

# East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

[Home](#)

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Submit](#)

[Meet the  
Editors](#)

[Issue 23-  
Spring  
2022](#)

[Previous  
Issues](#)

[Join Our  
Team](#)

## UC Clermont's Literature Essay Contest Winners

[back](#)



Copyright Eastfork Online Literary Journal. All Rights Reserved.

POWERED BY  
WebsiteBuilder

# East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

- Home
- About Us
- Contact Us
- Submit
- Meet the Editors
- Issue 23- Spring 2022
- Previous Issues
- Join Our Team

## The Hungry Games: Consumption and Class Structure in The Hungry Games

By: Aaron Fletcher

back

A nation divided not only by physical boundaries, but by a socioeconomic divide finds itself in a gruesome fight for survival year after year. While the classes toil below them, the head of Government and the richest of society find themselves in a position of comfort and power. This is the world presented by Suzanne Collins in *The Hunger Games*. Panem is a country that has been separated into a very distinct structure of Districts. Each District has its own purpose and level on the structure of socioeconomic class, the highest level being one and the lowest being twelve. A defining feature of these Districts is how accessible things like health care and food are, and the quality of these things. The higher your District is on the ladder, the more access you have to the things you need. This occurrence isn't just happenstance; it is a system that was devised by the Capitol that continues in order to maintain obedience and division. This world presented by Collins is not too far into the realm of fiction. The Contemporary American Social System is almost a perfect reflection of the system presented by Panem. Health Care, food, and other necessities are inaccessible to many Americans, just as they are to the residents of the lower districts. The way these things are regulated today hasn't quite reached the extent seen in *The Hunger Games*, but we are slowly working our way towards the same level of control. In her novel, *The Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins uses the accessibility of food and health care to separate the districts of Panem along socioeconomic lines to criticize the social systems of Contemporary America.

Throughout the novel, we are given various depictions of consumption of many different things. The way food, health care, and other forms of consumption present themselves in *The Hunger Games* is just as important as the actual necessity of the item to each individual. Perhaps the most important commodity to the residents of Panem, and more specifically District 12, is Health Care. In his article, "Folk Healers and Medical Miracles: Images of Health and Health Care in *The Hunger Games*," Robert Hackey says "Folk healers ... recognize the critical role of health care in Collins's trilogy" (Hackey 776). The survival of Katniss in her everyday life revolves around her understanding of Appalachian folk remedies, and both tributes from District 12 come to rely on folk medicine as well as miraculous modern medicines. The residents of the Seam have come to rely on folk remedies as their main form of health care. According to Hackey, this is because "health care choices for residents of the Seam ... are circumscribed by their abject poverty and powerlessness" (Hackey 776). Even with such a heavy reliance on folk medicine, modern medicines must be used in the Seam when remedies don't make the cut. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss gives pills to Peeta to reduce his fever. She says "I dug through the first-aid kit ... and find pills that reduce your temperature. My mother actually breaks down and buys these on occasion when her home remedies fail" (Collins 255). Though times like this occur where folk medicine just won't cut it, it is safe to rely on these remedies when situations like Katniss's run-in with the Tracker/Jackers occurs. After she has suffered many severe Tracker/Jacker stings, Katniss forms an Alliance with her fellow tribute Rue. In the same moment, Rue says she can fix Katniss's stings. Rue then proceeds to pull out some leaves which Katniss says are like the ones her mother uses. Rue chews upon these leaves and presses them on Katniss's knee (Collins 200). Katniss receives instantaneous relief upon the application of the leaves. She says "It's as if the leaves are actually leaching the pain right out of the sting" (Collins 201). Treatments like this aren't unusual to the residents of poorer districts like 11 and 12, they are also common in contemporary Southern Appalachia. According to Hackey, a remedy exactly like this one seen in *The Hunger Games* takes place. Hackey says "I do believe that the use of such a remedy is a way of life for Katniss and Rue, as well as for the current residents of Appalachia. Their presence in *The Hunger Games* isn't just a survival factor, it is a connection between the tributes and their everyday lives."

