product over the audience, so it is not the audience that is the final cause of art, but rather Truth itself, insofar as the artist can capture it. The reader (particularly the bourgeois reader) who approaches a modernist work is, accordingly, decentered and subject to the authority of the text and its truths, assuming he shares the aestheticist ideology of the writer.

Modernist aesthetics and the ideologies that underlie them have historically posed a special challenge for ethnic-American writers, for whom literature has often been a way of demonstrating the intelligence and humanity of marginalized populations, illustrating and protesting racist oppression, or effecting ethnic identity and solidarity. Early works of African American literature such as William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter*

(1853) or Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892) are obvious rhetorical vehicles, full of speeches and staged debates about racial issues, as are early works of Native American literature such as John Rollins Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* (1854) or Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, the Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Montana Cattle Range* (1927; though it can be argued that the more florid passages in *Cogewea* are actually interpolations by Mourning Dove's editor, Lucullus Virgil McWhorter). Early African American and Native American literature was written in a period where the presence of overt rhetoric, or even didacticism, in literature was more accepted in America. Indeed, early American literature often represents an extension of the American oratorical tradition and functions as a tool for social transformation: Susan Gustafson states that "Novel styles of oral performance propelled transformations in early American literature, and American literature reveals a peculiarly self-conscious relationship to oral forms" (xix), while Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran suggest that, in early nineteenth century America, a predominantly oral culture framed literature mainly in social and oratorical terms: "What we now call 'literature' this rhetoric treated as a species of epideictic discourse whose end was to 'teach and delight,' to pass on the established values of the culture and thus to sustain the common ground upon which arguments about particular issues could be conducted" (2). Though the link between oratory and literature in Euro-American literature weakened as the nineteenth century progressed, the connection continued to be strong in early African American and Native American literatures, in part, perhaps, because they grew out of oratorical efforts to fight social injustices that had yet to be remedied, and in part because the literatures themselves drew on strong, persistent oral traditions.

But the development of modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented a new, challenging set of literary standards for authors whose writing was still based on the oral and rhetorical traditions of specific cultural communities. As Wayne Booth recounts (90-92), the more dogmatic modernists, insisting that literature would no longer be a prop that reinforced the old order, or indeed any order outside the universe of art, condemned the presence of overt rhetoric and insisted that art's true value was independent of its social function—an assertion that was itself revolutionary, but posed a conundrum for both ethnic-American and regional authors. Henry Louis Gates states that the earliest African American authors

sought to write themselves out of slavery by mastering the Anglo-American belletristic tradition.... In a very real sense, the Anglo-African literary tradition was created two centuries ago in order to demonstrate that persons of African descent possessed the requisite degrees of reason and wit to create literature, that they were, indeed, full and equal members of the community of rational, sentient, beings, that they could, indeed, write. (Introduction xxxvii-xxxviii)

But as modern African American artists began to grapple with modernist tenets, the very goals that underlay the early African American literary tradition became suspect, perhaps proscribed. For all the subtle strategies of resistance and culturally-specific discursive strategies inscribed in the texts, much of early African American literature was a rhetorical means of effecting social integration, and both its rhetorical and integrative emphases were contrary to the techniques and politics of the new aesthetic. And even if African American writers did not accept pure aestheticism, modernism still threw into question the social role of art and the criteria by which its success could be judged. Modernism, particularly as it framed the

relationship of art to society, posed a series of antitheses—the individual artist versus the community he or she lived in, the integrity of artistic vision versus the social impact of art, historical tradition versus contemporary innovation—that were sometimes difficult to negotiate, especially for artists from communities in which art was traditionally viewed in a more organic manner. Given the hostility toward rhetoric in the new aesthetic, ethnic-American writers found themselves struggling to understand how the nature and purpose of modern literature might relate to those of their existing literary traditions.

The perceived tension between these antitheses was felt within the African American artistic community as early as the Harlem renaissance, when W. E. B. du Bois wrote that “all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda” (“Criteria” 757). Langston Hughes, however, asserted a different set of priorities more in line with the new aesthetic:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves. (“Mountain” 1271)

Young African American writers such as Hughes, Claude McKay (especially in *Home to Harlem*), Zora Neale Hurston, and Wallace Thurman asserted that they were writing from the

mountaintop and presenting with artistic integrity unvarnished works that encompassed the full spectrum of African American life, including those features that didn't accord with the bourgeois values of du Bois's Talented Tenth. They were still writing as African Americans, but with less concern about how their art affected Euro-American perceptions of their community. As a result the younger writers were often accused by those concerned with promoting civil rights of pandering to the Euro-American desire to frame African Americans as the repository of those forbidden passions that were repressed by modern society, and of thereby undermining the cause of racial equality.

The battle over the role of art within African American culture continued through the 1940s and 1950s, most prominently manifested in the conflict between Richard Wright and James Baldwin, whose seminal essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" dramatically juxtaposed Wright's *Native Son* with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Baldwin argues that both novels fail artistically because, instead of depicting the complex reality of human existence, they present simplified depictions of oppression in the hope of jarring the reader's sensibilities. In the process, Baldwin asserts, art is reduced to propaganda, and a full understanding of the human condition is lost: "The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended" (18). Writers such as Baldwin and Ellison who emphasized the importance of African American novels as artistic endeavors were dominant for a time over those who asserted that social advancement and protest were the main purposes of African American literature.<sup>50</sup> However, their aesthetic emphasis was again eclipsed in the 1960s during the Black Arts movement as critics such as Maulana Karenga, even while taking a separatist ideological stance directly opposed to the

integrationist politics of du Bois, echoed du Bois's assertion that art must ultimately be a tool in the service of politics:

All art can be judged on two levels—on the social level and on the artistic level.... Let it be enough to say that the artistic consideration, though a necessary part, is not sufficient. What completes the picture is that social criteria for judging art. And it is this criteria that is the most important criteria. For all art must reflect and support the Black Revolution, and any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid, no matter how many lines and spaces are produced in proportion and symmetry and no matter how many sounds are boxed in or blown out and called music. (1973)

So the pendulum swings: as Robert J. Butler points out in his historical review of the critical reaction to Ellison's work, a 1965 *Book Week* poll named *Invisible Man* as "the most distinguished single work published in the last twenty years," but by 1968 a *Negro Digest* survey of young writers suggested that Wright was once more ascendant and Ellison was largely rejected by a young African American population that had embraced black nationalism and the aesthetics of protest (xxviii). But, as we shall see, though Ellison embraced modernist aesthetics, he did not accept modernism's rejection of the rhetorical function of literature—rather, just as the African American rhetor uses Signifyin(g) to rhetoricize the white sign (Gates 47-48), so Ellison signifies on modernism itself, employing modernist techniques in ways that render them rhetorical and allow him to accommodate both the aesthetic and the political. Ellison treats the tenets and techniques of modernism as he treated Freudian and Jungian psychology in *Invisible Man*, simultaneously evoking and destabilizing them with a larger view to affecting his audience: "I'm a rhetorician and as far as I'm concerned as a

novelist, as a fiction writer, the terminologies of both [Freud and Jung] become rhetorically useful” (“Twenty Years” 202).

The conflict between art and rhetoric has only recently appeared in Native American critical discourse, perhaps because of the later development of the Native American novel, and perhaps because, as Robert Allen Warrior suggests, contemporary Native American critical discourse has often been characterized by “an avoidance of internal criticism, opting instead for a general pose of criticizing non-Indian scholarship in specific and U.S. society in general” (xviii). Warrior suggests that this avoidance of internal criticism has led to a muting of debate within the Native American critical community over matters such as the nature of identity or the role of Native American art and writing in the broader struggle for intellectual and political sovereignty. Nonetheless, some contemporary Native American critics, such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Jack Forbes, have argued that Native American writers have become too concerned with accommodating Euro-American readers or literary standards and have thereby abdicated their responsibility to promote aboriginal sovereignty: “Scholarship and art must say something about the real world, mustn’t they? As Vine Deloria Jr. asked the anthropologists in 1970, ‘Where were you when we needed you?’ Indians may now ask of their writers, two decades later, ‘Where were you when we defended ourselves and sought clarification as sovereigns in the modern world?’” (Cook-Lynn 81). Leslie Marmon Silko, in a review of Louise Erdrich’s *Beet Queen*, suggests that while Erdrich’s novel may be aesthetically impressive, its keen psychological insights may come at a political cost: “What Erdrich, who is half-Indian and grew up in North Dakota, attempts to pass off as North Dakota may be the only North Dakota she knows. But hers is an oddly rarified place in which the individual’s own psyche, not racism or poverty, accounts for all the conflict and tension. In this pristine world



all misery, suffering, and loss are self-generated, just as conservative Republicans have been telling us for years.... *The Beet Queen* is a strange artifact, an eloquent example of the political climate in America in 1986” (qtd. in Owens, *Other* 205-206).

In *Other Destinies*, Louis Owens questions Silko’s perspective, suggesting that she “seems to be demanding that writers who identify as Indian, or mixedblood, must write rhetorically or polemically, a posture that leaves little room for the kind of heterogeneous literature that would reflect the rich diversity of Indian experiences, lives and cultures” (206), and yet in *Mixedblood Messages* Owens criticizes Sherman Alexie and other contemporary Native American authors for using dazzling prose to produce “presold commodified Indian fiction” that “allows authors to maintain an essential ‘authentic’ Indianness while simultaneously giving the commercial market and reader exactly what they want and expect in the form of stereotype and cliché: what Vizenor terms the ‘absolute fake’” (78, 76). Though the debate over the relationship between aesthetics and rhetoric does not have as long a history within Native American criticism as it does within African American criticism, the questions of what role literature plays in attaining social justice, and of how the responsibility of the author to her art relates to her responsibility to her community, are becoming more salient as young Native American authors, particularly mixedblood authors who are writing in urban contexts, negotiate between the ideologies that underlie traditional storytelling and those that govern the production of modern literary works.

