

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Connecting Human and Nature: Storytelling in Silko's

Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit

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by

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Recommendation Letter

Mr. Prakash Adhikari worked on his thesis entitled “Connecting Human and Nature: Storytelling in Silko’s *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*” under my supervision from May, 2008 to February, 2009. I recommend his thesis be forwarded for viva voce.

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This Thesis submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Prakash Adhikari titled, “Connecting Human and Nature: Storytelling in Silko’s *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*” has been approved by undersigned members of the thesis Committee.

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Abstract

Leslie Marmon Silko returns repeatedly to the ties of the people to the nature. Her explorations of Pueblo myths, prophecies and storytelling emphasize the inextricable links between human identity, imagination and Mother Earth. This thesis examines the interrelationship between the Nature, Narrative and Native American Identity in her collection *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* through the path of Storytelling. In her writing, Pueblo identity intertwines with the inner strands of storytelling and its functional importance to the maintenance of traditional Native culture. All unite at the center – the land or Mother Earth, the single spirit out of which the entire Universe with its objects is emanated.

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I. Storytelling: Rediscovery of the Identity

Silko's writing emerged from the revival of Native American literature in the 1970s referred to as the Native American Renaissance. Introducing her essays anthologized in the *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Leslie Marmon Silko garnered renewed attention to the human identity, imagination and storytelling. This anthology also helps to establish Silko's characteristic literary style of incorporating the oral tradition of storytelling in Native American culture into the fiction. It is a collection of narratives or stories which later bring the written word, as well as the visual image. The representation and visualization of the storytelling explores the very essence of our lives. The collection is roughly divided into sections whose boundaries blend into each other, leaving the reader unsure of when she moves out of one section and into the next. Though the whole book of essays can be divided into three sections; i.e. initially begins from the land, secondly with the storytelling or narratives, and finally from her upcoming works, her web of identity is the storytelling as the path to renewal. Introducing the collection, Silko tells:

Pueblo people have always connected certain stories with certain locations; it is these places that give the narratives such resonance over the centuries. The Pueblo people and the land and the stories are inseparable. In the creation of the text itself, I see no reason to separate visual images from written words that are visual images themselves. (14)

It means that the Pueblo people, and the land and the stories have triangular relationship which is interconnected as a whole and if separated, it would be uncompleted. The Heritage and Identity are discovered through the sharing of tribal stories. The above extract comes repeatedly in her essay "On Nonfiction Prose" too. She believes more

about the written word as a mere picture or visual image of the spoken word as she learned more about the ancient folding books of the Maya, Aztec, and other Native American cultures. After she dropped the law school, she decided the only way to seek justice through the power of the stories.

In her essay, “Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories”, the narratives indicate that the migration from the north took many years. From a High Arid Plateau in New Mexico, Silko portrays the story of ancient Pueblo people who buried the dead in the vacant rooms or in partially collapsed rooms adjacent to the main living quarters. In their belief, the remains of things animals and plants, the clay and stones – were treated with respect because all these things possessed spirit and being. Similarly, Pueblo Potters, the creators of petroglyphs and oral narratives, never conceived of removing themselves from the earth and sky. For them, land is not only a source of life but also a source of philosophy: fundamental cultural values and world views are derived from land. Without land, they would not exist as distinct peoples and their relationship with their land is interdependent and continuous throughout annual cycles rather than dominant and objectified, springing from Biblical authority, as is often the case in Western tradition. This is aptly conveyed by Silko, who argues that the term ‘landscape’ is misleading, incorrectly describing the relationship between a human being and her or his surroundings. For her, ‘landscape’ falsely “assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separates from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on” (27).

Moreover, as various formations of colonialism and imperialism continue to affect indigenous peoples’ territories (and thus their lives), land has become a highly politicized issue both in everyday life and in the international political arena where today,

indigenous peoples have a voice, or multiple voices, that can no longer be entirely ignored or excluded.

The storytelling about the clans, squash blossom, lightening, constellation or elk or antelope draw their magical connection with the spirit dimensions. According to the story, the ancient Pueblo believed that the Earth and the Sky were sisters. As long as food family relations are maintained, the sky would continue to bless her sister, the earth, with rain, and the Earth's children would continue to survive. But the old stories recall incidents in which troublesome spirits or beings threaten the earth:

In one story, a malicious *ka'tsina*, called the Gambler, seizes the Shiwana, or Rain Clouds, the Sun's beloved children. The Shiwana are snared in magical power late one afternoon on a high mountaintop. The Gambler takes the Rain Clouds to his mountain stronghold, where he locks them in the north room of his house. What was his idea? The Shiwana were beyond value. They brought life to all things on earth. The Gambler wanted a big stake to wager in his games of chance. But such greed, even on the part of only one being, had the effect of threatening the survival of all life on earth. Sun Youth, aided by old Grandmother Spider, outsmarts the Gambler and the rigged game, and the Rain Clouds are set free. The drought ends, and once more life thrives on earth. (29-30)

The above extract gives an example of the imaginative 'supernatural beings' that had special power to control certain phenomena, to explain various things which were difficult to explain. Such stories became the great myths of the tribes. It means that the ancient people created myths, superstitions, rituals, morals, traditions, rules, codes, laws, religions, from things that they experienced or imagined in their mind. Similarly, Silko also highlights the identity of ancient Pueblo people through the stories they hear who

they are. It was the oral narrative, or story, that became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. They depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival. Notwithstanding the event or subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient, continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories. “Whatever happened, the ancient people instinctively sorted events and details into a loose narrative structure. Everything became a story” (31). They rationalized everything with a fabricated story.

Storytelling is person-to-person oral and physical presentation of a story to an audience in general but the Pueblo storytelling is a communal activity that requires active participation, and that listeners are "encouraged to speak up if they [note] an important facts or detail omitted" (32). Through this process, the audience becomes implicated in the telling of stories, and experiences the fragility and inter-connection of living words directly. The communal process of storytelling, i.e. remembering and the retelling a story in order to piece together valuable narrative accounts and crucial information that might otherwise have died with an individual was a self-correcting process. For example, the *hummah-hah* stories were enjoyed with different versions. Silko also recalls a deer hunt stories of forty years ago, as a dinner-table conversation which carefully described key landmarks and locations of fresh water and might also serve as a map. The interconnectedness of Pueblo oral narratives is stressed again as following:

The importance of cliff formations and water holes does not end with hunting stories. As offspring of the Mother Earth, the ancient Pueblo people could not conceive of themselves within a specific landscape, but

location, or place, nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives. (32-33)

Silko is not interested in creating a completely new range of self-expression, but in reflecting and re-creating the oral qualities of traditional storytelling practices. She connects the Laguna Pueblo migration stories to specific places – mesas, springs, or cottonwood trees – not only locations that can be visited still, but also locations that lie directly on the state highway route linking Pagate village with Laguna village. The state highway route as the symbol of human activity is harmoniously linked with the nature and location. Each Pueblo group recounts stories connected with Creation, Emergence, and Migration, although it is believed that all human beings, with all the animals and plants, emerged at the same place and at the same time. Rachel Stein comments that it falls upon those who are different to make the necessary changes in order to live in harmony with the world:

In Silko's fiction, it is often people at the margins of tribal/dominant culture people of mixed descent, or of mixed acculturation, those who bear the conflict between cultures in their own persons and who must inevitably negotiate the entanglement of competing cultures—who are driven to create new stories that reframe the relations of native culture and dominant white culture by reaffirming the reciprocal relation of humans to nature. (206)

Pueblo storytelling, Silko reveals, is multifunctional. Part map, part recipe, Pueblo stories are a record of genealogy, of social history. They enable societal cohesion, and also provide therapy. Storytelling provides the Pueblo with an identity, one that symbolically and materially places the Pueblo in relation to the land and nature. It is

because of this relation Silko is fond of repeating that human beings are a natural resource, no different than water or rocks.