Food is another important commodity to the residents of Panem, especially to those with limited access to sustenance such as those who live in the Seam. On the importance of food, Lori Parks and Jennifer Yamashiro say in their article, "Consumed: Food in *The Hunger Games*": "Food, Food, Food. The pages of Collins' novel ... are filled with visceral examples of hunger and desperation, the acquisition of food, its preparation, consumption or abandonment, and abundance. In District 12, the paucity of monthly government grain and oil rations leads to supplemental, illegal practices such as hunting, gathering, and trading on the black market." (Parks, Yamashiro 153) With such little access to food for the residents of District 12, the abundance of food comes as a shock to Katniss. This is visible in the first meeting with her stylist Cinna. Katniss observes Cinna "request" the food when he "presses a button on the side of table" which causes the table to open up to allow a second tableful of food to rise from below (Collins 65). Katniss then tries to imagine what it would take to gather all of the ingredients for the meal in front of her at home and says to herself "what must it be like, I wonder, to live in a world where food appears at the press of a button?" (Collins 65). This is such a stark difference in lifestyle for Katniss. She has dedicated her entire life to hunting and gathering in order to provide for herself and her family. This has taken so much control of her personality that she can't even imagine what she would do with her time if she didn't have to scavenge for food (Collins 65). Right away, Katniss has encountered a barrier that prevents her from connecting with the residents of The Capitol. The abundance of food Katniss encounters is just one of the factors that cause residents of poor districts to separate themselves from those who live in The Capitol and richer districts.

The accessibility and quality of certain commodities are restricted in different districts, this shows us the way in which the government of Panem keeps each district confined within the social and geographic barriers set upon them. One of the most social aspects of human life is the way we interact with food. Parks and Yamashiro say "Food is able to both connect and divide people on a social level" (Parks, Yamashiro 140). This statement is proven in *The Hunger Games* through the different levels of consumption each district can partake in, ranging from starvation to gluttony. The effects of accessibility to food shows itself when Katniss is analyzing the other tributes during training. Upon seeing the other tributes Katniss says that her "heart sinks" and "almost all of the boys and at least half of the girls are bigger than I am, even though many of the tributes have never been fed properly. You can see it in their bones, their skin, the hollow look in their eyes" (Collins 94). Katniss, being from the poorest district, has had the least amount of readily available food. This causes her to be at a disadvantage to the rest, even though others also have not been properly fed. The tributes from the wealthier districts, often referred to as "careers", have the greatest advantage over Katniss and the other poor tributes. Katniss says that each Career "tribute" must have fifty to a hundred pounds on [her]" (Collins 94-95). The access to food that Career Tributes have doesn't only cause a distancing between rich and poor districts based on ability, there is also an inherent jealousy that separates them. There is even a divide between the residents of different poor districts. When Katniss allies with Rue during the Games and they eat their first meal together, Katniss is surprised when Rue says that she has "never had a whole leg [of goodness] to herself before" (Collins 202). In response to this, Katniss says "I'd have thought ... you'd have a bit more to eat than us ... since you grow the food" (Collins 202). This is not a reprimand between districts, Katniss automatically assumes that Rue has more access to food since District 11 produces it. After Rue tells Katniss that they are punished if they take food, she asks if the residents of District 11 are able to eat all that they want. To this Katniss replies "no ... just what we buy and whatever we track in on our boots" (Collins 203). The lack of communication between these two districts was created enough of a barrier. But, since the residents assume the living situations of each other, there is a greater divide caused by the jealousy that has been created through each other's assumptions.