But that tension, only recently being manifested in the critical literature, was already there at the beginning of the Native American literary renaissance. Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* bears all the marks of a high modernist work even though so much of modernist aesthetics (or, at least, the aestheticism that accompanies the more doctrinaire versions of

modernism) seems directly contrary to the processes of traditional oral storytelling, which include involvement of and adaptation to the audience, contextual embedding of the story within the life of the teller and the culture of its telling, and the assumption that all stories, and indeed all the elements of language, form a unified web (as opposed to the provisional, fragile structure of a *bricolage*). Owens provides a close analysis of the statement from the jury that awarded the Pulitzer Prize to Momaday's novel, in particular the jury's statement that the award "might be considered as a recognition of the arrival on the American literary scene of a matured, sophisticated literary artist from the original Americas" (qtd. in *Mixedblood* 58). He asserts that the jury was awarding the prize for reasons that were assimilative:

I would suggest that in 1969 what the Pulitzer jury meant by this flattery was that at last a writer recognizable as "an aboriginal American" by the unmistakable indices of authentic "Indianness" within his work had learned, despite the primitivism signifying that essential Indianness, how to manipulate the techniques and tropes of high modernism.... In Momaday's protagonist, Abel, the...reader could locate the familiar alienated, rootless, lost-generation shadow of Jake Barnes, Quentin Compson, Jay Gatsby, and so on. And in Momaday's moderately difficult discontinuous, nonlinear narrative, the reader would find a comfortably familiar modernist pattern. (*Mixedblood* 60-61)

As Owens points out, though the jury mentioned Momaday's impressive mastery of modernist techniques, it failed to recognize his most significant accomplishment: Momaday had written a work that also made the "American literary scene" acknowledge the presence of the Native American oral tradition, a "Trojan horse novel," to use Owens's phrase (*Mixedblood* 69), that altered the nature of American literature by revealing not only that Native American writing

was compatible with modernism, but that modernism itself was in part a product of Native American culture (a point I will pursue further below). So subtle was the rhetoric of Momaday's modernist performance that the jury failed to realize that it was not only Momaday, but also they who had arrived. Still, in spite of the jury's implicit paternalism and its lack of attention to how the novel had broadened their own perceptions of American literature, the increased interest on the part of publishers, readers, and academics in Native American literature following the publication of Momaday's novel is evidence that *House Made of Dawn* was a seminal work whose effect reflects T. S. Eliot's assertion from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it" (784).<sup>51</sup>

In their novels, Ellison and Momaday employ modernist conventions, but their formal experimentalism, rather than draining their work of rhetoric and eliding specific cultural significance in favour of an acultural universalism, transforms modernism itself so that it affirms the ongoing presence of Native American and African American influences within modernism and, more broadly, within American literature and culture. As many critics, especially those working from a postcolonial perspective, have pointed out, the foundations of literary and artistic modernism include not only the sense of alienation and fetishization that accompanied technological advances at the turn of the twentieth century, or the mass political and moral disillusionment that followed the horrors of the first World War, but also the increased exposure of western artists and critics to "primitive" artistic traditions, an exposure linked to the peaking of European colonialism and the rise of anthropology as a distinct science, both of which occurred in the late nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup>

The influx of curios and artifacts, particularly from Africa, into European and American museums allowed modern artists to decenter the European artistic tradition by framing it as just one tradition among many, but it also provided a convenient field upon which artists could project the repressed desires of western civilization, so that foreign motifs became the emblems of the idealized or demonized Other (see for instance, Picasso's infamous placement of African masks on Parisian prostitutes in his *Les Femmes d'Alger*, in which the masks signify not only forbidden sexuality but also the threat of sexual disease). Kenneth Lincoln points out a similar use of Native American oral traditions among American writers stretching from early calls by Walter Channing to root American literature in aboriginal traditions to William Carlos Williams's modernist search for the "language of the tribe," and beyond to contemporary poets like Gary Snyder (Lincoln 3-7). In the introduction to George E. Cronyn's *The Path on the Rainbow*, an anthology of translated Native American songs published in 1918, writer Mary Austin remarks on "the extraordinary likeness between much of this native product and the recent work of the Imagists, *vers libristes*, and other literary fashionables...the first free movement of poetic originality in America finds us just about where the last Medicine Man left off" (xvi). Given the complex, sometimes contradictory motivations of primitivism in the modernist movement, it would be too simplistic, though not entirely inaccurate, to claim that modernist appropriation of other artistic traditions was simply another form of cultural imperialism, but it is fair to say that foreign artistic productions were treated mainly as means to various artistic and political ends, and so became divorced from their native contexts. In the development of cultural modernism, non-western forms were separated from their functions, or became adapted to new functions that were not part of their indigenous development. This process of appropriation and elision, in which the works of non-European cultures were

incorporated into a larger context and then robbed of their cultural specificity, reflects a larger dynamic that both Ellison and Momaday identify in American culture itself: an integral, ongoing appropriation of African American and Native American elements which is concealed by the characterization of both cultures as historical artifacts rather than living traditions.

It is not surprising that William Faulkner comes up so often as an influence (however qualified) in interviews with Ellison and Momaday,<sup>53</sup> for Faulkner, in many ways, faced artistic problems similar to theirs, in particular the challenge of expressing a particular sensibility—in Faulkner’s case, regional rather than cultural—in a modern idiom without allowing the sophistication of technique to overwhelm the local voices he wanted to convey. As James M. Cox points out, Faulkner’s achievement involved “seizing upon the discontinuity of modernism” and filtering his character’s own perceptions through it, rather than adopting a modern voice for narration and another voice for dialogue, an implicitly patronizing arrangement which pits the cosmopolitan reader and narrator against the regional characters (781). By “decentering the temporal sequence of plot, [and] displacing it with rhetoric and with voice” (782), Faulkner deprives his readers of their accustomed framework for interpreting the world of the novel and forces them to rely on the thoughts, words, and actions of the characters to orient themselves. In the process, the destabilized reader adopts new interpretive schemas that more closely reflect regional realities.

Catherine Rainwater, in *Dreams of Fiery Stars*, pursues a similar line of argument when she analyzes the relationship between authors and readers in Native American literary works. Rainwater states that relationships between writers and readers (or speakers and auditors, though here I am more concerned with written texts) in cross-cultural contexts are characterized by the presence of either solidarity or power, depending on the degree of mutual

semiosis between the producer and receiver of the text. In a relationship of solidarity the equal status of writer and audience is reflected in a shared semiotic context, in which the rules of production and reception are agreed upon, whereas in a relationship of power, the inequality between writer and audience is reflected in the writer's use of language that, even though it is authoritative for the audience, leaves it unable to construct meanings, understand frames of reference, or grasp rhetorical purposes. Rainwater, following Tzvetan Todorov, suggests that semiotic inequality was central to the Euro-American conquest of Native peoples in the Americas and posits that, although the Native American oral tradition is characterized by solidarity, "some Native American writers manage both power and solidarity in an apparent attempt to enter the dominant discursive space with a counter-colonial agenda" (9). Contemporary Native American writers, by placing Euro-American readers within a non-western worldview without necessarily orienting them completely, decenter the non-Native reader—not in order to reverse the order of domination, but to transform the predominant semiotic relationship so that cultural dialogue takes place on a more equal footing.

Rainwater, however, characterizes *House Made of Dawn* as a novel that is particularly given to power relations because, unlike Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, it destabilizes the non-Native reader without supplying much context or instruction:

*House* immerses the reader in a nonwestern reality while employing narrative power tactics that today, after almost thirty years of exposure to Indian writing, remain difficult even for informed readers to negotiate. Like *Ceremony*, *House* is biculturally encoded, but unlike Silko, Momaday leaves all except his already bicultural readers without obvious points of entry into the text. Though Momaday is certainly not obligated—by western standards, at least—to

accommodate the outsiders among the audience, his power-oriented narrative tactics problematize reader-response. Audience options are narrowly defined: seek extratextual information, (mis)read within an inappropriate framework, or give up. (Rainwater 11-12)

For readers who already share the cultural context of Momaday's novel, the lack of explicit orientation to that context for other readers is an affirmation that, for once, their perspective is the given to which other readers must adapt. The unabashed centrality of aboriginal worldviews in Momaday's novel constitutes a reversal of margin and center, an affirmation of the place of Native American culture within a work written even in the most contemporary of literary idioms (an affirmation that Gerald Vizenor's work continues to make in a postmodern context). But what of the reader, especially the non-Native reader, who lacks the cultural knowledge to enter fully into the text? Most studies of the implied reader or authorial audience concur that the actual reader will identify with the readerly role that the author constructs for her, for the time of reading in any case, only to the degree that she is able to accept the norms of the implied author of a text (see, for instance, Booth 138, Phelan 100, and Rabinowitz 22-23). Yet, the decentering of the Euro-American reader is precisely what Momaday and many other Native American authors seek to accomplish, and in order to do that, they must somehow persuade the non-Native reader to occupy a role during the reading of the text that is often uncongenial or even threatening: the role of the outsider. How does an author persuade the reader to acknowledge the authority of the text even while the reader is alienated from it by a set of values or a worldview that is distinct from or in conflict with her own? How convince the reader to experience her own exteriority without, in Rainwater's phrase, "giving up?"

It is Momaday's appropriation of modernism that allows him to place the extracultural reader in a position of exteriority while maintaining the authority of the text. The radical formal innovations of high modernism, though largely developed to undermine the artistic commonplaces that served as alibis for bourgeois society, themselves became conventional—the signs, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, of an alternative aesthetic economy which inverts the values of the mass economy but nonetheless possesses its own forms of symbolic capital and profit: “There are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation” (40). And, as with the writer, so the reader: the indifference to popular acclaim or commercial success that distinguishes the successful avant-gardist is matched by the determination of the progressive reader who persists in reading the modernist text not only in spite of but because of the challenges it poses, and by the critical community which sees difficulty as a sign of potential symbolic capital. The non-Pueblo reader who opens Momaday's novel and first reads the word “*Dypaloh*,” the traditional opening of a Pueblo story, is subject to an immediate cultural dislocation which is intensified throughout the novel as he tries to understand the prayer from the Night Chant, the significance of the Eagle Hunt or the Chicken Pull, the death of the Juan Reyes Fragua, the relation of Tosamah's Peyote ceremonies to the fragmented narration of Abel's thoughts as he lies on the beach, Ben's bear legend, Abel's rites after Francisco dies, and Abel's final run at dawn, until the reader at last encounters the final word in the novel, “*Qtsetaba*,” which traditionally ends a Pueblo story. But this cultural dislocation, which Rainwater correctly identifies as a source of potential misreading or discouragement, is set within a culturally-valued western idiom in which difficulty itself is a sign of value and the



decentering of the reader is an integral part of the reading experience. As with Faulkner, the disoriented reader can only turn to the world of the novel to construct his interpretive framework, and in the process he comes to see, however imperfectly, from the new perspective presented in the work itself.

Although the technical means are different, this process, by which the reader is decentered and then persuaded to engage dialogically with the world of the novel, is similar to the rhetorical use of story within aboriginal oral traditions as outlined in chapter four—the values of the story are not imposed on the reader, but are presented in a context where the reader must, in order to bridge the aporia posed by the narrative, become an active co-creator of the story. Readers may still, of course, rigidly apply inappropriate frameworks to the novel, attempting to master rather than to co-create the narrative; as Schubnell points out (97-99), some critics, focusing more on the modernist framework of the novel than on its aboriginal foundations, have persisted in seeing Abel as simply another instance of an alienated existentialist protagonist. But readings such as Charles R. Larson's assertion that Abel's final run is a sign of his movement toward death (78) can only be maintained if one ignores or distorts major features of Momaday's work. As I have demonstrated in chapters four and five, the sacred stories and myths that Momaday evokes in his novel are not framed as "fragments I have shored against my ruins" (Eliot, "Wasteland" 431) but as living traditions whose healing powers affirm the continuity of the past and present. And, unlike the alienated modern hero, Abel's trajectory, reflected in the overall structure of Momaday's novel, is circular, bringing him back to wholeness, even if his final run suggests that healing is identified with a continuous movement toward integration rather than with an abstract, static state of health.

