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# Undermining Narrative Stereotypes in Simon Ortiz's "The Killing of a State Cop"

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In an insightful article, Lawrence J. Evers has examined how Leslie Marmon Silko's "Tony's Story" and Simon Ortiz's "The Killing of a State Cop" retell and give Pueblo cultural form to the yellow-journalistic, legal, and psychiatric tellings of the murder of the new Mexico State Trooper, Nash Garcia, which took place on the Acoma reservation on Good Friday, 1952. Evers finds that Silko's text, in providing as a motive for the murder Tony's conviction that the cop is a witch, bears an "eerie likeness" to the report by Dr. George Devereux, an anthropologist and psychiatrist whose medical evaluation of Willie and Gabriel Felipe influenced Federal Judge Carl Hatch to reduce the brothers' sentence from death to life imprisonment. Devereux concluded that the brothers' behavior was abnormal by both Acoma and Anglo-American cultural standards, and that Willie was insane and Gabriel psychotic at the time of the murder.

Remarking that Ortiz's experience with the event was more immediate than Silko's, that his narrative is closer to the "facts" of the case, and that the narrative detail of the killing is close in tone to the gruesome journalistic account, Evers contends that the similarity between the anonymous second narrator and Ortiz provides a point of view that mitigates the reader's response to the crime (257). I agree with this judgment and would like to examine in some detail how Ortiz's story gives the reader an option other

than to pronounce a verdict in what is indeed depicted as a brutal killing. In doing this I will be following up on implications found in Evers' statement that Silko's and Ortiz's fictions "turn that small line segment of history into circles of form" (247).

My hypothesis is that Ortiz's text comprises the retelling of a narrative confession in which a series of reversals occur as the characters move along the linear itinerary from town towards the "heart of the reservation." Owing to these reversals the linear and telic structure of the narrative is attenuated as the pursuer becomes the pursued, the hunter the hunted, the victimizer the victim, the will to kill the will to die. These reversals contribute to a blurring of stereotypical character oppositions such as good guy/bad guy, oppressor/oppressed, enemy/hero, outsider/insider, and of Western cultural oppositions such as fact/fiction, legal/illegal, guilty/not guilty, and sane/insane.

The *telos* of the narrative, I will argue, is not the "truth" about the murder of the Mexican trooper from an Anglo-European legal point of view, namely, the verdict of guilty or not guilty based on the murderer's intention, motives, and mental state, but a specular point in the text at which the reader can figuratively *see* the murderer and the victim as they fail to see themselves, namely as doubles. This story is a retold "confession" of the conflicted, suicidal "stupidity" and "craziness" in persons from two cultural groups, Pueblo and Mexican, both marginalized to different degrees by dominant Anglo-European culture.

### Narrators and Voices

There are two narrators: Felipe and his anonymous friend who retells the story he was told at the age of twelve by Felipe. Both the first and second tellings include glosses that psychologically and culturally motivate the story. After having begun *in medias res*, where the *res* is Felipe's telling his story, the second narrator initiates his gloss by situating Felipe in terms of the narrative stereotype opposition, good guy/bad guy: "Felipe wasn't a bad guy. Not at all. A little wild maybe. He had been in the marines and he could have gotten kicked out if he had wanted to, he said. But he hadn't because he could play it pretty straight like a good guy, too" (101). In one sense the anonymous narrator suggests that

Felipe is neither a bad guy nor a good guy, but he does not leave his friend suspended in a betwixt and between of character types: rather, he portrays him as being able to appear to be a good guy, to “play it pretty straight.” Couched in the language of his military service, Felipe knew how to put on the marine uniform of the prototypical Hollywood good guy of American 1950s war films and to wear this uniform in such a way that the part of himself which did not fit into either the good guy or the bad guy category was hidden. From an Anglo-American perspective, this something, which the anonymous narrator suggests was wildness, could be associated with possible psychiatric problems, as is implied in Felipe’s saying that he could have qualified for discharge from military service, had he wanted.