The way that the accessibility to Health Care is regulated shows how the weakness of poor districts is favorable to The Capitol. The way Health Care is distributed in Panem is almost identical to the contemporary American health care system. In his article, Hackey says "in the contemporary American system, the availability of life-saving treatments depends on a patient's ability to pay" (Hackey 785). When Katniss finds Peeta, she knows that any remedy she could concoct will not be enough to heal him and he needs something stronger than the ointment she received for her burns. She knows she will have to work hard to impress sponsors who will provide the medicine Peeta needs. A single kiss gives the tributes from district 12 a pot of broth, food that was desperately needed for Peeta (Collins 261). After many more efforts to show her "swelling love" for Peeta, her work finally pays off when a "feast" is called in order to give each district the thing they so desperately need (Collins 274). Katniss retrieves her gift from the Feast and returns to find that it is medicine for Peeta. The injection Katniss gives Peeta works wonders, causing "almost all the swelling" in Peeta's leg to be gone (Collins 291). Katniss had to work hard to please the sponsors of *The Hunger Games* in order to receive the medicine Peeta needed. This is similar to the systems in contemporary America where "moral judgments shape ... the dispensation of social welfare benefits" (Hackey 785). In both Panem and the United States, quality health care is only given to those who are deemed worthy of it. If one can't afford a certain medication, they simply won't get it. The quality of health care, once it is accessed, also varies depending on one's social standing. The modern medicine in Panem has an ability not only to heal, but to restore. This is evident after the *Hunger Games* have come to an end. When Katniss wakes in a medical facility that is contained within the Training Center, she notices that "the scars from the burns are less prominent" (Collins 345). She has also regained her hearing (Collins 349). Perhaps the most extensive form of restoration by modern medicine in *The Hunger Games* comes with Peeta's new leg. Katniss describes the leg as a "metal-and-plastic device that has replaced his flesh" (Collins 369). This is also where folk medicines and modern medicines collide, because Katniss had used a tourniquet to prevent Peeta from bleeding out. Peeta lost his leg in exchange for his life. If this situation had occurred back in District 12, Peeta would forever be without his leg. But, since it occurred under the control of the Capitol, he had access to the medical technologies needed to give him a new, fully functional leg (Collins 369). The access to health care in District 12 is very limited. There was even an instance where the professional health care provider for the district turned away a patient because of his likelihood of death. This patient was treated by Katniss's mother using her traditional knowledge, but he had died anyway (Collins 178-179). Because District 12 is so far from the Capitol and so poor, it just isn't worth it for them to allow any kind of modern medicines to them. Once again separating the wealthy from the poor.

A social divide can be found arising between the districts of Panem and the classes in contemporary America, both being caused by the favoring of upper classes/districts and the neglect of lower ones. Hackey discusses how unaware the Capitol and wealthier districts are of the conditions suffered by poor districts by comparing them to those discussed in Michael Harrington's "The Other America." Hackey says "The same lack of awareness and concern for the condition of the poor described by Harrington exists in Panem, where the residents of the outlying districts are as 'socially invisible' to the pampered residents of the Capitol as the rural poor of the 1960s" (Hackey 789-791). Hackey then continues to say "in District 12, low wages, limited rations, and a high rate of occupational injuries placed many families at risk of malnutrition or even starvation" (Hackey 781). This occurrence can be seen in contemporary America where "rates of poverty, preventable illnesses and deaths, and avoidable hospitalizations remain much higher in Appalachia and other poor rural communities" (Hackey 781). The residents of both the Seam and Southern Appalachia are simply too poor to afford modern medicines. The deciding factors to how accessible health care is, are affordability and availability. Because of this, Hackey says, those who live in District 12 "rely upon traditional folk medicine ... for with few exceptions, pharmaceuticals, surgery, and other forms of medical care are typically neither accessible nor affordable" (Hackey 772). The lower districts of Panem and the lower classes of Contemporary America are rejected the same quality of health care provided to the upper class because it is financially out of their reach. This inequality can also be found in the accessibility of food.

For the lower districts of Panem and the lower classes of America, food is one of the most necessary commodities that cannot be easily accessed. According to Parks and Yamashiro "The *Hunger Games* tap into the way that food is encoded within a society. Historically the roots of hierarchical power can be traced to the domestication of animals and agriculture" (Parks, Yamashiro 159). The control of food in Panem and America has been removed from the people who produce it. This can be seen in the contemporary food production system as well as District 11. Recall the discussion between Katniss and Rue during the Games. When Katniss assumes that the residents of District 11 can eat all the food they wish, Rue corrects. According to Rue, if you eat the crops, "they whip you and make everyone else watch" (Collins 202). Even though District 11 is the agricultural center of Panem that produces food for the rest of Panem, they still do not have access to proper sustenance because it is not granted to them. If one cannot access a proper amount of food, they will become too weak, physically and mentally, to improve their situation.