The earth does not belong to us, we belong to it. This relation is disrupted when land and resource development intrude upon the Pueblo stories. The “maps” in the stories are altered. The places and landscapes that are destroyed materially are also the ones that make up the Pueblo stories. "In fact," she explains in “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective”, "a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" (50). The continued telling of stories from generation to generation is important in providing a connection to preserve heritage and identity that is vital part of the Pueblo Storytelling. Ellen Swango, Native American literary scholar writes that to achieve and maintain the union of cultural history, land and identity, “it is necessary to return to and preserve the Laguna oral traditions of storytelling and rituals of the past” (*Oral Tradition* 1).

Likewise, Silko again highlights the Pueblo attitudes toward oral expression. Pueblo people regard the spoken word as a more authentic of a speaker’s true feelings than written language, because written words are detached from the occasion, having been produced at a time remote from the experience. Words are mental pictures we have learned to associate in our imagination with specific things and ideas, either by vocal sounds, writing, or signs (hand). She has helped to revitalize Native oral tradition and is an important interpreter of its role in contemporary Native American writing tradition. She is a unique literary and scholarly source for this unit.

According to Silko, the stories “are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together” (52). The stories become intermingled, as they formulate the identity of the people. Silko further states, “we know who we are. We are the Lagunas . . . We are the people of these

stories” (50-51). By conjuring the voices and language of those who created the stories and passed them to her, Silko reinvokes their communal spirits. The subtle touches of tellers such as Aunt Susie influence the meaning the listener attributes to the story. Silko clearly states about Aunt Susie:

She was talking about “going over” as a journey, a journey that perhaps we can only begin to understand through an appreciation for the boundless capacity of language that, through storytelling, brings us together, despite great distances between cultures, despite great distances in time. (59)

In addition to recognizing language as a living entity, Aunt Susie’s belief on human affinity with nature and culture is an evident of the above lines. It is storytelling, as the powerful capacity of the language, which brings harmony in totality despite the differences in culture and time. Silko says, “Storytelling can procure fleeting moments to experience who they were and how life felt long ago” (42). Silko coins the term *storytelling* about “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” (50). To her, the storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In the retelling of the old legends, the spirit of the stories gives regenerative life to native culture.

In most of the plots of Silko’s short stories inside her *Yellow Woman* collection, we can very often find the presence of elements out of the landscape, elements that directly influenced the outcome of events. The subconscious plan of the young Yupik Eskimo woman to avenge the deaths of her parents is one of such stories. After months of baiting the trap, she lures the murderer (white trader) onto the river’s ice, where he falls through to his death. The perspective on narrative – of story within story, the idea that one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end

– represents an important contribution of Native American cultures to the English language.

According to Silko, the old stories demonstrate the interrelationships that the Pueblo people have maintained with their plant and animal clans people. In her arresting title essay, she recollects her childhood about the existence of the boulder precipitated the creation of a story around the Paguate village and makes reference to the story about Kochininako, Yellow Woman, and Estrucuyo, a monstrous giant who nearly ate her. Marmon Silko's identification with Yellow Woman is further evident by the following remark:

From Yellow Woman's adventures, I learned to be comfortable with my differences. I even imagined that Yellow Woman had yellow skin, brown hair, and green eyes like mine, although her name does not refer to her color, but rather to the ritual color of the east. (71)

Silko compares herself with the Yellow Woman and consider it as her favorite. She contrasts Native American and European American standards of feminine beauty, and then introduces the heroic figure of Yellow Woman, whose power lies in her courage and in her uninhibited sexuality, which the old-time Pueblo stories celebrate again and again because fertility was so highly valued. Her insights fill our minds like sun warms rock, or a quiet rain saturates dry ground. The Yellow Woman is a revolutionary figure who dares to cross traditional boundaries of ordinary behavior during times of crisis in order to save the Pueblo. Her strength, courage, and “vibrant sexuality” were boons to her people:

Kochininako is beautiful because she has the courage to act in times of great peril, and her triumph is achieved by her sensuality, not through violence and destruction. For these qualities of the spirit, Yellow Woman and all women are beautiful. (72)

Storytelling is the ultimate tool to relate an experience and draw a person into another realm of reality. How else could a person identify with a seemingly opposite being? If one hears or views a narrative unfolding, he must supply a logical placement for these characters and settings to briefly exist for the duration of the tale. If the story has a hint of realism, an audience member will believe it through the mere possibility of it having happened to someone somewhere. Silko claims:

We are all part of the old stories; whether we know the stories or not, the old stories know about us. From time immemorial the old stories encompass all events, past and future. The spirits of the ancestors cry out for justice. Their voices are louder now. The mountains shake and fall; the hurricane winds scour the earth; fire and flood engulf the cities as the ancestor spirits announce the time will return. (153-154)

Silko positions stories as derived from the people, and acknowledges that she is not their originator but their "caretaker." Storytelling passes on the essence of who we are, whether we know it or not. It is an intrinsic and basic form of human voices. More than any other form of communication, the storytelling is an integral and essential part of the ancestors' spirit as experienced by the human beings.

The telling of the tale invites the listener into a deeper sense of self, and at the same time into a deeper connection with the world, making the experience at once intimate and profound. As Story gives breath to the concept of relationship, "story" and world" become coextensive. Storytelling is thus a collective activity that is voiced by the artist but moulded by the community and land to which stories belong. Storytelling has been chosen as a focus for the unit for several reasons. The brevity of the material allows for the inclusion of a rich variety of cultural sources, in rudimentary form, presumably

having been engaged in storytelling activities. In addition, the complexity of the lore and the beliefs which support it are suitable touchstones for us.

Silko's collection of essays portrays many concerns of Native American life today more forcefully and eloquently. Stories position the individual in relation to the rest of the world. In her view, language is a large complex of inter-related stories; it is not only a vehicle for telling stories, but consists of and creates stories from within itself.

II. Environmentalism and Ecocriticism

The term 'Ecology', in general, means the study of relationships between organisms and their surroundings or environments. Richard Kerridge in his *Environmentalism and Ecocriticism* quotes, "Ecology is the scientific study of natural independencies: of life forms as they relate to each other and their shared environment. Since the 19th century, classification, hierarchy and discrete approach have been used in humanistic studies, following the example of natural sciences. The ecological approach to literary studies signals the emergence of a new type of literary criticism that is known as ecocriticism. Ecocriticism aims to bring a transformation of literary studies by linking literary criticism and theory with the ecological issues at large. It is an integral part of environmental movement which began with the celebration of Earth Day on April 22, 1970 and deals with the environment and literature.

Of the radical movements that came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, environmentalism has been the slowest to develop a school of criticism in the academic humanities. "Environmentalism" as Kerridge introduces, "began to take shape in the second half of the twentieth century, in response to perceptions of how dangerous environmental damage had become". He further adds, "environmentalism is both a critique of industrial modernity and another product of it, a distinctively modern movement in which an indispensable role is played by science: by the methods and technologies, for example, that can identify chemical traces or analyze atmospheric data".

Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood writes, in *Environmental Culture*, of 'massive processes of biospheric degradation' and 'the failure and permanent endangerment of many of the world's oldest and greatest fisheries, the continuing destruction of its tropical forests and the loss of much of its agricultural land and up to half its species within the next thirty years'. For environmentalists, the task is to persuade

the world to take these dangers seriously and do what is necessary to avert them. The obstacles are daunting. Actions available to individuals may seem as insignificant as to be scarcely worth taking. Evidence accumulates, but there are few single events large enough to shock the world into action-and those there are, such as the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster in 1986, fade from memory.