Likewise the anonymous narrator, in speaking of the “one trouble with him,” invites an Anglo-American psychiatric interpretation such as that of Devereux in the case of the Felipe brothers:

He used to tell me a lot of things, about what he had seen, about what he had done, about what he planned to do, and about what other people could do to you. That was one trouble with him. He was always thinking about what other people could do to you. Not the people around our place, the Indians, but other people. (101)

Evers suggests that this remark by the anonymous narrator “turns the paranoia assigned the brothers by Devereux into too deep a concern with oppression. Baca’s [Ortiz’s fictional name for the state trooper] Indian-hating becomes but an explicit and extreme case of a more general and constant pressure, a case answered by an extreme act” (258).

In a sense, Evers is implying that Felipe’s act, in Ortiz’s text, becomes understandable as extreme hatred and violence directed against racist hatred. Felipe’s hatred of racist hatred mirrors Baca’s racist hatred in its extremity. In limiting Felipe’s “one trouble” to a “paranoia” towards non-Indians, rather than assigning to him the paranoia that Devereux found that the Felipe brothers demonstrated towards their fellow Acoma Indians, the anonymous narrator leaves open the possibility that the killing of Baca could be interpreted as a revolt against the culture that stereotypes and oppresses native Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this revolt is misdirected. In seeking to explain why he killed the cop, Felipe gives vindictive hatred, directed in terms of racist stereotyping against Baca, as well as drunkenness, as motives. In so doing he implicitly conforms to racist stereotypes that could be used to explain his behavior: he acts like a “wild savage” and a “drunken Indian”:

“What the hell. He deserved to die, the bastard.”

It was the wine, Felipe said. And that thing he had about people, I guess. He didn’t say, but I knew.

He had gone to town from the reservation with Antonio, his brother. They drove their pickup truck to town where they bought the wine from a bootlegger. “From some stupid Mexican bartender. Geesus, I hate Mexicans.” (101-2)

In swearing, in pronouncing his hatred of Mexicans as an ethnic group, given to stupidity and law breaking, Felipe is speaking with the voice of the culture that proscribes the consumption of alcohol to him on the grounds that he is an Indian.<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, when he breaks those proscriptions, when he swears as the irreverent scofflaw—“Geesus, I hate Mexicans”—he affirms the “values,” which include racism, and the religion of that culture in which he hates not only the scofflaws but also the law: “Felipe spat on the ground. Indians were not supposed to drink or buy liquor at that time. It was against the law. Felipe hated the law and broke it whenever he felt he could get away with it” (102). Such a hatred is thus directed not only against Mexican bootleggers and cops, but also potentially against himself for his own scofflawry.

When Felipe was outside the bailiwick of Anglo-American law, owing to his having been sent overseas in his straight good guy uniform, he appears not to have hated all Mexicans. In a passage that will be considered in more detail further below, he tells of having been accompanied by a “Mexican friend from Nogales” in crazy play that would be proscribed in the US. Back in the US, however, even when wearing the straight uniform, his attempt to act like a good marine and have a drink is interpreted as scofflawry:

One time in Winslow I got off the train when it stopped at the depot and walked into a bar next to the depot to buy a beer. I was still in the

marines then and in uniform. This barman, he looked at me very mean and asked if I was Indian. “Shore,” I said. And he told me to get the hell out before he called the cops. Goddamn, I hated that, and I went around the back and peed on the back door. I don’t know why, just because I hated him, I guess. (102)

Felipe’s not knowing “why” he engaged in this rather juvenile behavior, with which, ironically, he opens himself to being classified as a “drunken Indian,” even though he is sober, or his “guess” that this behavior is grounded in “hate,” can be interpreted in a play on the title of a much discussed film of the 1950s: Felipe is a rebel, not without a cause, but with a cause he does not understand.

### Not Quite High Noon

The encounter between the cop, Luis Baca, and the brothers, Felipe and Antonio, interrupts the quiet, idle, window-shopping of the latter. This encounter begins in front of a symbol of Hollywood narrative:

Felipe and his brother were walking in town, not saying anything much, and maybe looking at things they wanted to buy when they had the money. They stopped in front of the Golden Theater and looked at the picture of what was in the movies that day and the next day.