There is more than just a battle between tributes happening in *The Hunger Games*. There is a battle for life happening within the lower districts of Panem. This battle is not a work of fiction, it is a retelling of the fight that is happening in the American lower class. The most necessary commodities to human life: Food and Health Care, are inaccessible to the poor residents of both countries. The self-reliance that can be found in Southern Appalachia, both in contemporary times and the future presented by Suzanne Collins, is not just a way of life that has survived out of tradition, it is a necessity, by having their interaction with food restricted, the residents of Panem are also restricted socially due to an altered lifestyle. This altered lifestyle has led to a segregation between classes. With this segregation comes both physical and mental weakness due to a lack of resources. Without access to proper food and quality health care, it is impossible for the least fortunate of both Panem and America to climb the social ladder and leave their current situation. Poor working and living conditions have led to a deplorable lifestyle among the lower class. A lifestyle that is intolerable, but also inescapable. Suzanne Collins created the world of Panem as a fictional future America, but the world she has created is not too far from the very real America that we live in today. Collins isn't just criticizing the social systems of today, she is warning us of things to come. Her predictions have already started to become true should our leaders be allowed to run wild with their regulation of social welfare, our very nation could turn into the dystopia that so many have come to fear.

back

Works Cited  
Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic Inc., 2008.  
Hackey, Robert B. "Folk Healers and Medical Miracles: Images of Health and Health Care in *The Hunger Games*." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 46, no. 4, Aug. 2012, pp. 775-788. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1111/jpcu.12224.  
Parks, Lori L., Jennifer P. Yamashiro. "Consumed: Food in *The Hunger Games*." *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 34, no. 2, June 2015, pp. 157-150. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1386/ejac.34.2.157.1.

## East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

[Home](#)[About Us](#)[Contact Us](#)[Submit](#)[Meet the  
Editors](#)[Issue 23-  
Spring  
2022](#)[Previous  
Issues](#)[Join Our  
Team](#)

### The Past Has Not Passed

By: Tim Combes

[back](#)

The past is an illusion; all that truly exists in this world, exists in the present. Past and Future alike exist only in one's mind, while the present eternally unfolds around him or her. The past is simply memories and the future is what one imagines tomorrow will bring based on those memories. Given the immaterial nature of the past, one would think that mankind would be able to keep it in its place; mankind, however, does no such thing. For many people, the past is a rock-filled suitcase they drag behind them wherever they go; it is more real to them than the present is or ever will be. No group of people demonstrate this connection to the past more completely than the former slaves of the American slave trade. These men and women endured years of torture within the institution of slavery and then were forced to deal with its lasting psychological bondage long after they were physically "freed". This is one of the core themes in Toni Morrison's acclaimed novel *Beloved*. In the novel, former slaves are forced to confront the past with the return of the protagonist's deceased daughter, who goes only by the name "Beloved". By reincarnating Beloved, Morrison illustrates how the past invades the present.

Beloved represents, among other things, the anguish of every African American soul lost in the slave trade. One must look no further than the phrase and scripture that preface the book for substantial evidence. The phrase "Sixty Million and more" comes right after the title page and serves as a dedication to all of the men, women, and children who were lost to the Atlantic slave trade. These people remain forever nameless, laid restlessly to rest in unmarked graves. By dedicating the novel to these lost souls, Morrison looks to give them a name and a story. The name she gives them is found in the words of the Apostle Paul on the following page, "I will call them my people, which were not my people. And her Beloved, which was not Beloved". Here, Morrison connects the biblical reconciliation of God and His people to the reconciliation of lost slaves to modern thought. In the same way that God looks to give a name to people previously unnamed, Morrison looks to give a name to the "sixty million and more" lost slaves who have been hitherto nameless. The name she chooses to give them is the same one that God gave his people: "Beloved".

Further proof of this is found abundantly throughout the novel. After her death as a child, Beloved spent her years in a dark timeless place she refers to simply as "the bridge" (87, 248). This place is an afterlife, but it is by no means heaven. On the bridge, she meets a man whom she refers to as "the man with my face", who one can assume is her father (248). She also meets a woman "with [her] face" who dons an iron circle around her neck who is most likely Sethe's (the protagonist) mother (250). In this dark eternal place her soul mingles with her ancestors as well as the souls of countless other slaves and over time their anguish mixed with hers so that when Beloved came back to earth, she was something far greater than Sethe's murdered daughter. Beloved comes back, in part, as every dead slave longing to finally be known. While on the bridge, she says, "there is no one to want me, to say my name" (251). This longing to be known plays deeply into her seduction of Paul D, as there is nothing more intimate in this life than sex. As Adam "knew" Eve, Beloved wants to be known by Paul D. When she begs him to call her by her name while they make love, she is not asking just for herself; she is asking for herself and every nameless soul that intertwined with hers on the bridge (137, 251).