Indeed, by using modernism as a means for conveying a story of healing, by infusing an idiom that was developed to express a sense of irredeemable cultural fragmentation with a story of wholeness, Momaday manifests artistically a conviction he expressed at the first convocation of American Indian Scholars, when he responded to a question about how young Native Americans living in a modern world might be influenced to adopt traditional values:

They look at the world and look at the dominant society which is destroying the world in which it lives.... Surely there is a better destiny available to man. I don't think they have to look much further than that to see that they have one at their fingertips, and it's the one in which they've grown up and have a blood interest.... For a long time, the Indian culture, the traditional values in the Indian world, have not been valued in the terms of the modern dominant society. We've always, I think, thought of acculturation as a kind of one-way process in which the Indian ceases to be an Indian and becomes a white man.... I think, for the first time, that it is not a one-way process at all. Acculturation means a two-way, a reciprocal kind of thing in which there is a realization of...one world, [which] is composed of both elements, or many for that matter.... I think more and more we ought to educate the white man. We ought to reconstruct the institutions within the dominant society, so that Indian values are available to the dominant society. (68-69)

Momaday's appropriation of modernism, because it affirms the contemporaneity of traditional Pueblo and Navajo values for Native and non-Native readers even as it creates a context in which non-Native readers are distanced from their own interpretive frameworks and influenced

to experience alternate worldviews, is a form of reconstruction that enacts this cultural reciprocity.

The issue of cultural reciprocity is also key to Ellison's own use of modernist techniques, though his ideas about the nature of that reciprocity are in some ways different than Momaday's. Whereas Momaday's use of modernism was intended to give a voice to aboriginal values within a contemporary context, Ellison's use of modernism reflects a desire to blend voices, in accordance with his views on the vernacular and the nature of American democracy. As Robert O'Meally points out, *Invisible Man* marks the culmination of a gradual transformation in Ellison's purpose and style: "We...see in Ellison's work a shift in style from social realism to surrealism. His efforts to devise a language to express the mad and variegated world as seen by his self-aware characters led him to experiment with symbolic forms generally unused by the writer of hard-fact realism." Ellison's later short stories, his first novel, *Invisible Man*, and the portions of *Juneteenth* that were subsequently published all reject the restrictive, deterministic naturalism that characterizes the works of writers such as Richard Wright or Chester Himes, and instead "employ modernist techniques—surrealism, multiple perspectives, stream of consciousness—to reveal a world tempestuous and out of focus" (1-2).

And yet, it was not only the chaos of the modern world that Ellison sought to convey through his adoption of these techniques. In his acceptance speech for the National Book Award, Ellison explicitly links *Invisible Man*'s modernist techniques to the social role of art: "if I were asked in all seriousness just what I considered to be the chief significance of *Invisible Man* as a fiction, I would reply: its experimental attitude, and its attempt to return to the mood of personal moral responsibility for democracy which typified the best of our nineteenth-century fiction" ("Brave" 151). In "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask

of Humanity,” Ellison compares the rhetorical, socially-oriented prose of nineteenth-century American writing, in which African American characters are ambiguous and complex, with the putatively arhetorical, individualistic prose of modern writers such as Hemingway or Steinbeck, in which African Americans are absent or presented stereotypically. He concludes that “it is not within the province of the artist to determine whether his work is social or not. Art by its nature *is* social” (94), and, therefore, that all art is also rhetorical: “Hard-boiled writing is said to appeal through its presentation of sheer fact, rather than through rhetoric. The writer puts nothing down but what he pragmatically ‘knows.’ But actually one ‘fact’ itself—which in literature must be presented simultaneously as image and as event—became a rhetorical unit” (96). Modern literature’s asocial nature had social implications, and its rejection of rhetoric functioned rhetorically:

The irony of the “lost generation” writers is that while disavowing a social role it was the fate of their works to perform a social function which re-enforced those very social values which they most violently opposed.... On the social level this writing performs a function similar to that of the stereotype: it conditions the reader to accept the less worthy values of society, and it serves to justify and absolve our sins of social irresponsibility. With unconscious irony it advises stoic acceptance of those conditions of life which it so accurately describes and which it pretends to reject. (94-95)

For Ellison, the literary, the social, and the rhetorical imply one another, and the key symptom of the disingenuousness of modern American literature is its elision of racism, for “when the artist would no longer conjure with the major moral problem in American life, he was defeated as a manipulator of profound social passions” (91-92). Modern writers couldn’t avoid the

social consequences or rhetorical effects of their writing, but they could repress or deny the knowledge of them, along with the issue in American society which would most powerfully betray their presence. Ellison here anticipates Toni Morrison's speculations on whether

the major and championed characteristics of our national literature...are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence.... Just as the formation of the nation necessitated coded language and purposeful restriction to deal with the racial disingenuousness and moral frailty at its heart, so too did the literature, whose founding characteristics extend into the twentieth century, reproduce the necessity for codes and restrictions. (6-7)

Where some might consider experimentalism to be a retreat away from questions of history into questions of form, Ellison firmly links the two, asserting that "What has been missing from so much experimental writing has been the passionate will to dominate reality as well as the laws of art" ("Brave" 153). He suggests that while the complex, protean nature of American society calls for a prose that is equally polyvocal and fluid, the ultimate goal of art, particularly in an American context, is to take hold of Proteus until he reveals the way home, "which is called love, and which we term democracy" (154). Democracy, like the vernacular, is for Ellison a blending of voices, but it is not a hegemonic process in which individual voices are finally absorbed into a single dominant voice which is America, but a more complex reality in which diversity and unity are simultaneously asserted, a process that, in the context of jazz, Ellison has termed "antagonistic cooperation" ("Territory" 598). The challenge of novel writing within the American context is, for Ellison, a matter of rhetoric, of presenting the various voices within America to one another in a way that will allow them all to exist independently and yet contribute to a larger whole: "the matter of the artist's ability to identify

the mixed background and general character of his audience can be more problematical than might be assumed. In the field of literature it presents a problem of rhetoric, a question of how to fashion strategies of communication that will bridge the many divisions of background and taste which any representative American audience embodies” (“Chehaw” 494).

As Todd Avery and Patrick Brantlinger point out, the attitude to audience among most of the high modernists was unremittingly elitist, with James Joyce writing that “No man... can be a lover of the true or the good unless he abhors the multitude,” and Ezra Pound’s *The Little Review* declaring on its masthead that it would “make no compromise with the public taste” (qtd. in Avery and Brantlinger 245). While Ellison draws on modernist technique, his assertion that “our most characteristic American style *is* that of the vernacular.... In it the styles and techniques of the past are adjusted to the needs of the present, and in its integrative action the high styles of the past are democratized” (“Territory” 608) suggests that his artistic, political, and rhetorical aims differ greatly from those of his modernist “ancestors.” In *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston A. Baker examines how the term “modernism” might be constructively applied within the context of the Harlem renaissance, and suggests that Sterling Brown’s poem “Ma Rainy” represents a pivotal moment when the African American vernacular erupted into the modern world:

The indisputably modern moment in Afro-American discourse arrives, I believe, when the *intellectual* poet Brown, masterfully mantled in the wisdom of his Williams College Phi Beta Kappa education, gives forth the deformative sounds of Ma Rainy.... The blending, I want to suggest, of class and mass—*poetic* mastery discovered as a function of deformative *folk* sound—constitutes the essence of black discursive modernism. (93)

For Baker, Brown's poem, written in dialect, enacts a powerful reversal wherein the folk element legitimizes high art for its African American audience, manifesting a spirit of "renaissancism," or nationalistic engagement—the emergence of African Americans as a self-defined community into the modern world. Whereas dialect poetry previously represented in many cases a parody of African American discourse, Brown showed that he could use the parodic mask given to him by Euro-American culture to speak revolutionary truths, thereby redeeming the mask and its folk roots through what Baker calls a "mastery of form." If modernism is originally a movement that eschews the popular for the elite, or the provincial for the metropolitan, Brown's poetry asserts, as in "Memphis Blues," the Phoenix-like persistence of folk culture, rising out of the perpetual transience of the new and the ruins of T. S. Eliot's unreal cities:

Nineveh, Tyre,  
Babylon,  
Not much lef'  
Of either one.  
All dese cities  
Ashes and rust,  
De win' sing sperrichals  
Through deir dus' ... (1-8)

While Ellison generally eschews dialect in *Invisible Man*, African American folk culture is, as we have seen, central to the novel. Like Brown, Ellison infuses modernist forms with African American vernacular speech and story, blending "class and mass," and in the process he too demonstrates that folk elements persist within or even underlie the modern, just as the African

American vernacular itself constitutes a foundational, living element of American culture. And just as Brown learned to speak in his own voice through the mask of dialect, Ellison also speaks through a mask, but in his case the mask is the modernist idiom itself.

In his acceptance speech for the National Book Award Ellison emphasizes the experimental, modern nature of *Invisible Man*, but to his friend, writer Albert Murray, he writes of his novel that, “For me it’s just a big fat ole Negro lie [tale], meant to be told during cotton picking time over a water bucket full of corn, with a dipper passing back and forth at a good fast clip so that no one, not even the narrator himself, will realize how utterly preposterous the lie actually is. I just hope someone points out that aspect of it” (Ellison and Murray 21). The African American folk tradition lies at the core of Ellison’s modernist work, just as Lucius Brockway sits in the basement under the vast mechanical apparatus of the Liberty Paints plant and provides the foundation for its paint: “*we the machines inside the machine*” (213). But unlike Brockway, who colludes in his own silencing, making a white paint that seems all the purer for its required injection of black dye, Ellison uses the fractured modernist idiom as a prism that allows him to reveal the individual colours within the seemingly homogenous white light of American culture, which seems to illuminate but in fact only renders its various components invisible.

In *Invisible Man*, the application of experimental aesthetics to folk elements enacts the democratization of modernism, in part because Ellison’s use of experimental techniques is a form of Signifyin(g), a simultaneous appropriation and parody of modernism. Houston Baker suggests that the Trueblood episode in *Invisible Man* “heightens the multivocal character of the novel from within, acting as a metacommentary on the literary and artistic system out of which the work is generated. . . . the Trueblood episode, like other systematic symbolic phenomena,



gains and generates its meanings in dialogic relationship with various systems of signs” (*Blues* 176). The Trueblood episode, in its content, obviously signifies on Freud and Sophocles, but its tragicomic, blues-inflected blending of contemporary reality and mythology also signifies on the more earnest appropriation of myth in modernist writing. For Trueblood, as for the modernist, history is a nightmare, but Trueblood is not interested in using myth to escape history, because he knows there is really no escape; instead, he slyly turns Norton’s myths back on him in order to claim his own place within history. Baker’s observations on the Trueblood episode are true for the novel as a whole: the constant collision and collusion of modern and folk elements within the plot of *Invisible Man* reflect the relationship between the modernist work and the “Negro lie,” so that Ellison comes not so much to adopt modernism as to self-consciously perform it, just as the African American folk orator not only works within the forms his tradition allots to him, but also makes sure his audience knows that he is consciously performing them, thereby placing himself above the form.