In *Timescapes of Modernity* (1998), the social theorist Barbara Adam suggests a reason for this. Environmental problems are frequently invisible, deferred, gradual, too small, too large, and subject to radical uncertainty. As such, they are unrepresentable by our customary forms of narrative, verbal and visual. Often we are not confronted with the environmental harm we do, because it occurs later and elsewhere, Adam argues that culture, lacking the complex multiple perspectives of time and space these hazards call for, cannot find symbols, visual images, or stories of individual lives to give them adequate representation. Inventing these new forms, or helping writers and artists invent them, is a project for ecocriticism.

Cultural critic Andrew Ross, in his *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society* (1994), has pointed out that civil liberties and gains for oppressed groups have usually been won in times of prosperity. Environmentalists should be careful not to align environmentalism with attacks on these gains. Ross suggests us that the need is for environmentalists to foreground the pleasures associated with their vision. He writes of our culture's 'need to be persuaded that ecology can be sexy, and not self-denying', and of 'the hedonism that environmentalist politics so desperately needs for it to be populist and libertarian'.

The changes required are so great as to appear to be dreams with no purchase on the ordinary business of life. Yet to the environmentalist, it is the familiar assumptions that are dangerously unrealistic: the normalized desires that enmesh us in increasing car

use, energy consumption, deforestation, factory farming and overfishing. If the gap between what is necessary and what is possible is to close, and if environmentalism is in future to be seen as more than a doomed rearguard action or spasm of regret, there will have to be a cultural shift strong enough to induce democratic politicians to make eco-friendly practices advantageous for the mass of the world's population. This is the considerable challenge facing ecocritics. Their more modest task is to analyze and evaluate environmentalism in culture.

Environmentalists are conventionally seen as defenders of nature, but it can be argued that all human behavior, including the environmentally destructive, derives from natural impulse. 'Unnatural' is often a term 'Nature' of abuse used to oppress people; yet to identify a group of people with nature is also, historically, an oppressive strategy. In *What Is Nature?* (1995), Kate Soper writes of our need to retain two conflicting perspectives. We need to value natural ecosystems and acknowledge our dependence on them, without forgetting that 'nature' is a series of changing cultural constructions that can be used to praise and blame.

In its most familiar meaning, nature is what the earth is and does without human intervention. This may include 'natural' human impulses, as opposed to considered actions. The natural is the opposite of the artificial. Natural wilderness is land that has never been altered by human activity. Bill McKibben Argues, in *The End of Nature* (1990), that global warming has brought the possibility of this pure state of nature to an end:

By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its interdependence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us. (54)

Ecocriticism is a name that implies ecological literacy. It celebrates nature advocating the nature's original status. The words 'Eco' and 'Critic' both come from Greek 'Oikos' and 'Kritis', and together they mean 'house judge'. It may surprise many lovers of outdoor writing. But in alien the 'Oikos' is nature or 'Wildest home' and 'Kritos' is "an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order, no boots or dishes strewn about to ruin the original décor" (Howarth 69).

Ecocriticism is literary and cultural criticism from an environmentalist viewpoint. It is the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Texts are evaluated in terms of their environmentally harmful or helpful effects. Beliefs and ideologies are assessed for their environmental implications. Ecocritics analyze the history of concepts such as 'nature', in an attempt to understand the cultural developments that have led to the present global ecological crisis. Direct representations of environmental damage or political struggle are of obvious interest to ecocritics, but so is the whole array of cultural and daily life, for what it reveals about implicit attitudes that have environmental consequences.

The first use of the term 'ecocriticism' seems to have been by US critic William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978), where he defines the "eco" in ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." A few works of literary criticism may be said to have been ecocriticism before the term was invented, including in Britain Raymond Williams's *The Lay of the Land* (1975), a feminist study of the literary metaphor of landscape as female. These were informed by environmentalist ideas and asked some of the questions that were to become important in ecocriticism, but it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that ecocriticism became a recognized movement.

In this context the possible relations between literature and nature are examined in terms of ecological concepts. Ecocriticism, then, attempts to find a common ground between the human and the nonhuman to show how they can coexist in various ways, because the environmental issues have become an integral part of our existence. This is one problem that ecocriticism addresses in its attempt to find a more environmentally conscious position in literary studies.

In 1992, The Association for study of literature and Environment (ASLE) was held at the annual meeting of Western Association to promote the idea of relationship between human being and nature. From its founding, ASLE has grown to a membership of 1004 (864 domestic and the rest worldwide), with affiliates in Australia, Germany (home of European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and Environment), India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. Later in 1993 it was furthered by Interdisciplinary Study in Literature and Environment (ISLE). These schools believe that human culture is connected with physical world. Thus, literature also does not go beyond that. Ecocriticism was officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works, both published in 1996. *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and *The Environmental Imagination*, by the Lawrence Buell where they focused on "nature writing," in specifically "environmental texts."

Cheryll Glotfelty, co-editor of a widely used introductory textbook, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), maps the methods of ecocriticism. In "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," she notes that ecocriticism asks a wide-ranging set of questions, and she insists "all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture,

specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. "[A]s a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman."

Lawrence Buell's interest in "the nature of environmental representation," allows him to set out a "checklist" of four points that characterize an "environmentally oriented work." They are:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (*Environmental Imagination*, 6-8)

Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad genre that is known by many names: *green cultural studies*, *ecopoetics*, and *environmental literary criticism* are also popular monikers for this relatively new branch of literary criticism. As in environmental history, the American center of ecocriticism is contested. In the expanded, published version of a forum that began as a session at the 1998 annual convention of the Modern Language Association, Ursula K. Heise, professor of comparative literature, summarizes "the comparatist's perspective on ecocriticism." First, "ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with American literature. It means, of course, not that ecocriticism does not or should not deal with American literature but that it is not in principle more closely linked to American than to any other national or regional literature." Second, "ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with *nature* writing. Again, this does not imply that ecocriticism does not ever deal with nature writing; clearly, it often does. But to suggest that it deals with nothing else is comparable to claiming that feminism is only applicable to texts by or about women." Third, "ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with

nature *writing*." But just as ecocriticism is not limited to American Literature, as it not to setting, it is too not limited to nature and writing. Moreover, it is profoundly interdisciplinary field that explores not only literate and written texts but also different medias too. Photography, documentaries, films, and other materials like history, philosophy, art, and anthropology are some examples.

In a 1999 contribution to the *PMLA*, Simon C. Estok asks "What goals and definitions . . . do we envision for ecocriticism? What counts as ecocriticism?" (*Letter*, 1096). Estok notes in 2001 that "ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections" (*A Report Card on Ecocriticism* 220). More recently, in an article that extends ecocriticism to Shakespearean studies, Estok argues that ecocriticism is more than "simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function—thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise—of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds" (*Shakespeare and Ecocriticism* 16-17).

In her history of the emergence of ecocriticism as a critical movement, Glotfelty contrasts the prefixes "eco-" and "enviro-":

In its connotations, enviro- is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment. Eco-, in contrast, implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts. (xx)

"Enviro-" encourages the distinction between nature and culture, sometimes even to the extent of making them mutually exclusive so that nature, strictly speaking, exists only

when it stands in magisterial independence of human fingerprints of any kind (the premise of Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature*); whereas "eco-" encourages seeing both nature and culture as interconnected parts contained by the Earth's ecology. In taking Rueckert's term instead of inventing a new term "envirocriticism," this movement seems to side with "eco-" but it also sides with "enviro-" in the names, mentioned above, of its journal and organization. Perhaps early ecocriticism's focus on nature writing, which fits readily into the "enviro-" model, has something to do with this terminological ambivalence.