The ways in which Sethe, Paul D, and Denver interact with Beloved is symbolic of how each of them deals with the past, specifically slavery. Sethe is quick to accept Beloved as soon as she shows up soaking wet on the road to 124 Bluestone (61). She is instantly endeared to her because her name reminds her of the daughter she lost and she immediately invites her to stay in her home (63, 64). Once she discovers that Beloved is, in fact, the daughter she murdered all those years ago, she is elated that she has returned and has seemingly forgiven her (213). Beloved's emotions toward Sethe, though, are much more complex than love and forgiveness; Beloved is filled with much more rage and spitefulness toward Sethe than she at first appears (281). Once Beloved's rage becomes apparent, Sethe begins to lose her mind and thinks she must explain her actions to Beloved (284). This complicated web of interaction is symbolic of Sethe having her final battle with her past. Sethe's past forced her into a corner where she was forced to murder her own daughter to save her from the horrors of slavery. This act is the pinnacle of Sethe's relationship with the past because it shows how she let the past control her actions to the point of infanticide. Once Sethe knows that Beloved is her daughter, she decides that the only way to overcome her past is to make Beloved understand. If she can achieve forgiveness from Beloved, then she has overcome the past. If she can make Beloved understand, then she has overcome slavery. What she discovers, however, is that Beloved's forgiveness doesn't matter; what matters is if she can forgive herself (322). She must learn that she, herself, is her "best thing".

As much as he would never admit it, Beloved has immense power over Paul D. He is allured to her "shine" and is extremely wary of her, so much so that he begins to have sex with Sethe in the mornings to clear his head before he sees Beloved (76). She has so much power over him that she is even able to physically move him (154). She gains so much power over him that she is eventually able to put him into a trance in order to make love with him, which causes the lid to his tobacco tin heart to come loose (138). This tricky relationship with Beloved perfectly illustrates his tricky relationship with the past; the past has immense power over him. Just like Beloved, Paul D is unknowingly "moved" by the past. He thinks his "thin love" is an advantage, that it keeps him safe from harm when, in actuality, it keeps him from ever truly experiencing life. Paul D's inability to love keeps him constantly nomadic, until he meets Sethe. His past catches up to him when he reconnects with Sethe, and the rust begins to fall off the tobacco tin that is his heart when his love for her begins to grow. In this way, when Paul D is being intimate with Beloved, he is being intimate with his past. Ironically, his affair with Beloved further illustrates his love for Sethe because it shows that he is willing to face his dark past to be with her.

Denver did not care much for Sethe's past until Beloved came along; she found it annoying and superfluous since it didn't involve her - since it didn't "belong" to her (15). Beloved's arrival, however, instantly gives Denver something in the past that belongs to her: her sister. Denver may be a young, immature girl, but she is extremely perceptive and recognizes Beloved for who she is almost immediately. Denver knows what Sethe did and is terrified of her for it. She believes it is her job to protect Beloved from Sethe, so that the past does not repeat itself. Once Denver sees Beloved's true colors, though, she realizes that the truth is not as black and white as she once thought and realizes it is her responsibility to save her family (286). Even though Denver loves Beloved, she is not tethered to her in the same way that Sethe is and the same is true for Denver's relationship with the past. Denver is aware of Sethe's past only partially, in the same way that she only knows Beloved partially, and is therefore not as bound by its grasp as Sethe is. This freedom from the past is what allows Denver to become the true hero of the novel and eventually save her mother.