There are a number of episodes in *Invisible Man* where folk elements implicitly critique the modern. Pete Wheatstraw is the very embodiment of the vernacular, zooming the invisible man with riddles he can’t answer and vainly trying to engage him in some mutual signifying, only to exclaim in frustration, “Now I know you from down home, how come you trying to act like you never heard that before! Hell, ain’t nobody out here this morning but us colored— Why you trying to deny me?” (170). Yet this ghost from the invisible man’s southern past wanders through the streets of Harlem with a shopping cart full of discarded blueprints, an overflow of plans never built, as if to testify to the profligacy of the modern taste for novelty and to contrast the insubstantiality of the urban blueprints with the vitality of Wheatstraw’s own southern blues, which refer to constructions just as puzzling, but more corporeal: “*She*’s

*got feet like a monkey...Legs like a maaad/Bulldog*" (173). In the factory hospital, the invisible man is constrained in a coffin-like machine and tormented by doctors and nurses who are set on changing his personality; more specifically, they would like to erase those parts of it that reflect his African American identity so that he experiences "no major conflict of motives, and what is better, society will suffer no traumata on his account" (232; the association between this technical form of racial extinction and lynching is reinforced when one doctor suggests castration as a solution). But throughout the treatment, fragments of the invisible man's southern childhood continually bubble up, until a doctor asks him "WHO WAS BUCKEYE THE RABBIT?," and the invisible man realizes "Somehow *I* was Buckeye the Rabbit...or had been" (237), identifying himself with the trickster figure in African American folklore who, though physically dominated, always used his craftiness to defeat larger animals like fox and bear. And in the prologue of his story the invisible man identifies himself as Jack the Bear hibernating in his cave, but this archetypal African American figure lives hidden in a border area adjacent to Harlem in the basement of a building "rented strictly to whites," illuminating his den with over a thousand lights by siphoning off power from the local utility, Monopolated Light & Power (5). While modernity, and the elitist aesthetic that sprang from it, may claim to have a monopoly on both illumination and power, Ellison slyly appropriates that power in order to enlighten his readers about the complex nature of American society, which is, like the vernacular, not a hegemony but a composite of many voices, some of which are marginalized by social injustice. Throughout the novel, elements of the African American vernacular are not only expressed in the modernist idiom, but also offer a critique and contextualization of modernism itself. Though the elitism and universalism of cultural modernism could operate as a kind of deracinating coffin, the folk elements expressed from within the modernist idiom

constantly affirm the human within the modern, the repressed within the dominant, and the popular within the elite, undermining all these dualisms. In this way Ellison makes the novel vernacular in both its structure and its language, and solves what he calls “a basic problem of rhetoric” in American literature:

How does one in the novel (the novel which is a work of art and not a disguised piece of sociology) persuade the American reader to identify that which is basic in man, beyond all differences of class, race, wealth, or formal education? How does one...make the illiterate and inarticulate eloquent enough so that the educated and more favorably situated will recognize wisdom and honor and charity, heroism and capacity for love when found in humble speech and dress? Conversely, how does one persuade readers with the least knowledge of literature to recognize the broader values implicit in their lives? (“Society” 724)

Ellison and Momaday have both written Trojan horse novels. While the two authors’ mastery of the modernist idiom may have granted them admission to the American canon, the ultimate rhetorical aim of the novels is not merely to adapt to and thereby confirm the aesthetic standards of the American critical community, but to transform their audiences’ hegemonic conceptions of American literature and society. Both authors assert that their respective traditions are alive not only independently but as ongoing, constitutive elements of American literature and culture. Ellison states, in accordance with his integrative theory of the vernacular, “I don’t recognize any white culture.... I recognize no American culture which is not the partial creation of black people,” and asserts that “we’ve looked at our relationship to American literature in a rather negative way. That is, we’ve looked at it in terms of our trying to break into it. Well, damn it...*that literature is built off our folklore, to a large extent!*”

(McPherson 356, 379). In his introduction to the *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, Momaday similarly insists that “The native voice in American literature is indispensable” (6) and writes, “On the one hand, the native voice in American literature has gone largely unheard; on the other hand, it is and always has been pervasive. Even those writers, among them some of the major figures in our literary history, who have known next to nothing about the American Indian oral tradition have consistently acknowledged that tradition and perpetuated it. That tradition is so deeply rooted in the landscape of the New World that it cannot be denied” (14).

Both authors frame American culture and society not as monolithic entities but as improvised constructions which are the product of dialogue between various elements within them. Ellison insists that “In relationship to the cultural whole, we are, all of us—white or black, native-born or immigrant—members of minority groups” (“Chehaw” 500), but also acknowledges that this presentation of American culture is problematic for many because it offers a more indeterminate sense of national identity: “perhaps we shy from confronting our cultural wholeness because it offers no easily recognizable points of rest, no facile certainties as to who, what or where (culturally or historically) we are. Instead the whole is always in cacophonous motion.... Deep down, the American condition is a state of unease” (“Chehaw” 504). Momaday’s assertion that “American literature begins with the first human perception of the American landscape expressed and preserved in language” (“Native Voice” 14) likewise destabilizes American identity by defining it in terms of space rather than time. Momaday frames America not as a country or a history, but as a landscape, and he asserts that American literature is constituted not by a unified historical or artistic trajectory unfolding chronologically, but by a shared space that grounds its various artistic facets, allowing them to

co-exist and influence one another diachronically and synchronically. The Native American voice pre-exists the Euro-American voice by thousands of years, but it is not a historical artifact; rather, it continues, like the landscape, to exist in the present, informing the works of contemporary writers both Native American and, in some cases, Euro-American.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke writes,

In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through a mediatory ground that makes their communication possible, thus providing the first condition necessary for their interchange of blows. But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one end ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric. (25)

In the novels chosen for this study, an unwavering determination to encompass the full complexity of African American and Native American reality has led the authors to accept the invitation to rhetoric, and to include both their own communities and others within the scope of their rhetorical action. In neither work does the protagonist arrive at a static state of being: in the final pages of Momaday's novel, Abel has only begun his run toward wholeness, and in the epilogue of Ellison's novel, the invisible man is poised to leave his den and once more enter society. While both Abel and the invisible man have attained a greater degree of self awareness, neither has acquired an essential identity; rather, both characters finally come, like their creators, to survive and prosper within the conundrums of identification and division that attend inter-group relations in America.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aside from leftist writers, there were relatively few critics who gave negative reviews of *Invisible Man* in the 1950s and early 1960s, but in the late 1960s and 1970s, the reputation of the novel reached its nadir, with many writers and critics criticizing Ellison for being out of touch with contemporary African American reality. For a history and summary of negative accounts from the 1950s to the 1970s, see Butler xxi-xxii, xxvi-vvii. More recent critical treatments that still reflect this stance are Jerry Gafio Watts's *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life*, Robert E. Washington's survey of ideologies in African American Literature (187-91, 199-203, 223-24), and Houston Baker's recent reassessment of Ellison's work in *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America* (21-40).

<sup>2</sup> In almost all cases, defining the communication practices of a culture using the rubric "rhetoric" is an act of analysis (in the original Greek sense of the word, to unloose or undo something that is bound together) and may indeed constitute a violation or inaccuracy, unless the act of analysis is balanced by a reciprocal synthetic movement that continually acknowledges the integrated nature of rhetorical practice and, in that acknowledgement, problematizes the very term "rhetoric." Schiappa points out that the use of the word "rhetoric" in reference even to the oratory of the older sophists implies a separation of speech from philosophy that is not actually suggested in the textual fragments that have survived, which focus on the more holistic concept of logos ("Name" 8). In *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Vine Deloria points out that "Religion was an undefined sphere of influence in tribal society," not because Native people had no spirituality, but because religiosity was so integrated into everyday life that "tribal customs and religious ordinances are synonymous" (103). The

anthropologist studying Native American culture from a religious perspective is caught in a dilemma: the term “religion,” insofar as it denotes a distinct facet of culture, frames matters in a way that does not reflect the experience of the people whose culture she is trying to understand; on the other hand, to say that Native American cultures have no religion (or only an incipient religion) is scarcely accurate, especially when those beliefs and practices that a Euro-American would characterize as religious so permeate the culture as to be indistinguishable from its other elements.

Rhetoric, in most non-western cultures, functions similarly; Oliver states that “in the West rhetoric has been considered to be so important that it had to be explored and delineated separately, as a special field of knowledge about human relations. In the East, rhetoric has been considered so important that it could not be separated from the remainder of human knowledge” (10). The use of the term “rhetoric” to understand the communicative practices of other cultures is therefore misleading if it is considered an unproblematic category in terms of which an observer can view a subject, but if rhetoric is used *sous rature*, as a provisional term by which two cultures are tentatively oriented to each other, then its application can be productive, in part because the meaning of “rhetoric” itself becomes problematized, and the process of cultural interaction becomes relational rather than observational. As David Murray suggests, “by concentrating on the various forms of cultural and linguistic mediation which are always taking place, we reduce the danger of making the space between the two sides into an unbridgeable chasm, or of turning differences into Otherness” (1). Note also that in some cases further research may discover texts that could be characterized as overtly rhetorical, even in Schiappa’s sense; for an example, see Yameng Liu’s analysis of Chinese writing guides.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Schiappa is not the anti-foundationalist reactionary that Poulakos constructs in his (to my mind, rhetorically disastrous) reply to Schiappa's original article (Poulakos, "Interpreting" 219). Schiappa is very careful to acknowledge in his articles that "rhetoric" has a variety of potential meanings, but is meticulous in his insistence that if the word is used in the historical sense that Plato or Aristotle used it, then care must be taken to ensure that the term really fits the circumstances. He is not so much arguing for a single definition of rhetoric as he is suggesting that a critic's sense of the word needs to be clearly identified. In pointing out the limitations that accompany Schiappa's definition, I am not disagreeing with it, but merely stating that, for my purposes, a broader definition of rhetoric serves me better, and I am also attempting to make apparent the potential blind spots that accompany my own sense of the term here.