Glotfelty's working definition in *The Ecocriticism Reader* is that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii), and one of the implicit goals of the approach is to recoup professional dignity for what Glotfelty calls the "undervalued genre of nature writing" (xxx). Lawrence Buell defines "ecocriticism" . . . as [a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (430, n.20). Ecological study accepts the fact that in harmony and relations lies an origin. The basis of creative impulse is to get that origin. The origin of this kind will be obtained only by harmonizing unrelated materials. Every art can restore this original sense of order. Thus, ecocriticism is an attempt to strengthen the relation of human and non-human world.

"As environmental problems compound," writes Cheryll Glotfelty, speaking on behalf of the academics worldwide, "work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem" (1996: xxi). Therefore, her question, "How then can we contribute to environmental restoration...from within our capacity as professors of literature" (1996: xxi), is of crucial importance. But this contribution should be well focused on the literary as well as on the ecological concepts, not privileging one over the other. The task of ecocriticism, then, is to formulate a

conceptual foundation for the study of interconnections between literature and the environment. Literature can be perceived as an aesthetically and culturally constructed part of the environment, since it directly addresses the questions of human constructions, such as meaning, value, language, and imagination, which can, then, be linked to the problem of ecological consciousness that humans need to attain. Within this framework, ecocritics are mainly concerned with how literature transmits certain values contributing to ecological thinking. They state that the environmental crisis is a question that cannot be overlooked in literary studies.

Ecocriticism also denotes the view that nature culture relationship can form the basis of our understanding, the earth as a whole. Nature and culture are not two separate fields but are twinned process which overlap each other. Therefore, nature culture duality no longer suits to domain of literature and environment. Dualities like nature versus culture, and wilderness versus the city are constantly breaking down. Nature is equally valuable as culture is. Hence, ecocriticism seeks unique balance between nature, culture and other things. So it would be a mistake to separate culture from nature and superiorize one above another. Ecological studies enlarge all important connections between them.

In his letter on PMLA, Michael P. Cohen for instance, traces the value of nature:

A particular piece of land, valley a homeland, may be value of a particular person or community. But the love of the natural world in which human being find themselves is not a regional or local issue consider the obligatory scene in the proletarian novel where the immigrant mother leaves the sweatshop in an American city and reminds herself and her children of the green world of the country. (1092)

Therefore, ecocriticism determines precise relationship between nature and culture. But some Ecocritics worry that too much attention to nature as a cultural and ideological

construct, or rather a multiplicity of constructs made by different groups, will lead to neglect of nature as an objective, material, and vulnerable reality. Clearly, ecocriticism can become a hot and contested topic in the world of literary studies. But do ecocritics read, manipulate, and use texts in a unique manner? The quick answer is that they are like other literary critics "examining textuality, not just summarizing textual content." But there is an added component.

Applying ecology or ecological concepts and themes to literary criticism proves to be an enhancing process to literary studies. As more and more environmental theorists make a call for an inward transformation in the humanities, literary theorists cannot ignore the presence of interconnections between nature and culture, particularly the fact that cultural dimensions of literature do influence and are influenced by the environmental issues. Therefore, a new ecological vision is shaping itself among the theorists now, one that allows negotiations between culture and nature as inseparable processes. Ecocriticism invites us to think about story in new ways and to approach story with new critical tools. It develops the new ecological canon which considers the whole earth as an environmental community with all its things, living as well as non living things as the members. Thus Ecocriticism is the literary canon to derive balance, harmony and wholeness.

III. Storytelling: Understanding Human Nature Relationship in Silko's

Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit

The progression of Silko's art throughout her collection of essays, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, portrays a blend of harmony between the human spirit and the nature. It demonstrates her fascination with land, earth and her desire, in what she calls "essays," to capture the life within these natural elements. Her essays are so personal, artistic, and emotional that the term almost seems inappropriate without the insistence of perennial relationship between man and nature. The material in this collection includes some previously published materials, stories discussing topics ranging from her Laguna Pueblo upbringing and her recent run-ins with the border patrol to her interpretation of the appearance of a serpent in the rock near Paguate. The following lines from the introduction of the collection reveal her identity and the connection with the environment when she was growing up:

I was never afraid to go anywhere around Laguna and never afraid of any person unless the person was an outsider. Outsiders were white people, mostly tourists who drove up and did not stay long. But up in the sand hills and among the sandstone formations around Laguna, I did not see many Laguna people either, only people cutting wood or returning from their sheep camp. Up in the hills with the birds and animals and my horse, I felt absolutely safe; I knew outsiders and kidnappers stayed out of the hills. I spent hours and hours alone in the hills southeast of Laguna. (16)

It illustrates that Silko has a deep connection to the natural world since her childhood which is obvious through her relationship with the plants, birds and animals. This signifies the Laguna People as a whole who behave the plants and animals as if the latter were human beings. Silko's Laguna Pueblo heritage is richly linked to the land. It

clarifies that she preferred to be without human companions so that she could give her complete attention to the hills and the surroundings. She has expressed her inner feelings how she always feels safer alone in the hills than when she is around people. The following excerpt from the introductory part of the collection clearly demonstrates her natural feeling against the urban development:

Humans are the most dangerous of all animals, that's what my mother said. She was fearless with snakes and picked up rattlesnakes with ease. Most of my life I have lived in small settlements or I have lived outside of town, as I do now, in the hills outside of Tucson, where the nearest house is a quarter mile away. I still trust the land- the rocks, the shrubs, the cactus, the rattlesnakes, and mountain lions- far more than I trust human beings. I never feel lonely when I walk alone in the hills: I am surrounded with living beings, with these sandstone ridges and lava rock hills full of life. Luckily I enjoy danger, so I find human beings irresistible; humans are natural forces, just like flash floods or blizzards. (17-18)

Silko is aggressive to the Europeans who portrayed the Native American as sub-humans and destroyed all the books written by the latter. The source of their understated emotional timbre is a carefully controlled blend of pride in Pueblo heritage and anger over the perpetuation of injustice against Native Americans and the nature. Her insights here are so clearly presented that both the novice and the scholar of Native studies will absorb much of her teaching. Just as maintaining oral tradition rejuvenates native cultures and enables individuals to recover lost identity and to discover a place where they belong in their world, connection to the land is the final element necessary for wholeness and unity with one's world.

Stories play a crucial role in defining what it means to be a member of a given tribe and how a person relates to the tribe's past, present, and future. Although the details of stories found in different tribes may differ, the tales often have similar themes. One common theme is the creation of the world. Another is the theme of a people's origins and migrations. Just as maintaining oral tradition rejuvenates native cultures and enables individuals to recover lost identity and to discover a place where they belong in their world, connection to the land is the final element necessary for wholeness and unity with one's world. Silko states, "[T]hink . . . of the land, the earth, as the center of a spider's web. Human identity, imagination, and storytelling were inextricably linked to the land, to Mother Earth, just as the strands of the spider's web radiate from the center of the web" (21). In the first passage of her essay "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Studies", she connects the spirit to the spirit and matter to the creative principle:

YOU SEE THAT, after a thing is dead, it dries up. It might take weeks or years, but eventually, if you touch the thing, it crumbles under your fingers. It goes back to dust. The soul of the thing has long since departed. With the plants and wild game the soul may have already been born back into bones and blood or thick green stalks and leaves. Nothing is wasted. What cannot be eaten by people or in some way used must then be left where other living creatures may benefit. What domestic animals or wild scavengers can't eat will be fed to the plants. The plants feed on the dust of these few remains. (25)