The final chapter illustrates how modern society chooses to ignore the past to not have to face it. This chapter serves as a beautifully poetic epilogue to the story and is peppered with the repeating phrase, "it was not a story to pass on" (323, 324). In other words, Beloved's story was not to be passed on. This phrase was very cleverly included by Morrison because it has multiple meanings depending on how one reads it. One can either read it as "It was not a story to pass on" or as "it was not a story to pass on". If one reads it and emphasizes the word "not", then he or she will get the impression that the story is bad or worthless. The story should not be passed on, it should be lost forever in time; it would be better for society if everyone forgot about it. However, if one reads it as "it was not a story to pass on", then an entirely different meaning emerges. Morrison simply could not pass on the opportunity to write this novel. This story is important and must be told to everyone in the world. This double meaning illustrates the dual nature with which society treats the past, specifically slavery. Society wants to sweep slavery under the rug; it wants slavery to be forgotten. It is best for these stories not to be passed on from person to person, to just let them die. The past, however, is a pesky thing and will just not die that easily; to defeat the past one must face it. This truth is illustrated by the second interpretation of the phrase, "it was not a story to pass on". For society to ever truly overcome the past, these stories must be told. Healing can only come after one recognizes a wound.

Throughout the events of *Beloved*, it is abundantly clear that the past has invaded the present. Beloved rose from the river soaked not only with water but with the sadness and rage of sixty million lost souls. She returns from the dead and brings not only her own pain with her but also the pain and of countless slaves lost in a timeless abyss. Beloved's return forced both Paul D and Sethe to deal with their long buried pasts, and Denver was forced to learn how to help them do it. The past is not easy to overcome, it is a process full of agonizing pain and damaged pride, but it must be overcome nonetheless. Just like a murdered daughter gone too soon, the past never stays buried.

#### Works Cited

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage, 1987, 2004. Print.

[back](#)

## East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

[Home](#)[About Us](#)[Contact Us](#)[Submit](#)[Meet the  
Editors](#)[Issue 23-  
Spring  
2022](#)[Previous  
Issues](#)[Join Our  
Team](#)

### “They Kill What They Fear”: Assimilation and Gender Roles in Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony

[back](#)

By: Erin Elliott

In a society seemingly obsessed with marketing merchandise into gender specific categories, it seems almost impossible for the concept of gender-neutrality to spark anything but outrage among a more conservative demographic who often quote the Bible as evidence for their beliefs. This passage from Matthew is often used for that purpose, but another meaning can be derived that embraces gender-fluidity:

“the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’ 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh” (New International Version, Matt. 19:4-6). This blending of feminine and masculine traits is present in the Bible as it is also present in the polytheist beliefs of certain Native American tribes. This common ground is often overlooked by those who wish to force their beliefs on other people through assimilation. Assimilation occurred after imperialists “conquered” native lands and were confronted with a culture that did not coincide with their own. The solution was to rid the natives of their culture: “Kill the Indian, save the man” (“Kill the Indian, and Save the Man”; Capt. Richard H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans). In 1887, the Dawes’ act was passed to assimilate the indigenous people into white culture. The government offered small plots of land in exchange for citizenship in a trade that resulted in more land being stolen from the Natives. The plots of land were small compared to the landscape they had shared with each other before. This trade ultimately led to a breakdown of the former tribal social structure. Gender roles, while heavily prevalent in white culture, were not as important to many tribal cultures; however, after many years of forced assimilation and living drastically different from their traditions, Native American families adopted white gender roles, and the detriments that come with it, into their culture. In Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony, Tayo lives on a reservation that has felt the effects of cultural assimilation. The cultural trauma Tayo’s people face can only be healed by acknowledging the damage made by assimilation, respecting the feminine traditions and landscape that have been altered by the damaging effects of hierarchal gender roles, and changing the traditions to properly heal a people effected by assimilation and account for mixed-race tribal members like Tayo. The characters in Ceremony who adopt these gender roles and are uncomfortable with their identity have internalized generations of assimilation; they ignore the traditional stories that incorporate the interconnectedness of all things including nature, gender, family, time, and all people.