<sup>4</sup> The publication of George Kennedy's *Comparative Rhetoric* has obviously helped solidify the field, providing an impressive overview of research in many areas, though the book has significant weaknesses, aside from its overly broad definition of rhetoric. Although Kennedy avows that he "has no intention of trying to impose Western assumptions about rhetoric on exotic cultures" (5-6), his search for a "General Theory of Rhetoric" (1) sometimes leads him to apply Greek categories too loosely on other species and cultures (Can we really speak of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic rhetoric among animals? [18-21]), and to construct an evolutionary trajectory which frames the communication practices of other cultures as successive approximations of classical western rhetoric: it is symptomatic that Kennedy begins with animal communication, moves on to non-literate indigenous cultures, and then to literate cultures such as those in the ancient near east, India, and China, and then ends with Greek and Roman rhetoric, a movement that LuMing Mao characterizes as "rhetorical



Darwinism” (410). While many of the ethnological studies that Kennedy cites deal with other rhetorics from an emic perspective, the overall orientation of his book is etic, so that in order to understand the rhetorics he discusses on their own terms rather than as part of a development toward classical rhetoric, outside reading is required. Nonetheless, as a general introduction to and consolidation of the field, Kennedy’s book is ambitious and groundbreaking.

Interestingly, Kennedy does not provide in his book a historical overview of the field of comparative rhetoric. It is beyond the scope of this project to do so, but Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz in her essay “Culture and Communication: A Review Essay” provides a concise overview of the increasing interaction of anthropology and linguistics in the 1960s under the influence of Dell Hymes, culminating in a number of studies on the ethnology of communication, some of which examined language from a rhetorical perspective. Important among these is Maurice Bloch’s *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, a collection of studies which examines oratory in a variety of traditional societies from an emic perspective, effectively combining rhetorical analysis and ethnology. LuMing Mao provides a comprehensive overview of the historical development from contrastive to comparative rhetoric in his article “Reflective Encounters: Illustrating Comparative Rhetoric.” Mao concentrates especially on the growing interest in Eastern rhetorics, which have been the focus of the two most ambitious studies in comparative rhetoric thus far, Robert T. Oliver’s *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China* and Xing Lu’s *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.* More recent major collections on comparative rhetoric include *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks*, edited by Carol S. Lipson and Roberta A. Binkley, which examines ancient rhetorical traditions other than those of the Greeks, and *Alternative Rhetorics: Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Laura Grey-Rosendale and Sibylle Gruber, which expands

the bases of comparison within comparative rhetoric by examining how gender, technology, ethnicity, and class relate to rhetorical theory.

<sup>5</sup> The field of contrastive rhetoric is generally thought to begin with Robert B. Kaplan's 1966 landmark article, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," in which, after analyzing over six hundred student essays written by students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, he suggests that difficulties in second-language writing (particularly in the arrangement of paragraphs) are to a degree the result of differences in the "logical systems" associated with various cultures, a hypothesis he explores in more depth in his book *The Anatomy of Rhetoric: Prolegomena to a Functional Theory of Rhetoric*. In response to some criticism of his views, Kaplan has modified his position somewhat, basing differences less on inherent logic or a strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and more on cultural factors, and qualifying the distinctions he identified ("Revisited" 9-10; for a summary of the criticism Kaplan's views have engendered, see Connor 31-32).

For two decades after Kaplan's initial article, contrastive rhetoric research consisted mainly of text analyses undertaken with a view to improving second-language instruction, the most comprehensive of which were the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Study of Written Composition, and the Educational Testing Service Study of Written Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Study of Composition by international students. See Alan C. Purves's *Writing Across Languages and Cultures* for articles based on these studies; Purves's collection is also a hinge-point between contrastive and comparative rhetoric, since some of the studies he includes are more interested in understanding cultural communication practices on their own terms rather than in terms of ESL teaching.

Ilona Leki's article "Twenty-Five Years of Contrastive Rhetoric: Text Analysis and Writing Pedagogies" provides a concise history of the field throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, in the 1990s contrastive rhetoric underwent what Ulla Connor calls a "paradigm shift"; a broader theoretical framework that "considers cognitive and sociocultural variables of writing in addition to linguistic variables has been substituted for a purely linguistic framework interested in structural analyses of products" (Connor 14). In recent years, contrastive studies have begun to appear that are descriptive rather than prescriptive, working outside of the field of pedagogy and studying rhetorical interactions that result from differences in class or between same-language cultures instead of differences in national language. For an overview of some recent developments, see Ulla Connor's book, *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cultural Aspects of Second-Language Writing* and the articles in Clayann Gilliam Panetta's collection, *Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined*. Contrastive rhetoric is a rapidly developing field in which much promising research remains to be done; the present project, which uses the idea of contrastive rhetoric to explore the role of differing rhetorical traditions in ethnic-American literatures, represents a new direction for the field. One wonders how a broadened and reconfigured contrastive rhetoric might intersect with other areas, in particular the study of postcolonial literatures.

<sup>6</sup> While the majority of studies tracing the relationship between African American vernacular culture and literature focus on musical forms such as the blues or jazz, or on folk tales and characters, there are a number of studies which trace the relationship between rhetoric and literature in the African American tradition. The most prominent of these is Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey*, which reframes both African American rhetoric and literature in terms of poststructuralist literary theory; I make extensive reference to Gates in the

chapters on Ellison. However, there are a number of other studies in this area which concentrate especially on the influence of the vernacular sermon on African American literature, the most significant of which are Dolan Hubbard's *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* and Marcellus Blount's "The Preacherly Text: African American Poetry and Vernacular Performance," which deals specifically with Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "An Antebellum Sermon," but also speculates on the role of sermonic rhetoric in African American poetry in general. The figure of the preacher in African American literature is explored in Walter C. Daniel's *Images of the Preacher in Afro-American Literature* and James Robert Saunders's *The Wayward Preacher in the works of African American Women*. Concise introductions to these subjects can be found in Kari J. Winter's entry on "Oratory" and Dolan Hubbard's entry on "Sermons and Preaching" in the *Oxford Companion to African American Literature*.

Works dealing specifically with the role of rhetoric in Ellison's novel include, most prominently, Lloyd W. Brown's "Ralph Ellison's Exhorters: The Role of Rhetoric in *Invisible Man*," Robert Bataille's "Ellison's Invisible Man: The Old Rhetoric and the New," John F. Callahan's treatments in his article "Chaos, Complexity, and Possibility: The Historical Frequencies of Ralph Waldo Ellison" and his chapter "Frequencies of Eloquence: The Performance and Composition of *Invisible Man*" in his *In the African-American Grain: The Pursuit of Voice in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, as well as Dolan Hubbard's examination of *Invisible Man* in his *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination*. Most recently, H. William Rice offers close rhetorical readings of *Invisible Man* in his *Ralph Ellison and the Politics of the Novel*, but Rice draws almost exclusively on the classical rhetorical tradition to undergird his analysis of the invisible man's speeches, whereas I emphasize the

role of African American vernacular rhetoric in the development of the invisible man's oratorical style and the construction of his identity.

Though Kimberly Roppolo, in her article "Towards a Tribal-Centered Reading of Native Literature: Using Indigenous Rhetoric(s) Instead of Literary Analysis," breaks new ground when she suggests that readings of Native American literatures should be informed by Native American rather than European or Euro-American rhetorics, I am aware of no extended studies that explicitly relate Native American systems of rhetoric to Native American literature. In a way, however, this absence of studies is illusory, because, as I argue in my chapters on Momaday, rhetoric and story are so integrated in many Native American cultures that almost any examination of storytelling contains, implicitly in any case, a rhetorical element. Just as rhetoric is an integrated rather than a separate element within many Native American cultures, so rhetoric is an integrated element within many critical studies that examine, to give only one common instance, how a particular work of Native American literature employs strategies from the oral tradition in order to evoke the active participation of the reader in the construction of a story. Nonetheless, it is true that, in terms of overtly relating contrastive or comparative rhetoric to Native American literature, there has been little work done, especially in comparison with the growing body of work on African American literatures.

This points to the need for further research, and it also, perhaps, points to the potential dangers of a rhetorical approach to Native American culture and art. Even more than the study of African American rhetoric, the study of Native American rhetorics throws into question the most basic presumptions underlying western models of rhetoric; even a term so basic as "persuasion" becomes fraught with potential misapplications, and a non-Native critic must

constantly be on guard against the inappropriate projection of western paradigms (not that western paradigms are inherently incorrect or obstructive, but it is all too easy to use them in colonizing ways that conceal rather than reveal emic understandings of communication). I hope, however, that my examination of *House Made of Dawn* provides some evidence that, applied with appropriate care, a rhetorical approach to Native American literary texts can provide new insights into how literary and extra-literary expression relate to each other.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Gilyard's introduction to *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives* offers a concise history of research in African American rhetoric, although it is surprising that Gilyard does not mention Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey*, perhaps because he views it mainly as a work of literary criticism. Works that have been especially helpful for the present study are Roger D. Abraham's pioneering studies of African American communication in urban contexts, *Deep Down in the Jungle* and *Talking Black*; Molefi Kete Asante's *The Afrocentric Idea*, and his earlier work under the name of Arthur D. Smith, especially his "Markings of an African Concept of Rhetoric"; Gates's *Signifying Monkey*; and Geneva Smitherman's sociolinguistic analyses of African American Vernacular English in *Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America*. Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II have recently published two major anthologies of studies on African American rhetoric, *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* and *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives*; the arrival of these anthologies suggests that African American rhetoric continues to be a prominent area of interest within a number of disciplines, including sociolinguistics, composition and rhetoric, cultural studies, and, increasingly, literary and film criticism.

On the dynamics of black sermonics and worship, especially helpful were W. E. B. Du Bois's exposition on African American sermonics in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Zora Neale Hurston's observations of the social and linguistic aspects of African American religion in *The Sanctified Church*, Henry Mitchell's *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, which is at present the definitive book on African American homiletics, and Evans E. Crawford's *The Hum*, which closely examines the reciprocal relationship between the African American preacher and his or her congregation during worship. Gerald L. Davis's *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know* and Bruce Rosenberg's *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* both offer close analyses of the structure and content of the folk sermon; as opposed to Davis, Rosenberg considers the folk sermon to be a genre that crosses racial lines, though he acknowledges that African Americans have contributed significantly to its development.

<sup>8</sup> Although I have tried my best to assess my sources and use them responsibly, it is a limitation of this study that my own knowledge of African American and Native American cultural practices is derived from other scholars rather than through fieldwork. I hope that, as interest in comparative and contrastive rhetoric grows, interdisciplinary research will allow scholars from a variety of areas to combine their expertise and produce studies that more intimately involve the people whose rhetorical practices are being studied.

<sup>9</sup> Though they were preceded by Louis Thomas Jones's early study, *Aboriginal American Oratory*, the two most thorough studies of general Native American rhetoric, both focusing mainly on intercultural rather than cross-cultural rhetoric, are William M. Clements's *Oratory in Native North America* and Janice Schuetz's *Episodes in the Rhetoric of Government-Indian Relations*. Clements's book in particular offers an excellent overview of the Euro-American characterization of Native American oratory and the uses to which that

characterization was put in early America, ground that is also covered by David Murray in *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts* and Sandra M. Gustafson in *Eloquence is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America*. George Kennedy also includes a chapter on North American Indian rhetoric in his *Comparative Rhetoric* (83-111). In terms of the rhetoric and oratory of individual tribes, as Clements notes (129), Iroquois oratory is by far the most thoroughly studied; Michael K. Foster's *From the Earth to Beyond the Sky: An Ethnographic Approach to Four Longhouse Speech Events* is a good model for future comparative studies.