Silko conceptualizes language as living. The Laguna stories with which she grew up emphasize the interconnection of all living things with the land that creates and sustains them. On the other hand, it is the same balance and cyclic relationship for which

the scientists have given the term ‘food chain’ which makes ‘ecosystem’, a local set of conditions that support life. These are full of variables, often in flux, and subject to forces outside the boundaries. It also applies to the human as Silko writes:

Human remains are not so different. They should rest with the bones and rinds where they all may benefit living creatures- small rodents and insects-until their return is completed. The remains of things-animals and plants, the clay and stones-were treated with respect, because for the ancient people all these things had spirit and being. (26)

Almost from the beginning, Native Americans have been stereo typed as being close to nature, or “noble savages”. In recent years native people have been labeled the “first ecologists”. Protecting the land is part of daily life, and many see it as a limitless responsibility. In fact, Indians are ecological in the truest sense – they know nature’s cycles and understand its tolerances, they see themselves as a part of the land itself, no better than the other creatures that live on it. Silko believes that humans are part of natural world, and they are not separate from it. Since human beings depend on nature for their needs and survival, like parasites; they can’t disconnect themselves from the environment:

THE ANTELOPE MERELY consents to return home with the hunter. All phases of the hunt are conducted with love: the love the hunter and the people have for the Antelope People, and the love of the antelope who agree to give up their meat and blood so that human beings will not starve. Waste of meat or even the thoughtless handling of bones cooked bare will offend the antelope spirits. Next year the hunters will vainly search the dry plains for antelope. Thus, it is necessary to return carefully the bones and

hair and the stalks and leaves to the earth, which first created them. The spirits remain close by. They do not leave us. (27)

This view leads to establish harmony between the human beings and nature. To Native Americans, ecology is a matter of balance with love and respect.

Silko appears to have succeeded in demonstrating clearly in print that the land is alive. Bate provides an illustration. He finds in Wordsworth's *The Excursion* the insight that 'everything is linked to everything else, and, most importantly, the human mind must be linked to the natural environment' (Romantic Ecology, 66). She further elaborates the Pueblo beliefs, that a rock has being or spirit, although we may not understand it since it may differ from the spirit we know in animals or plants or in ourselves. Balance plays a significant role in indigenous peoples' worldviews which are centered around the relationship with the land, i.e. the surrounding natural environment. Native North Americans believe that the creator endowed all things, living and non-living, with a spirit. In sharing this attribute, everything animate inanimate is related and sacred; people are therefore expected to respect all things on mother Earth. Indians understand that they are equals with plants and animals—in fact, as a result of links forged in the distant past, people are often kin to flora and fauna.

The relationships between people, animals, plants, and the land are carefully explained in an extensive lore, and the rituals and ceremonies that form a core part of native life underline the links between the world that people inhabit and the realm of the spirits. From the emergence place, Silko further clarifies the human-nature harmony as following:

There is no high mesa edge or mountain peak where one can stand and not immediately be part of all that surrounds. Human identity is linked with all the elements of creation through the clan; you might belong to the Sun

Clan or the Lizard Clan or the Corn Clan or the Clay Clan. Standing deep within the natural world, the ancient Pueblo understood the thing as it was—the squash blossom, the grasshopper or rabbit itself could never be created by the human hand.

...A bolt of lightning is itself, but at the same time it may mean much more. It may be a messenger of good fortune when summer rains are needed. It may deliver death, perhaps the result of manipulations by the Gunnadeyahs, destructive necromancers. Lightning may strike down an evildoer, or lightning may strike a person of goodwill. If the person survives, lightning endows him or her with heightened power. (28)

Generations of people have left their mark on the North American Landscape in the form of thousands of boulder alignments, pictographs painted onto rock surfaces, and petroglyphs pecked into rock such as these rows of figures made by the Anasazi which can still be seen today on the Navajo Reservation. Rocks with unusual shapes, colors, or positions were especially revered. Rock art usually depicts sacred experiences – such as human-like beings or stylized renditions, of the everyday such as animals. Many of these sites are still used by native people for expressing their spiritual connections to the Earth. Silko explains her feelings with the rocks that teach as following:

Pictographs and petroglyphs of constellations or elk or antelope draw their magic in part from the process wherein the focus of all prayer and concentration is upon the thing itself, which, in its turn, guides the hunter's hand. Connection with the spirit dimensions requires a figure or form that is all inclusive. A lifelike rendering of an elk is too restrictive. Only the elk is itself. A *realistic* rendering of an elk would be only one

particular elk anyway. The purpose of the hunt rituals and magic is to make contact with *all* the spirits of the elk.

The land, the sky, and all that is within them- the landscape- includes human beings. Interrelationships in the Pueblo landscape are complex and fragile. The unpredictability of the weather, the aridity and harshness of much of the terrain in the high plateau country explain in large part the relentless attention the ancient Pueblo people gave to the sky and the earth around them. Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation not only among human beings, but also among all things- the animate and the less animate, since rocks and mountains were known on occasion to move. (29)

Ancient Pueblo people told of great encounters they had with animals and other tribes whether it was true or imaginary. They tried to tell their stories by painting pictures on the cave walls or rocks. They told of encounters with their ancestors, of imaginary adventures. Silko tries to elaborate the survival of the fittest. According to her, Survival in any landscape comes down to making the best use of all available resources and depended upon the interrelationship and harmony.

Indeed, her essays are much more effective because they come from personal experience. They are eloquent stories where the multiple lessons and teachings are pulled out by the reader rather than being laid out point by point. In her collection, she explains the following regarding the all inclusive vision of the ancient Pueblo people:

The impulse was to leave nothing out. Pueblo oral tradition necessarily embraced all levels of human experience. Otherwise, the collective knowledge and beliefs comprising ancient Pueblo culture would have been incomplete. Thus, stories about the Creation and Emergence of human

beings and animals into this world continue to be retold each year for four days and four nights during the winter solstice. The *hummah-hah* stories related events from the time long ago when human beings were still able to communicate with animals and other living things. But beyond these two preceding categories, Pueblo oral tradition knew no boundaries. (31)

Silko better sketches the memory of her ancestors and their battle story which resides in part with the high, dark mesa. It reminds of the story of the people within the family and clan. In this way, the continuity and accuracy of the oral narratives are reinforced by the landscape – and the Pueblo interpretation of that landscape is maintained. They relied upon the terrain, the very earth herself, to give them protection and aid. Human activities or needs were maneuvered to fit the existing surroundings and conditions. She has beautifully woven the relationship between all life and the nature as following:

Natural springs are crucial sources of water for all life in the high desert and plateau country. So the small spring near Pagate village is literally the source and continuance of life for the people in the area. The spring also functions on a spiritual level, recalling the original Emergence Place and linking the people and the spring water to all other people and to that moment when the Pueblo people became aware of themselves as they are even now. The Emergence was an emergence into a precise cultural identity. (36)

Silko gives the example of the high desert plateau country where all vegetation, even weeds and thorns, becomes special, and all life is precious and beautiful because without the plants, the insects, and the animals, human beings living there cannot survive. It may be possibly due to the human beings long ago who noticed the devastating impact human

activity can have on the plants and animals. This idea keeps close link to Native American life and the nature. Thus, the Pueblo stories about the Emergence and Migration are not to be taken as literally as the anthropologists might wish. Prominent geographical features and landmarks that are mentioned in the narratives exist for ritual purposes. Silko further emphasizes the relationship between man and nature through the narrative as following:

The narratives linked with prominent features of the landscape between Paguate and Laguna delineate the complexities of the relationship that human beings must maintain with the surrounding natural world if they hope to survive in this place. Thus, the journey was an interior process of the imagination, a growing awareness that being human is somehow different from all other life – animal, plant, and inanimate. Yet, we are all from the same source: awareness never deteriorated into Cartesian duality, cutting off the human from the natural world. (37)

Through the above lines, we can also find out the crux of dualism as the central feature and unanswered question. The opposite of dualism is monism, the belief that the world and its creatures should be seen as one substance, one organic body. Ecocritics Diane McColley and Ken Hiltner have read Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) as a work of Christian monism that deconstructs dualistic theology. Eve becomes a Christian version of the pagan *genius loci*. Satan tempts her with a dualistic vision of transcendence and mastery. It is a monistic vision regarding to the same source we belongs to. The separation of humanity from nature as Rene Descartes philosophy is not possible. Nature, including the human body, is mechanical.