The traditions of the Pueblo people present in the novel are primarily influenced by feminine figures like Corn Woman, Thought Woman (Spider Woman), Ts’eh (the mountain woman), and other more human female figures—but spiritual all the same—like Night Swan and the Mexican woman. The traditional masculine figures like the Hunter, Betonie, Uncle Josiah, Robert, and Tayo are gentle and accepting of the integral position of women in their tribe. According to Paula Gunn Allen, author of *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, a woman’s position in the Pueblo tribe is central to a matrilineal, “gynocratic” lifestyle rather than peripheral to a patriarchal one (2). The Laguna Pueblo’s creator, Thought Woman, “like all of her creation, is fundamentally female.” In accordance with Keres theology, Thought Woman is not only female, but male as well: “Since she is the supreme Spirit. She is both Mother and Father to all people and to all creatures.” (15). Allen argues that because the creator is feminine, “The Lagunas regard their land as feminine” (122). Allen also says that “While Ceremony is ostensibly a tale about a man, Tayo, it is as much the feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of the witchery” (118-119). The characters that respect this “feminine life force” do not implement hierarchal gender roles into their behavior and instead respect the land and all of its people.

The mountain people who help Tayo complete his ceremony, the Hunter and Ts’eh the mountain woman, are representations of the ideal traditional male and female. Tayo believes them to be married and thinks the man will incite violence against him like the men fighting at the bar in Gallup, but the hunter and Ts’eh work together and do not fight for ownership over the other. Tayo’s relationship with Ts’eh stays with him after his ceremony is completed: “he thought of her then; she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there” (257). No name is given to who Tayo is referring to, but one could assume he is also thinking of his mother who left him when he was a child. Ts’eh’s nurturing nature is one that Tayo never experienced from his Aunt growing up; Ts’eh, unlike Auntie, does not care for the labels society places on families: “They would leave the questions of lineage, clan, and family name to the people in the village, to someone like Auntie who had to know everything about anyone” (208). Tayo grew up without a mother because of his communities’ fear of the other and shaming of pre-marital sex. Ts’eh and Night Swan are older women who convey wisdom and acceptance Tayo did not receive from a feminine figure and represents their traditions of respect and fluidity between genders and their relations. The encounters Tayo has with both Ts’eh and Night Swan are vastly different from the stories Emo tells of the women he sleeps with in which he uses disgusting and disrespectful language towards women. There is no person in either sexual encounter Tayo has that is wishing for a selfish ownership over the other. In this way, they have “become one flesh” (New International Version, Matt. 19:4-6). In Lydia R. Cooper’s article “The Sterility of Their Art,” she goes as far to argue that Tayo is healed through the process of a spiritual pregnancy with the land—this feminine life force represented in Night Swan and Ts’eh: who are connected by their femininity, association with the land, mixed-race, and traditional sacred colors of blue and yellow. Before, Tayo’s “pregnancy” was a hollow one in which he wakes up from nightmares with morning sickness. When Tayo tries to heal his trauma with alcohol, like the other veterans, he becomes enraged and cannot make sense of his own thoughts. Allen argues that because Tayo had become a warrior, he felt separated from his people: “A warrior in a peace centered culture must experience total separation from his tribe” but “through his love of Ts’eh he becomes conscious of the female side of his own nature and accepts and integrates feminine behavior into his life.” When Tayo instead finds healing through unification of the feminine landscape that represents itself in Ts’eh and Night Swan, his “pregnancy” is that of new life and healing: “the terror of the dreaming he had done on this bed was gone, uprooted from his belly; and the woman had filled the hollow spaces with new dreams” (Silko, 204). The representation of this new life after the unification of Tayo and the land is present with the painting of the pregnant she-elk and the calves from Josiah’s cattle (214). This healing is for the entire tribe, but it cannot reach the veterans who will not let go of their obsession with masculinity and power. This ultimately leads to their death or complete separation from the tribe.

The Native Veterans rejection of their feminine traditions correlates with their internalized shame and want for acceptance in the white world. White America, especially in the 1940s, is a patriarchal society. These men reject Tayo because they are jealous of his white genetics and believe Tayo thinks he is better than they are. This causes them to become furious at their position in life as they have adopted the misogynistic need to be better than everyone and possess and conquer everything. It is Night Swan that tells Tayo, “Indians or Mexicans or whites—most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing...they are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don’t have to think about what has happened inside themselves” (92).