Navajo rhetoric and the rhetoric of Peyotism are particularly relevant to Momaday's novel. Works especially seminal to understanding Navajo rhetoric include Janet P. Lindsay's "Navajo Public Speaking" (an unpublished MA thesis), Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton's *The Navajo*, Gerry Philipsen's "Navajo World View and Culture Patterns of Speech: A Case Study in Ethnorhetoric," and, most centrally, Gary Witherspoon's groundbreaking study *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*. Rock Point Community School's *Between Sacred Mountains: Navajo Stories and Lessons from the Land* also offers important background on the nature of Navajo storytelling and the centrality of place in Navajo thought. As my chapter on Ben Benally suggests, Navajo healing rituals offer an important insight into Navajo rhetorical practice, and key texts that examine the persuasive aspects of the chantways include Sam Gill's *American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion* and Gladys Reichard's comprehensive *Navajo Religion: A Study of Symbolism and her Prayer: The Compulsive Word*. Of course, Leland C. Wyman's works on the various Navajo chantways, especially *Blessingway* and his article "Navajo Ceremonial System," as well as Washington Matthews's *Navajo Legends* and his definitive account of the Nightway,



*The Night Chant, a Navaho Ceremony*, provide essential background material for understanding the Navajo aspects of Momaday's novel. That material is admirably compiled, analyzed, and related to Momaday's novel by Susan Scarberry-García in *Landmarks of Healing*, which is the most thorough, culturally-informed study of *House Made of Dawn* yet written.

Works helpful for understanding the roles of rhetoric and oratory in Peyotism include Weston LaBarre's classic text, *The Peyote Cult*, Edward F. Anderson's, *Peyote: The Divine Cactus*, and, especially, David F. Aberle's comparative study, *The Peyote Religion Among the Navaho*.

<sup>10</sup> None of the major studies on the rhetoric of fiction published to date examines the degree to which the current paradigms in the field are culturally specific, perhaps, in part, because of the structuralist underpinnings of much of the research. Most are based on literature from the western canon and assume a homogenous readership. See, for instance, Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, which is based on Marcel Proust's work; Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, which examines Henry James, Jane Austen, Vladimir Nabokov, and Franz Kafka, among other western authors; Peter J. Rabinowitz's *Before Reading*, which refers most often to Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Thomas Dixon, Jr., William Faulkner, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (there are references here to Richard Wright and Sutton Griggs, but issues of ethnicity are not raised); Seymour Chatman, who, in *Story and Discourse* and *Coming to Terms*, refers to Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, and William Faulkner, among others; and, finally, Michael Kearns's *Rhetorical Narratology*, which refers to Jeanette Winterson and J. M. Coetzee. Only James Phelan, in *Narrative as Rhetoric*, directly addresses the issue of cultural dissonance in his reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (173-89), and

though he tentatively attributes the elusiveness of the text in part to his own status as a white male, he suggests that the novel's ambiguity, to the degree that it is a result of cultural difference, is more because he and Morrison have different relationships to the historical substance of the novel than because Morrison is telling the story, in part, through a different narrative tradition. The study of the rhetoric of fiction needs to be decentered, as postcolonial and comparative literary studies are, so that the rhetorical critic interrogates his own subjectivity and cultural relation to the texts as closely as he examines the object of his study. The attendant disciplinary anxiety would be more than compensated for by an increased critical self-awareness.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, George E. Kent, Susan L. Blake, and Eric J. Sundquist.

<sup>12</sup> Washington put little stock in rhetoric as a subject of instruction. Rhetoric was originally part of the language instruction at Tuskegee in the third year of study (Tuskegee 171), but Washington later viewed the traditional teaching of rhetoric as a "waste of time," stating that "It means little to spend a lot of time teaching definitions, including figures of speech and what not, such as the average text book on rhetoric is full of before the student has actually learned to express himself or write in a simple, direct way. It is just the same as having a man spend months learning the definition of carpentry before he undertakes to do real carpentry work" ("Lee" 188). Indeed, in 1894 Washington handed responsibility for the teaching of the rhetoric class to a science teacher ("Hoffman" 413), and by 1897 he had taken rhetoric out of the program of study in favour of grammar instruction ("Villard" 311).

<sup>13</sup> Of course, as Gates indicates, the term *signifying* has long been used by African Americans to indicate indirect or parodic discourse. Gates, through his new coinage, Signifyin(g), merely gives the term a new written form that foregrounds its potentially

disruptive effect on the universe of Euro-American discourse, and particularly on the process of signification, the establishment of meaning. When the term is used specifically in Gates's sense, I will adopt his spelling, but when it is used in a more general sense, I will use the standard spelling.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Mengeling (68), O'Daniel (90), and Busby (75).

<sup>15</sup> Langston Hughes, in a critique of Negro colleges, describes the incident:

Last year, we had the amazing report from Tuskegee of the school hospital turning over to the police one of the wounded Negroes shot at Camp Hill by white lynchers because the sharecroppers have the temerity to wish to form a union—and the whites wish no Negro unions in Alabama. Without protest, the greatest Negro school in the world gives up a poor black, bullet-riddled sharecropper to white officers. And awhile later Tuskegee's president, Dr. Moton, announces himself in favour of lower wages for Negroes under the N.R.A., and Claude Barnett, one of his trustees, voices his approval of the proposed code differentials on the basis of color. (62)

<sup>16</sup> This sly double-voicing was a common strategy among African American orators before the reconstruction. Gerald L. Davis, in his study of the performed African American sermon, describes how Brother Carper, an antebellum African American preacher, expanded in a sermon upon Isaiah 32:2 (“And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”) with a travel narrative that included many local geographical features. James Watson, the white recorder of the sermon, dismissed the geographical references as mere rambling, but Davis points out that they seem to describe a potential escape route for runaway slaves (62-63).

<sup>17</sup> The invisible man's cyclopean metaphor is, in retrospect, an example of dramatic irony as well, given that Brother Jack himself will eventually be revealed as one-eyed. Although he does not know it at this point, the invisible man is actually encouraging his audience to trade one form of blindness for another which elides racial issues and "can only see in straight white lines" (336).

<sup>18</sup> "To begin with 'identification' is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of *division*.... Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (Burke, *Rhetoric* 22).

<sup>19</sup> Gayatri Spivak, in her now-infamous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" suggests that oppositional discourses that rely on essentialized identities tend to mirror the structures of the dominant discourse rather than challenge them: "The 'subject' implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups" (28). Speaking of African American opposition to Marcus Garvey's ideas, Tony Martin describes how "the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other integrationist organizations were against him because he argued that white segregationists were the true spokesmen for white America and because he in turn advocated black separatism" (qtd. in Bochin 157). Theoretically, Signifyin(g) evades this oppositional mirroring because it does not supply the other half of an antithesis, but through its polyvocality and irony subtly undermines the whole idea of dichotomization.

<sup>20</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton describe the workings of Navajo meetings, in which the process of speaking and reinforcing community solidarity seems to be more prominent than the meeting's stated purpose or product:

Meetings are almost invariably long [and] drawn out. Talking goes on interminably with great respect for conventions of oratory which prescribe various courteous references to preceding speakers, endless repetition of matters previously covered, extended circumstantial account of events which are—from a white point of view—irrelevant. When a Navaho family go to a meeting, they go for all day.... The present practice of actually voting for candidates or on policy decisions is a white innovation and still makes most older and middle-aged Navahos uncomfortable, since the Navaho pattern was for discussion to be continued until unanimity was reached, or at least until those in opposition felt it was useless or impolitic to express further disagreement. (70-71)

Janet Lindsay, in an unpublished Master's thesis on Navajo public speaking, draws similar conclusions after examining the role of speech in Navajo legends, examining historical speeches, and observing speech at tribal council meetings: "The Navajo purpose of speech making was seldom to convince directly or to move to action, but rather to express thought and feeling about those things which affected the speaker or his relatives. The orator hopes to find words to express his own ideas exactly. Such speaking may be highly persuasive, but it is incidentally and not designedly so" (114).

<sup>21</sup> Division and disagreement do, of course, occur within Native American societies, but their potential impact requires rhetorical strategies that preserve the overall integrity of the tribe. Both Parsons, in her study of Pueblo religion, and Kluckhohn, in his examination of

Navajo witchcraft, point out that irreconcilable, overt division in traditional tribal societies often results in accusations of witchcraft. The power of witches may resemble that of shamans or chanters, but witches are individualistic and antisocial (Parsons 63), and to identify someone as a witch is to make her into a scapegoat whose rejection serves to reinforce rather than to undermine the unity of the tribe—indeed, insofar as the witch comes to stand for extreme individualism and self-centeredness, a rejection of her constitutes an assertion of intertribal identification and collectivism: “The witch is the person whom the ideal patterns of the culture say it is not only proper but necessary to hate” (Kluckhohn, *Witchcraft* 96). Burke, in his *Rhetoric of Motives*, cites Kluckhohn’s book as evidence of a “rhetoric of witchcraft,” suggesting that witchcraft serves as a kind of topos that functions in conflicts over the rate of cultural change or over the balance between individualism and collectivism (45).

The political, social, and rhetorical aspects of tribal societies have been, of course, complicated by the imposition of non-aboriginal governmental institutions, majority rule, and the rise of pan-Indianism. I am not arguing that differences between western and Native rhetorics are related to an essential difference between Euro-Americans and Native Americans, but that they are related to different constructions of the individual and her relation to society and the world. Nor, obviously, am I arguing that someone of aboriginal descent who uses eristic rhetoric is any way less “Native,” particularly since the very survival of Native peoples has depended in part on their ability to successfully appropriate Euro-American rhetorical strategies in order to deal with colonization. What I am positing (and what I believe Momaday represents) is that there is often, even within rhetorical practice that seems distinctively “western,” traces of an alternate rhetorical tradition that implicitly or explicitly disrupts the assumptions that underlie western rhetoric.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that the sturdy but static image of the rhetorical triangle has been subject to much challenge and modification recently, especially as modern and postmodern critical theories intersect with rhetorical theory. Randy Harris, for example, uses the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to graphically illustrate how the dialogic interaction of the speaker, audience, and text with one another works iteratively to turn the triangle into a six-pointed star, a twelve-pointed star, and, ultimately, a circle. The final figure represents a concept of rhetorical practice that intersects more closely with Native American ideas of rhetoric.

<sup>23</sup> Satanta, a powerful Kiowa orator, delivered his speech at the Medicine Lodge Creek Council on October 20, 1867.