From the ecological perspective too, Silko repeatedly focuses the food chain which composes the ecosystem. Attempts to derive 'balance', 'harmony', and 'unity'

from ecology and make them into terms of literary value are best justified by Silko. The perfect harmony and balance of human-nature cannot be overlooked in the same way.

The human beings depended upon the aid and charity of the animals. Only through interdependence could the human beings survive. Families belonged to clans, and it was by clan that the human being joined with the animal and plant world. Life on the high, arid plateau became viable when the human beings were able to imagine themselves as sisters and brothers to the badger, antelope, clay, yucca, and sun. Not until they could find a viable relationship to the terrain – the physical landscape they found themselves in – could they *emerge*. Only at the moment that the requisite balance between human and *other* was realized could the Pueblo people become a culture, a distinct group whose population and survival remained stable despite the vicissitudes of the climate and terrain. (38)

In pursuance to Silko, the human beings living out in the hills were also not lonely because they had all the living creatures of the hills around them, and the earth loves equally to all of us as we are her children. Silko ties a strong connection with the environment through her expression of Landscape as a character in fiction. She says regarding the Hopi landscape:

The bare but beautiful vastness...emphasizes the visual impact of every plant, every rock, every arroyo. Nothing is overlooked or taken for granted. Each ant, each lizard, each lark is imbued with great value simply because the creature is alive in a place where any life at all is precious. Stand on the mesa's edge at Walpi and look southwest over the bare distances toward the pale blue outlines of the San Francisco Peaks (north of Flagstaff) where the ka'tsina spirits reside. So little lies between you

and the sky. So little lies between you and the earth. One look and you know that simply to survive is a great triumph, that every possible resource is needed, every possible ally—even the most humble insect or reptile. You realize you will be speaking with all of them if you intend to last out the year. Thus it is that the Hopi elders are grateful to the landscape for aiding them in their quest as spiritual people. (40-41)

Her writing consistently shows close attention to the natural world, with deep concern to the planet which represents the most fundamental relationship in our lives. She warns, “When humans have blasted and burned the last bit of life from the earth, an immeasurable freezing will descend with a darkness that obliterates the sun” (47).

In the Creation story, Silko presents the support of Antelope and Badger to knock a hole in the Earth bringing the people into the world. Anthropologists and ethnologists have, for a long time, differentiated the types of stories within the clans that the Pueblos tell. Echoing Whitman's conception of poetry, Marmon Silko presents stories as being more profound than commonly perceived. They are the creators, definers, and sustainers of identity, and they hold communities of people together as a whole family, clan, nation, and species—in short, stories can potentially unite all living things. However, when used with malicious intent, they can also work to dissipate communities and divide life. Being related to the land in the stories ensures balance in the ecosystem, and sustainable use of resources. Silko's elucidates:

One of the other advantages that we Pueblos have enjoyed is that we have always been able to stay with the land. Our stories cannot be separated from their geographical locations, from actual physical places on the land. We were not relocated like so many Native American groups who were torn away from their ancestral land. And our stories are so much a part of

these places that it is almost impossible for future generations to lose them – there is a story connected with every place, every object in the landscape. (58)

Additionally, a recurring theme in the pieces collected for *Yellow Woman* is the negation of the view that traditional Native culture is somehow fixed or impervious to change. American Indians, Silko tells us, are always changing the ways they teach, they live, they eat and the way their stories, songs and dances are presented. In her essay “Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit”, Silko talks about the world where all the living and non-living things are of equal value. She considers the whole environment as a community. All the plants and animals and other species along with the human beings are equal members of the natural community. It carries the concepts of organic whole and assumes the human existence is not independent but interdependent. She emphasizes the unity of human and nature with reference to the view of the old-time people:

We are sisters and brothers, clans people of all the living beings around us. The plants, the birds, fish, clouds, water, even the clay – they all are related to us. The old-time people believe that all things, even rocks and water, have spirit and being. They understood that all things want only to continue being as they are; they need only to be left as they are. Thus the old folks used to tell us kids not to disturb the earth unnecessarily. All things as they were created exist already in harmony with one another as long as we do not disturb them.

As the old story tells us, Tse’itsi’nako, Thought Woman, the Spider, thought of her three sisters, and as she thought of them, they came into being. Together with Thought Woman, they thought of the sun and the stars and the moon. The Mother Creators imagined the earth and the

oceans, the animals and the people, and *ka'tsina* spirits that reside in the mountains. The Mother Creators imagined all the plants that flower and the trees that bear fruit. As Thought Woman and her sisters thought of it, the whole universe came into being. In this universe, there is no absolute good or absolute bad; there are only balances and harmonies that ebb and flow. Some years the desert receives abundant rain, other years there is too little rain, and sometimes there is so much rain that floods cause destruction. But rain itself is neither innocent nor guilty. The rain is simply itself. (63-64)

Silko stresses the old-time Pueblo world regarding to the beauty of the spirit which was manifested in behavior and in one's relationships with other living beings. Human beings should understand that all the things in the world – living or non-living have an “inherent worth” in them. Beauty was as much a feeling of harmony as it was a visual, aural, or sensual effect. The whole person had to be beautiful, not just the face or the body. It is because of the reason that the faces and bodies could not be separated from hearts and souls. In the view of Old-time people, all things including the rocks and water have souls and being. They are in harmony with one another since their creation and emergence as long as we do not disturb them. In this way, nothing in this Universe is innocent or guilty, good or bad but the existence of harmony and balance should be continued without unnecessary disturbance.

Traditional beliefs hold that songs can create harmony. Each tribe has its own songs, as well as songs that are shared among tribes, and songs can be categorized according to their use, such as for religious ceremonies or for social events. Drums and flutes are two of the most popular musical instruments. Songs are most often accompanied by dance. Powwows are opportunities for Native American peoples to

gather together to celebrate life, honor the earth, and to give thanks to the creator with songs accompanied by drums. A powwow also allows various groups the opportunity to observe tribal traditions through song, dance, and elaborately decorated clothing. More importantly, the powwow is a way to preserve and share Native American culture and identity among various tribes.