Night Swan is not interested in labeling and demonizing other races; she helps Tayo along with his ceremony even though she is Mexican and not Native American. In this way, her role is like that of medicine man Betonie’s grandmother Mexican Woman, who married his grandfather Descheeny—a Navajo medicine man. It is the Mexican woman who tells Descheeny that to heal their people from the witchery of the world, they “must have power from everywhere. Even the power we can get from the whites” (159). It was a Mexican woman that convinced Betonie’s grandfather Descheeny to change the ceremony so that he could heal the victims of cultural trauma that had not occurred when the original stories were told: “because it was set loose by witchery of all the world, and brought to them by the whites, the ceremony against it must be the same” (159). To heal their cultural trauma, Tayo’s tribe must respect the old traditions while also accommodating them to their new reality.

Tayo needed to be cured not only from the trauma of war, but of the cultural trauma he faced specifically because of his mixed race. As a Native, he is not accepted into white society; neither is he fully accepted into his community and, in some cases, his own family. The characters that react negatively to Tayo’s race are also characters who reject the traditional stories and have a more assimilated attitude. They are suffering because of the discrimination they face, and the internalized shame they feel: “they blamed themselves for losing the land the white people took...they never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and took it away again when the war was over”. The Isleta man at the bar in Gallup acts on this internalized shame in his disdain towards Helen Jean: “You think you’re better than a white woman?” (155). The more assimilated characters like Emo and the Isleta man from the bar seemingly have no respect for women or a connection to the world around them. They have adopted the attitude of white men like the Texans who have no respect for life and hunt a mountain lion for fun rather than out of necessity (188). Near the end of Tayo’s ceremony, he becomes angry at the people back home:

“he wanted to scream at Indians like Harley and Helen Jean and Emo that the white things they admired and desired so much...had been stolen...these people had been taught to despise themselves because they were left with barren land and dry rivers. But they were wrong. It was the white people who had nothing; it was the white people who were suffering as thieves do, never able to forget that their pride was wrapped in something stolen, something that had never been, and could never be, theirs.”

Tayo comes to this revelation through the double-consciousness of his bi-racial liminality. He does not envy the white people who discriminate against him because of the discrimination he faced for being partially white. “he was not one of the destroyers” (189). Tayo is more respectful to the world around him because of his “non-traditional” household helmed by his grandmother and non-destructive masculine influences. Uncle Josiah and Robert have respect for wildlife and still perform the proper ceremonies after Rocky and Tayo kill the deer. It is Rocky who, under the influence of his mother, rejects the old traditions. Tayo’s nature is contemplative and hesitant on taking another life, rather than his friends who rejoice in it. While Auntie is a woman that likes to be in charge, she was not very kind to Tayo; and therefore, her influence did not reach him the way it did Rocky.

At the end of Tayo’s Ceremony, Tayo has finally found peace through his newfound understanding of his people’s traditions and feminine landscape. He no longer is tormented by Rocky and Josiah’s death as he now can access his memories as they connect to his sense of belonging and tradition: “This feeling was their life, vitality locked deep in blood memory, and the people were strong and the fifth world endured, and nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained” (204). The fifth world is the spiritual world that connects the Pueblo people through the feminine landscape. Tayo has been healed through this landscape as he now understands the world in which he lives and has let go of his anger:

“He cried relief at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (229).

The boundaries of gender, race, time, memory, and borders do not plague Tayo anymore because he is now unified with the earth, rather than manmade constructions like gender roles and assimilation that keep people separated from one another. The new Ceremony was a common-ground to bridge the liminal space Tayo suffered in. Those caught in the liminal spaces of this diverse world can be healed through a mutual understanding and open-mindedness. The United States’ government assimilated Native Americans into the Christian faith because they could not see themselves reflected in the Native’s traditions. Instead of finding a common-ground to bridge this separation of cultures, the government took the Native’s culture away from them along with their sacred land. They did not see that the lines drawn to separate the earth’s people were imaginary. The Christian Bible and the oral traditions of the Laguna Pueblo tribe seemingly have no shared ideology; however, they share similar concepts of blending femininity and masculinity. For America to heal its transgressions and collective suffering, it must recognize that this common-ground can be found through respect and knowledge of other cultures.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. Penguin, 1977.

Cooper, Lydia R. “The Sterility of their Art”: Masculinity and the Western in Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony.” *Western American Literature*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2014, pp. 267-291.

Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Restoring the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Beacon Press, 1986.

[back](#)