<sup>24</sup> The Night Chant or Nightway (in Matthews, *klédze hatál*; in Wyman [“Ceremonial”], *Tl’ée’ji*) is central to Momaday’s novel, and is particularly associated with Ben Benally, who is the night chanter referred to in the title of the novel’s third section. The Night Chant is one of a complex system of Navajo healing ceremonies, often called chantways, that employ combinations of chanting or singing, rites, prayers, emetics and other herbal medicines, prayersticks and other ceremonial equipment, drypaintings, and sometimes public dances to cure diseases. Each chantway is based on an underlying myth, or combination of myths, that conveys the origins, procedures, and rationales for the ceremony, and each consists of a complicated series of rituals and rites that is strictly fixed, down to the syllables of each prayer. Some of the ceremonies, which are always led by a singer or chanter who performs and facilitates the entire ceremony from memory, may last up to nine days and can involve large numbers of people (in those cases where a chantway ends with a public dance, hundreds of people may come to participate or watch). The Nightway is one of the most popular and involved ceremonies, used especially to cure insanity, deafness, and paralysis (Reichard,

*Religion* 12). A full performance of the ceremony, which can only be given in the late autumn or winter, ends on the ninth day with public dances in which the performers are masked as Navajo Holy People. For a concise introduction to Navajo chantways, see Leland Wyman's "Navajo Ceremonial System." The standard study on the Nightway is Washington Matthew's *The Night Chant, a Navajo Ceremony*, although a more concise version of the ceremony is available in John Bierhorst's *Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature*. A standard general overview of Navajo mythology and ceremony is Gladys Reichard's *Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*.

<sup>25</sup> If Porcingula Pecos is to be believed, Nicolás's venom is further drawn by the fact that Francisco is actually his illegitimate son (179). Perhaps Nicolás was hoping to absolve his sin by converting Francisco to Christianity, but in the end it is only exacerbated by Francisco's heretical synthesis of Christianity and Pueblo religious practices.

<sup>26</sup> As most critics do (see Scarberry-García 41, and Schubnell 97), I will assume that the albino whom Abel murders is the person whose birth Fray Nicolás refers to in his journal (44-45). This assumption is somewhat problematic, however, since the year of the journal entry Nicolás is 1875, which would make the albino seventy years old at the time Abel meets him, an age that belies his performance in the chicken pull and his strength during the murder. It is also possible that the issues associated with the albino's age could reinforce the theme of supernatural power. Interestingly, Parsons, in her study of Jemez Pueblo, briefly mentions an albino named Juan Reyes Fragua, born approximately at the same time as the albino in Momaday's novel (49).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Radin suggests that the Trickster embodies a period in which there is "no clear cut difference between the divine and non-divine. . . . His hunger, his sex, his wandering, these



appertain neither to the gods nor to man. They belong to another realm, materially and spiritually, and that is why neither the gods nor man know precisely what to do with them” (168). Thus, trickster’s destabilizing influence extends not only to the earthly realm, but to the divine. From the perspective of a Winnebago Peyotist, Tosamah would be an especially provocative figure, since, as Radin points out, while the followers of Winnebago native religion view Wakdjunkaga, trickster, as a benign but foolish figure, Winnebago Peyotists view him as a symbol of fallen humanity and even of Satan himself (150). And here is trickster himself cast as a Peyote Priest! Tosamah’s ability to undermine the dichotomy that separates the sacred from the profane makes him resemble to a degree Ellison’s Rinehart, another preacher whose ability to escape the strictures of Euro-American society lies in indirection and sly appropriation, rather than direct opposition.

<sup>28</sup> For two versions of the arrowmaker story and Momaday’s commentary on it, see “The Man Made of Words” in *Indian Voices: The first Convocation of American Indian Scholars* (59-62) and “The Arrowmaker” in *The Man Made of Words* (9-12).

<sup>29</sup> Traditional Mexican Peyotism is essentially aboriginal in character, as are the Mescalero Apache and Kiowa-Comanche forms. Among the Oto, Omaha, Iowa, and Winnebago, and other tribes such as the Delaware and Osage, Peyote comes to be more closely associated with Christian symbol and ritual. (La Barre 162-63). Aberle points out that practice differs significantly even between southern and northern Navajo (190).

<sup>30</sup> Tosamah’s shift from tribe to ethnicity, from a community whose essence is the people forming it to what Benedict Anderson would call an imagined community constructed through language, is consistent with the pan-tribalism that characterizes Peyotism (see La Barre 113; Aberle, “Peyote” 558; Anderson 34). It is also consistent with Momaday’s idea of

himself as more pan-Indian than specifically Kiowa; while he attributes this more generalized sense of identity in part to the Kiowa's lack of a land base (there is no Kiowa reservation) and to his upbringing among different Native tribes, including the Jemez Pueblo and the Navajo, he also suggests that a general decline of the reservation system and increasing cross-tribal interaction leads many young Native Americans to identify less with their tribes and more with a general sense of Indianness: "Most Indian people I know think of themselves first as Indian" (Woodard 37).

<sup>31</sup> While I have found the work of Walter Ong to be a useful source for exploring the rhetorical role of the oral and written modes in both African American and Native American literatures, I agree with both Ruth Finnegan (140-46) and John Miles Foley (5), that the strict dichotomization of oral and written mindsets, or of oral and written societies, which is implied by the work of Ong and other critics, such as Eric Havelock, needs to be viewed with caution. As Finnegan writes, a polar typology "appeals not only to the romantic in all of us, but to the desire to produce comparative generalizing theories to make sense of the complex phenomena that confront us" (140). The prominence of Mikhail Bakhtin's work in ethnic-American literary studies (and particularly Native American studies), with its emphasis on the utterance, a dialogic structure that to some degree transcends the oral/written dichotomy, is no doubt in part due to the desire to understand the relation of the oral to the written in a more complex manner. Paula Gunn Allen suggests that writing novels "in the phonetic alphabet is the new part, that and the name. The rest of it, however, is as old as the hills, from which we take our sense of who we are" (Introduction 4). However, for many Native American authors, while writing may not be associated with distinctive mental processes, it is closely associated with the political and educational processes that underlie colonialism. When Emma LaRocque,

exploring the challenges faced by Native American writers, states that “What is at work is the power struggle between the oral and the written, between the Native in us and the English” (xx), she is positing a difference that is political rather than epistemological. Momaday’s own implicit critique of La Barre is not so much focused on the actual transcription of the Peyote ceremonies, but on the processes of objectification and appropriation associated with the transcription. The oral and written represent, to an extent, different social contexts for the production and transmission of knowledge, but within a colonial context, those differences are as much linked to power as they are to epistemology.

<sup>32</sup> The runners after evil correspond to the runners in the stick-races that traditionally accompany the annual clearing of the irrigation ditches around Jemez. Elsie Clews Parsons suggests that “in Pueblo Indian view the stick (or ball) race is run as a kind of mimetic magic, in imitation of the Cloud people who flood arroyo or ditch as they come stick-racing, the clay balls (or drift?) rolled up alongside the water course being their kick ball or stick” (*Jemez* 77). Joe S. Sando writes that the races are now rarely performed, though running remains a central part of life in Jemez (86-87, 181). The mythic runners both represent and effect wholeness; Abel’s vision of them allows him to begin framing his own situation in terms of traditional story patterns.

Regarding evil, Florence Hawley Ellis writes that understanding Pueblo religion is difficult for “whites whose background of thinking has been heavily colored by the dualistic and absolutistic concepts of Christianity. Pueblo supernaturals are classified on the basis of their specific powers and functions rather than on ethical concepts of all-good or all-bad” (19), though exposure to Christianity has led to greater emphasis on ethical classification. In Pueblo culture, witches (*Jemez sawah*) are not thought to be aligned with evil powers, as they are in

much Christian thought, but rather use powers that are common to all practitioners of magic in ways that are socially harmful or unbalanced: “The situation is parallel to that observed in nature when for a time the rain which benefits the crops may become a torrent which washes them out, or when winds, which must blow to make a proper Rio Grande spring, become gales which overturn trees and whip plaza dancers with gusts of sand” (Ellis 20). Parsons also suggests that witchcraft is defined by the Pueblo in social rather than absolute terms: “witches are far more individualistic than the shamans whose techniques they use outside of their proper setting.... To the Pueblo, witchcraft and immorality or crime are almost synonymous. A witch has all the traits people consider anti-social” (*Religion* 1.1 63).

This continual emphasis on the relational nature of evil interfered with the attempts of Christian missionaries to introduce the concepts of sin and redemption that depended on the relationship between the individual and God: “That the story of the Crucifixion did not take at all among Pueblos is because the concept of redemption is quite alien to them and the concept of sin almost so.... Since misbehavior to the Pueblo has social rather than individual consequences, being crime, not sin, the conception of penance did not take” (Parsons, *Religion* 2.2 1102). Perhaps the snake imagery associated with both the albino and Martinez suggests that Abel perceives them in Christian terms, as sources of absolute evil that must be eliminated, rather than in Pueblo terms, as forces that are integral to the moral and cultural landscape and must therefore be avoided or accommodated, though critics such as Schubnell (121) and Scarberry-García (44-45) point out that the ambiguities of the albino’s murder make it difficult to determine if the murder should be seen as a violation of Pueblo conventions or as a ritual killing. Marc Simmons suggests that the association of snakes with witchcraft in Pueblo culture is more a result of Spanish influence than Pueblo religion (qtd. in Scarberry-

García 44), and Parsons, in her study of Pueblo religion, mentions no connection between snakes and witches.

<sup>33</sup> The phrase “water bird” further links Abel’s story with Tosamah’s peyote ceremony, since Peyote mythology includes birds that serve as messengers for peyote; these birds are associated in the ceremony with the arrival of the midnight holy water. When the water is brought, the water bird is often invoked by dipping a bird’s feather in the water or by pouring the some of the water onto a pile of ashes in the shape of a bird (La Barre 71).

<sup>34</sup> Frances McCullough, an editor at Harper and Row and a former classmate of Momaday’s, assisted Momaday in developing the novel from its first drafts; she first encouraged Momaday to incorporate the excerpt from *The Way to Rainy Mountain* into *House Made of Dawn* (Schubnell 96).

<sup>35</sup> See also Kenneth Burke’s linking of magic and rhetoric in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (44).

<sup>36</sup> In most versions of the Navajo creation myth, the first people, who eventually become the Holy People of Navajo mythology, journey upwards through different levels of a subterranean world, eventually emerging onto the surface of the earth, from which they create the Navajo world. The number of levels differs in some versions of the myth, but four is a commonly cited number, with the earth’s surface being the fifth level. After the creation, the Holy People become the inner forms of natural features, such as rivers or mountains, and of more abstract elements, such as thought or speech. For a brief general overview of Navajo creation myths, see Sam D. Gill’s “Navajo Views of Their Origin,” and for different versions of the creation myths, see Matthew’s *Navaho Legends* (which has been revised by Paul G.

Zolbrod in *Diné Bahané: The Navajo Creation Story*), as well as Wyman's work on the Blessingway.