To demonstrate sisterhood and brotherhood with the plants and animals, the old-time people make masks and costumes that transform the human figures of the dancers into the animal beings they portray:

Dancers paint their exposed skin; their postures and motions are adapted from their observations. But the motions are stylized. The observer sees not an actual eagle or actual deer dancing, but witnesses a human being, a dancer, gradually changing into a woman/buffalo or a man/deer. Every impulse is to reaffirm the urgent relationships that human beings have with the plant and animal world. (68)

It shows their bottomless connection to the natural world. The people live in tune with the plants and animals and treat them as if they were human beings. Such a relationship does not put humans in the centre and non-humans in the margin. It rather considers both humans and non-human animals as equal parts of the environment. Moreover, the old folks used to warn not to harm frogs, toads or green bottle flies as they save the people:

We children were always warned not to harm frogs or toads, the beloved children of the rain clouds, because terrible floods would occur. I remember in the summer the old folks used to stick big bolls of cotton on the outside of their screen doors as bait to keep the flies from going in the house when the door was opened. The old folks staunchly resisted the killing of flies because once, long, long ago, when human beings were in a

great deal of trouble, a Green Bottle Fly carried the desperate messages of human beings to the Mother Creator in the Fourth World, below this one. Human beings had outraged the Mother Creator by neglecting the Mother Corn altar while they dabbled with sorcery and magic. The Mother Creator disappeared, and with her disappeared the rain clouds, and the plants and the animals too. The people began to starve, and they had no way of reaching the Mother Creator down below. Green Bottle Fly took the message to the Mother Creator, and the people were saved. To show their gratitude, the old folks refused to kill any flies. (69)

This implies the importance of an animal to the nature in which non human as well as human beings depend. As per Pueblo beliefs, Killing the frogs or toads and flies invites the terrible flood as well as a starvation respectively. In her essay “The People and the Land are Inseparable”, Silko clarifies the inseparability of the People and the land:

In the old days, there had been no boundaries between the people and the land; there had been mutual respect for the land that others were actively using. This respect extended to all living beings, especially to the plants and the animals. We watched our elders behave with respect when they butchered a sheep. The sheep had been raised as a pet and treated with great care and love; when the time came, it was solemn, and the butcher thanked the sheep and reassured it. When the hunter brought home a mule deer buck, the deer occupied the place of honor in the house; it lay on the best Navajo blanket with strings of silver and turquoise beads hanging from its neck; turquoise and silver rings and bracelets decorated the antlers. (85-86)

Silko presents her love and respect for the homeland or the natural world in her collection. She highlights the human need to maintain harmonious relation with nature. Nature is all in all for her and she cannot conceive a healthy and happy world for human beings to the exclusion of nature. Her characters either human or non-human are deeply interlocked with the natural world and they cannot choose anything other than the natural entities for their pleasure and satisfaction. Though the scientists consider it as a food chain, the people respect the sheep or deer with love before it is butchered. She shares us her feelings about the relationship with her homeland which she did not learn before.

After Silko left Laguna for Tucson, she discovers that the animals and other living beings have a great deal to teach if paid special attention. She was impressed with the Tucson Mountains which are the remains of a huge volcano that exploded long ago. She was happy to find such lovely, unusual rocks, wonderful colorful and odd pebbles around her house and felt quite at home. In her essay “Hunger Stalked the Tribal People”, Silko talks about the tribal people and the old stories of the southwest which were told about drought years and starvation. Silko speaks for the Native Americans’ deep reverence and care towards the natural world as following:

Before anyone at the dinner table would take a bite, everyone would silently give thanks to all of the animal and plant beings that had given themselves to human beings to stop the hunger. A small pottery bowl was passed around the table at the same time, and the smallest child was encouraged to take small pinches from the food on her plate to feed to the spirits of beloved family members. No meal is ever eaten without first saying thanks. No person, no stranger who arrived at mealtime was ever refused, even if everyone else had a bit less on the plate, because the sharing of food is a fundamental expression of humanity. Hungry animals

eat first and allow others to feed only when they have filled themselves; even mother coyotes or mother hawks swallow the food first and regurgitate later. To share one's food is to demonstrate one's humanity. So each meal at Laguna was an occasion for thanksgiving, and each meal was shared with everyone, even strangers. (96-97)

In her essay "Tribal Councils: Puppets of the U.S. Government", Silko explained the reasons how the Navajo Tribal Council's own company is deforesting the Chuska Mountains though the indigenous people of the Americas traditionally revered and protect the Mother Earth and considered the land and all beings to be sacred. In order to answer how there are strip mines, clear-cut logging, hydroelectric dams, and radioactive waste disposal centers located on Indian land, she clarifies that the tribal council is an alien form of government which was forced upon the Indian people by the U.S. government in 1941 by the Indian Reorganization Act and it was happened against the will of the Pueblo or Navajo people. Silko focuses on the struggles of the native populations of the American southwest to reclaim the land that the Europeans have appropriated. She sheds light on the inviolable characteristics of the Mother Earth:

No part of the earth is expendable; the earth is a whole that cannot be fragmented, as it has been by the destroyers' mentality of the industrial age. The greedy destroyers of life and bringers of suffering demand that sacred land be sacrificed so that a few designated sacred places may survive; but once any part is deemed expendable, others can easily be redefined to fit the category of expendable. (94)

Silko puts forth the European hostility to natural world. In the name of civilization and development, the merciless treatment over nature brings fatal consequences. According to her, the construction work in the river destroys the earth's surface and changes the soil

into “red as Flesh”. It causes many plants to wither while the temperature increases and wells run dry. It hinders the ecosystem which results in environmental imbalance. Thus, Silko contrasts the solidity and balance of the natural world with the growing degradation and destruction that comes from human greed. While the Native American integration with nature brings balance and harmony, the European separation from it invites destruction and disharmony. Silko further warns the serial killers of life on earth without any compromise as they are so sick and cannot stop themselves:

They would like the rest of us to embrace death as they have, to say, “Well, all this is dead already, what will it matter if they are permitted to kill a little more?” Even among the conservation groups there is an unfortunate value system in place that writes off or sacrifices some locations because they are no longer “virgin”. Those who claim to love and protect the Mother Earth have to love all of her, even the places that are no longer pristine. (95)

This view leads to the interdependence of the entire thing in nature. Silko marks out the awareness to save the Mother Earth. It’s the responsibility of all of us to love and protect the earth. Similarly, the Native Americans pay respect to the birds and bees for their role to the growth of plants. Silko is fond of the rattlesnakes which also help to control the other harmful insects and protect crops. Since all the species play equal roles to run the ecosystem, they deserve equal value and respect in their places. Thus, human beings should not take one thing in preference to the other and we need to leave “space” to all the natural entities perpetually. In her essay, “Fifth World: The Return of Ma ah shra true ee, the Giant Serpent”, Silko presents the prophecies:

So the old people laugh when they hear talk about the “desecration” of the earth, because humankind, they know, is nothing in comparison to the

earth. Blast it open, dig it up, or cook it with nuclear explosions: the earth remains. Humans desecrate only themselves. The earth is inviolate. (125)

The Laguna Pueblo elders declared the earth was the sacred mother of all living things and blasting her wide open to reach deposits of Uranium Ore was an act almost beyond imagination. They have their own explanation i.e. the destruction of any part of the earth does immediate harm to all living things.

Silko highlights the Pueblo Command System which value cooperation and non aggression above all, “Moreover, this system of cooperation extends to all living things, even plants and insects, which Laguna Pueblo elders refer to as sisters and brothers because none can survive unless all survive” (130). It is all about the unity to strengthen the balance and harmony. In the belief of old people, no one (person) or thing is superior (or of greater) or inferior (or of lesser) value than another and if presumed, such hierarchies are considered absurd. And this means that any location can potentially become a sacred spot.

In her essay “Notes on Almanac of the Dead”, Silko talks about herself that she works by intuition and instinct instead of outlines or plans. Her interests in the ancient astronomical knowledge that the tribal people of the Americas had possessed long before the arrival of the Europeans, leads her to learn about the great culture of the Maya people, who had invented the zero and who had performed sophisticated mathematical calculations so that they could predict the positions of the planets and the stars. She elucidates, “What interested me about the Mayas was their notion of time; they believed time was a living being that had a personality, a sort of identity. Time was alive and might pass, but time did not die; moreover, the days and weeks eventually would return” (136).

Silko, obviously knowledgeable about ancient Mayan and Mixtec screen folds, tries to recreate a similar fusion of text and picture. In doing so, she demonstrates how traditional American Indian culture is not static. It takes on new forms and adapts and changes with time.