<sup>37</sup> Momaday has often expressed his affinity for the Navajo people, stating that "I feel closer to the Navajo than to other peoples. I also identify with Benally for that reason" (qtd. in Schubnell 100).

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that by "gods," Reichard is referring to the Navajo Holy People, the *diyin dine'é*. Wyman specifies that the name of these supernatural beings

does not imply that they are virtuously holy but that they are powerful and therefore dangerous. It is man's responsibility to maintain harmonious relations between himself and the Holy People, or at least to avoid them, lest he become injured or ill from their power. Thus an attack from the Holy People is not necessarily because they are inimical to man but because man himself has been the transgressor.... The Holy People for the most part are indifferent to man but may be persuaded or coerced into aiding in the restoration of a person who has become ill through contact with them. ("Ceremonial" 539)

The Holy People are neither omnipotent nor omniscient and are very human in their emotions; as Reichard states, "The most powerful beings are sometimes thwarted by a circumstance with which a man could easily cope" (*Religion* 58). Written representation of the names of Holy People, and of other Navajo words, varies between sources. Where possible, I follow the usage of the Smithsonian Institute's *Handbook of North American Indians*, but within quotations spelling may vary.

<sup>39</sup> Witherspoon points out

the astonishing degree to which the Navajo language is dominated by verbs.

There seem to be few, if any, nouns that are not either passive forms of verbs or derived from verbal forms.... The dominance of verbs in Navajo also corresponds to the Navajo emphasis on a world in motion...the principal verb in the Navajo language is the verb “to go” [which Witherspoon estimates has some 356,200 distinct conjugations in Navajo] and not the verb “to be,” which is the principal verb in so many other languages but is of relatively minor importance in Navajo. This seems to indicate a cosmos composed of processes and events, as opposed to a cosmos composed of facts and things. (48-49)

Abel’s reification of whiteness, and his resulting immobility both in prison and on the beach following his beating by Martinez, are particularly unfortunate from a Navajo perspective, given that motion is associated with existence itself. Though the runners after dawn are drawn from Pueblo culture, they are also a potent image from a Navajo perspective, since they embody perpetual motion even in the face of a potentially paralyzing evil. Abel’s physical healing and the final image of running in the novel speak to his restoration not only to a state of health but to existence, and the circular structure of Momaday’s novel, which begins and ends with the image of Abel running, enacts a dynamic completeness rather than a static closure.

<sup>40</sup> Though even in the portions of the section that are not devoted to the reservation, Ben still evinces some Navajo characteristics. For instance, he never refers to Abel by name, except once in an indirect quotation from Angela. Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton note in their study of the Navajo that “Names are powers to The People. To use a name very often would wear it out, whereas if the name is kept fresh and full of strength, uttering it may get its

owner out of a tight hole some time. . . . It is considered very impolite to use someone's name in his presence" (66-67). Witherspoon concurs and also points out that, because names are important tools for controlling potentially malevolent Holy People, the use of a name implies an element of control that is contrary to the general Navajo orientation of non-interference, and so a special fourth person conjugation is used for verbs that refer to a person who is present (84). Interestingly, Abel and Angela are the only characters Ben treats in this way, while characters like Tosamah or Milly are named directly. This selective practice suggests that Abel and Angela are, within the entirety of Ben's section, characters that have a special significance within a Navajo context; they exist in both the urban world in which Ben lives and the Navajo world that he reconstructs through his narration.

<sup>41</sup> During a ritual in which the Stricken Twins are nearly cured of their injury, they spontaneously cry out in joy, and their cure is immediately stopped. The narrator in Matthew's recording of the tale exclaims, "Ah! Had these boys kept quiet in the sweat-house that day our people could now all have their diseases cured without paying for the cure; but because they spoke and had to pay, the Navahoes have, ever since, been obliged to make gifts in order to be cured" (Matthews, *Night Chant* 244). The story serves to underline the necessity of strictly following ritual instructions, and the dangers of doing otherwise. Indeed, many Navajo believe that the paralytic stroke and the deafness that Washington Matthews suffered in his old age were a result of his insufficient control over the ritual language of the Nightway, which he had come to know better than any other Euro-American; paralysis and deafness are two of the conditions the ceremony is supposed to cure (Bierhorst 288; Aberle 197).

<sup>42</sup> I would argue that Robert M. Nelson here gets it precisely backwards when he states that Tosamah criticizes John for valuing "words about the Truth more highly than the Truth



itself,” and asserts that, from Tosamah’s perspective, the problem with Christianity is that its purpose is to “preserve and propagate the Word (as opposed to the Truth, which, originally, preceded the Word...)” (69). Tosamah explicitly asserts that “in the beginning was the Word”; his problem with John is that the evangelist links the Word to a fixed Truth when he says the Word is God. The problem with Christianity, from Tosamah’s perspective, is that it cannot accept that the polyvalent Word precedes any fixed Truth, not that it values words over the truth. It is the idea of truth as preceding words that Tosamah challenges.

<sup>43</sup> In *Forked Tongues*, David Murray expresses surprise at how often a character’s alienation from culture is expressed in Native American literature through the motif of the missing or failed father, citing works from Mourning Dove, John Joseph Matthews, Darcy McNickle, Momaday, and Hanay Geiogamah (82, 95-96; to his list Murray could also add Leslie Marmon Silko and James Welch, since Tayo in Silko’s *Ceremony* and the unnamed narrator in Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* are also missing fathers). Another related motif is the figure of the elder relative who raises the child in the parent’s stead, present in *Cogewea*, *Wind From an Enemy Sky*, *House Made of Dawn*, *Ceremony*, and *Winter in the Blood*. Perhaps the persistence of this motif in contemporary Native American works speaks to the dislocation that modernity imposes on indigenous people, as well as the role that literature can play in bridging the gap between grandparent and grandchild, tradition and modernity.

<sup>44</sup> These are the Navajo that come into Walatowa for the fiesta of Porcingula, “wizened keepers of an old and sacred alliance, come to prolong for another year the agony of recognition and retreat” (Momaday, *House* 62). It is somewhat fitting that Father Olguin, projecting onto the people that surround him the sense of shame and betrayal that follows

Angela's confession, becomes stuck in his car within the Navajo convoy of wagons, given his own connection to the colonial enterprise of the church.

<sup>45</sup> See Scarberry-García 17-38. The myth of the Twin War Gods is told at length in Matthews's *Navaho Legends* (105-34), and summarized by Reichard in *Navajo Religion* (481-84). For the myth of the stricken twins, see Matthews's *Night Chant* (221-65), and for the Pueblo War Twins, see Hamilton A. Tyler's *Pueblo Gods and Myths* (209-220), and the comments throughout Parsons's *Pueblo Indian Religion*.

<sup>46</sup> For a full telling of the legend, see Rock Point Community School's *Between Sacred Mountains* (63-69) or Aileen O'Bryan's *The Dîné: Origin Myths of the Navaho Indians* (48-62).

<sup>47</sup> For a description of Enemyway ritual and the squaw dance, see Coolidge and Coolidge 166-85.

<sup>48</sup> For a brief description of the figure of Changing Bear Maiden, see Reichard's *Navajo Religion* (414-417), and for a more complete recounting of myths associated with her, see Matthews's *Navajo Legends* (92-103) and O'Bryan 44-47. Wyman suggests that Changing Bear Maiden is associated in the chantways with mental disturbances (*Mountainway* 20), and states that she is associated with the Evilway chant, which is used to treat diseases stemming from contamination by Navajo ghosts or witchcraft (Wyman, *Mountainway* 104 and "Ceremonies" 542).

<sup>49</sup> The text upon which Momaday based this section of the novel is in O'Bryan 131-38; for commentary on how the myth of the sisters functions within the Mountainway and other chantways, see Wyman, *Mountainway* 131-36.

<sup>50</sup> Robert E. Washington (190-91) and Houston Baker (*Critical* 25, with specific reference to Ellison) attribute this emphasis on aesthetics rather than politics, and on an individualistic existentialist perspective rather than a group-based social justice perspective, to the rise of the Cold War and the resulting general repression of domestic protest in the United States. This project suggests that Ellison's art and politics transcend such easy categorization, and though Ellison may not have been politically militant, he was not quiescent. Indeed, the FBI kept a file on Ellison, which it reopened in 1958 in association with an investigation into communist infiltration of the NAACP (Jackson, *Genius* 411).

<sup>51</sup> Of course, Momaday's novel marked only the beginnings of a transformation which is as yet only fitfully realized, and writers who are writing from "minority" or "marginalized" cultures still face, in many cases, special difficulty getting works published, as well as academic indifference or misunderstanding.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Sheppard (31-32) outlines the many ways in which a fascination with the primitive shaped the modernist movement. For other accounts of the role of primitivism in the development of modernism, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (153-59), Michael Bell's analysis of the metaphysics of modernism (20-25), and especially Jeremy MacClancy's essay on the role of anthropology in modernism.

<sup>53</sup> Both Ellison and Momaday have reservations about Faulkner's dense prose style, but Ellison asserts that Faulkner is the only author in modern American literature who carried forward the moral weight of the nineteenth-century literary tradition ("Brave" 152-53, "Twentieth-Century Fiction" 98-99). In fact, Ellison stated that Faulkner "made it possible for me to look at certain aspects of Negro life" ("Dialogue" 137) and claimed that "If you would find the imaginative equivalents of certain Civil Rights figures in American writing, Rosa

Parks and James Meredith say, you don't go to most fiction by Negroes, but to Faulkner" ("Stern Discipline" 750). When Ellison met Faulkner on the morning of the National Book Award ceremony, Ellison acknowledged his debt by saying to him, "You know...you have children all around now. You won't be proud of all of them, just the same they're around" (Ellison and Murray 45).

Momaday, in his interviews, is more ambiguous about his relationship to Faulkner, sometimes tentatively suggesting that Faulkner influenced his style and sometimes denying an influence, but he does acknowledge a similarity of approach regarding the universal relevance of localized perspectives: "The particular is the universal.... Faulkner writes about Yoknapatawpha county, but that county becomes the whole world to the reader. The regional aspect of his writing does not exclude you; it includes you. And that's the way writing should be" ("Shouting" 112). He also suggests that Faulkner, as a southern author, is attempting, like Native American authors, to merge written literature with a strong oral tradition: "The oral tradition, the Indian oral tradition, is very strong in the West, and in American literature exclusive of Native American literature the tradition seems to be very strong in the South" (Coltelli interview 159). While Momaday is suspicious of what he considers Faulkner's stylistic excesses, he still suggests that Faulkner is an integral part of his art: "I wouldn't want to try and write like Faulkner, though maybe I do in small ways because I have read him. His voice, no matter how complicated it might be, is very much a part of my hearing. My experience" (Woodard 135). Schubnell, in his critical analysis of Momaday's work, analyzes the relationship of Faulkner to Momaday in more detail (68-70).

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