Without clocks or calendars we see only the succession of the days, some longer, some shorter, some hotter, some colder; but the succession is cyclic. The process of aging becomes a process of changing: the infant changes; the flower changes; the changes continue relentlessly. Nothing is lost, left behind, or destroyed. It is only changed. (137)

It urges that the change is a relative thing indeed. It is just continuing in the cyclic process. Silko repeatedly demonstrates the Pueblo explanation in order to protect the native land in her essay “Stone Avenue Mural” as, “Human beings also are natural forces of the earth. There will be no peace in the Americas until there is justice for the earth and her children. (151) She makes us aware about the ongoing destruction of ozone layer, green house effects, nuclear effects and other natural catastrophes that destroy million of lives.

However, Silko juxtaposes Native American and Pre-Christian sensibility towards nature, and finds similarity between them. Both the traditions are close to nature and establish ethical relationship with it. The stories she heard as a child tells us about another time, when all of Mother Earth’s children, the birds, the lizards, bugs, plants, and human beings, lived together as one family and shared the water and the food equally. Silko says, “They behaved justly with one another. The time and place of this harmony and justice still exists, it is not gone or destroyed. Greed blinds human eyes to the location of the place and time nearby to us” (152).

Silko further insists the interconnection of all living things with the mother earth that creates and sustains them. Her efforts to defend against the hostility to the mother earth and her children are exclusively preoccupied with the old stories as following:

From the beginning there have always been those destroyers who delight in the suffering and destruction of Mother Earth and her children. These destroyers are liars, of course, and they want the people to lose heart; so the destroyers always tell the people that the old stories are ended, the old stories don't matter anymore. But the truth is, the stories don't ever end; they continue on; the old stories continue to unfold even now, in many locations, not just in Chiapas with the Maya Zapatistas. (153)

It is vividly explained above that the people who destroy the earth always misguide the people about the old stories. Instead of the old stories, they will also disappear themselves when the mother earth will be ended. This context is seriously compared to the invasion of the Americas by the Europeans.

As a nature lover, she was interested in the photography from the very beginning of her life. The irony is that her father was a professional photographer and she has always mixed photography with her written work. Photography, especially as a visual storytelling, has been perceived to be the ultimate tool in recording and relating actual events. In "The Indian With a Camera", Silko reclaims this visual and artistic legacy as her own. Furthermore, in her essay "On Photography", Silko recalls her interests to capture the natural environment in through her lens:

Thousands of years were necessary for the people to learn how to live with the land to survive and even thrive during the most difficult droughts and climate changes. Great climatic changes are also under way today; on this point all can agree. Is it the greenhouse effect from fossil fuels, a

consequence of aboveground nuclear tests, or is it simply another dimension of some ancient cycle of earth; Los Angeles, Las Vegas, San Diego, Phoenix, and Tucson are cities in the desert; supplies of potable water for these cities are dwindling fast. May be the newcomers need another five hundred or even a thousand years to learn how to live with the earth here, but when the water has run out, their time will have run out too. Who will be left? Only a few remember how the desert nourishes her children who live with her. When they look at photographs of Los Angeles or Las Vegas, they will be amazed that the strangers lasted as long as they did. (185)

These lines are set against the greenhouse effect, climatic changes, etc. due to the industrial capitalism. In quest of the best option to the most destructive forms of industrial and nuclear development, Silko has attempted to delve indigenous non-industrial cultures, exploring the possibility of alliance between these cultures and the wider environmental movement.

Silko's excerpt from her collection, "An Essay on Rocks" vividly demonstrates the life that she sees in rocks. She combines photography with written words to tell a story about a particular rock. Although this experiment in merging pictures and text to tell a story appears at first blush to be entirely original in form, it is, in actuality, a continuation of traditional Native American Literature. Silko illustrates in her essay on rocks that American Indian cultural forms of expression can be reclaimed using contemporary technology. She presents miraculous memory of rock as following:

Observed close up, the rock has a smooth metallic luster sometimes found on meteorites. It is a rock with the peculiar property of appearing larger at a distance and smaller when seen close-up. Those who pay no attention to

rocks may be surprised, but the appearance of a rock may change from hour to hour. Some attribute the changes to the angle of the sun or the shift in shadows on the snow next to the rock. Once while I was deer hunting I saw a giant bear sleeping on a rock in the sun; when I got closer there was only the great basalt boulder amid the patches of melting snow. (191)

In this way, Silko weaves episodes from her life into musings on the inclusiveness of the ancient Pueblo vision, how integral place or rock is to the Pueblo ethos and sense of identity, and how stories are a vibrant part of everyday Pueblo life, establishing and preserving a web of meaning, memory, and knowledge.

According to the Pueblo old stories, the plants, mountains, rivers, etc. have also souls or spirit. Their belief resists human exploitation over natural world and promotes a healthy relationship between human and nature. It results in human love and respect to the natural world.

Literary ecology has become the web re-minding us to seek the connections these stories convey—connections among human characters, connections between and among species, connections in culture and place, and connections reflecting the biosphere-based life we share, as we inhabit this earth together. Increasingly aware that we have only one earth (Mother Earth) to inhabit, we humans have new opportunities to hear each other's stories, to honor storytelling across cultural lines, and to embrace animals and their habitats as integral to our stories. Native American literature has long been familiar with these possibilities. Fresh perspectives toward stories and storytelling hold potential to restore (to re-story) and to refurbish our environmental imagination. Having proven her ability to master fiction, Silko demonstrates her storytelling success with non-fiction in the *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* collection.

IV. Conclusion

In her *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko presents beauty of the spirit as the true symbol of perennial relationship. Through the path of storytelling, she demonstrates the perennial harmony in between man and nature but not a momentary. It is the man who should run behind the nature but not the nature to run behind man and if this relationship does not exist for long run, it will be the destruction. We can easily understand the value of human-nature relation in depth, lasting an indefinitely long time. This type of everlasting relationship between man and nature cannot be separated from each other. It depicts the importance of land and nature in Native American belief systems. The connection between identity and the relationship to land is evident, whether expressed explicitly or implicitly.

Silko develops human-nature unanimity through Native American reciprocity to the natural world. Native Americans way of living and attitude towards nature reflect their harmonious relationship with nature. It dismantles the nature/culture dualism putting them not as two opposites but as similar ones and observes both the human and nature on the basis of equality. It changes the anthropocentric way of looking at nature and puts human and nature at good terms developing the ecocentric view to look at the natural world.

Silko's concise essays are like songs; their harmonies are autobiographical, their melodies topical. She continues to address human concerns through a storyteller's voice. She is considered as one of the best Native American Writers to explore the attachment between man and nature through the storytelling. She has been strongly dedicated to her native land/place, surrounding, and the natural life since her livelihood. These ways help to bring human beings and nature together. This way of looking towards nature raises moral concerns about human interaction with nature.

Focusing on a wide range of topics discovers that the mother earth and all the earthly creatures including human beings and brings balance and peace to the whole. Balance plays a significant role in indigenous peoples' world views are centered on the relationship with the land i.e. the surrounding natural environment. Silko insists that a human relationship with the nature does not disturb anything but brings harmony. It is vivid that human actions affect the environment and in the long term it affects the human beings themselves. To be free of the harmful impact upon the whole environment, human action should not be harmful to the surroundings as they dismantle the harmonious relationship. This human-nature relationship has been presented through the Native American attachment with the nature.

As she herself is from Indigenous American society, she portrays all her feelings regarding to the interconnectedness with land. It is not merely about her personal experience but a vivid picture of the old Pueblo stories too. She captures all the meaningful oral tradition and living styles of her society through this collection. Almost all of her essays are related with the nature and human beings. In a true sense we can get fresh aroma of balance of man and nature in most part of her writings.

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