“Hey, Indio. Hey, what hell you doing?” It was Luis Baca, a member of the state police who patrolled the state highway near the reservation. (102)

The brothers’ “answer” to the question is silence, silence grounded in their fear and hatred of the cop because of the brutal treatment Felipe had received in a previous arrest, silence because it *is* a stupid question. They are not doing anything. But the way Baca addresses his question also implies that to do nothing, that simply to be an *Indio* is to be a scofflaw. This racist stereotyping is the *reason* which Felipe does not see as he repeats what the voice of the law said in ordering him out of town: “‘Hey, goddammy Indio, get the hell away from there. Get out of town.’ For no reason at all” (103). This same unseen reason, racist stereotyping, can be heard in the words with which Felipe excoriates the racist cop: “For no reason at all. Goddamn. I got mad and I called him a dirty,

fat, lazy, good-for-nothing, ugly Mexican” (103). At this point in the narrative, the anonymous narrator repeats Felipe’s moral gloss on his own story, the reason, indeed, for his telling this story which he wants his younger friend “to remember. . . always” (101): “Felipe looked around him and told me I better learn to be something more than him, a guy who would probably die in the electric chair up at Santa Fe” (103). One can interpret Felipe’s admonition to the anonymous narrator that he not limit himself by drinking, by hating, by racist stereotyping, and by killing, but that by his behavior he add “more” to the story of this behavior. This “more,” this surplus, is the gloss added to the story in order to explain the wild remainder that could not be contained in the good guy uniform and in order to convert that wildness into something else.

### The Chase

Having discouraged Felipe’s swaggering talk of killing Baca, Antonio goes with his brother to their truck, where they open “*another* bottle of wine” (103; my emphasis) and drink. Within the expression, “another bottle,” lies a possible reason for Baca to have ordered them out of town. Yet, since Baca had no reason to suspect that they were drinking, other than to assume they were “drunken Indians,” even though they were not acting like they were drunk, this “reason” can be reduced to Baca’s stereotyping. They then leave town in their pickup truck. Baca follows in a bizarre chase that seems partly serious, partly playful. Within the town limits, the brothers neither stop nor speed up when Baca turns on his siren and pursues them. Baca pulls up beside them and, rather than signaling them to pull over, he laughs at them. He appears to be playing with them as the cat plays with the mouse. Once outside the town limits, Antonio slows down and Baca passes and drives ahead of them towards the reservation.

After this reversal, in which the chaser has assumed the position of the chased and vice versa, Felipe introduces a character type with which to contrast himself: “‘Antonio, my brother, he is a kind of a funny guy,’ Felipe said. ‘He doesn’t get mad like me. I mean yell or cuss. He just kind of looks mean or sad. He told me to give him the wine and he drank some and put it on the seat between his legs’” (103). Apparently under the influence of the wine, the “kind

of a funny guy” feigns the role of the chaser, speeding up in what Felipe says was an attempt to “scare the bastard” (104), rather than to hit the police car. This results in Baca’s running off the road, the brothers’ returning to taunt him by throwing the wine bottle and making obscene gestures, and then the resumption of the chase with Baca once again in the position of the chaser as they turn “into the road that led to the reservation” (104).

Although in this reversal of the reversal Baca is again literally chasing the brothers, their entering the reservation sets up the third reversal in the chase. This third reversal, in which the chaser becomes the hunted and the chased the hunter, is informed by the hunting motif that emerges as Felipe tells the anonymous narrator of the .30-30 Winchester rifle he took from behind the seat: ““You remember the .30-30 I was using when I went deer hunting last year? The one I let you shoot even though you aren’t supposed to before you shoot at a deer with it. That one. My father bought it when he was working for the railroad. That one”” (105). This description introduces the possibility that Felipe and the anonymous narrator are connected to the murder weapon through their having violated Pueblo hunting ritual. Expressed in terms of a cross-cultural analogy, Felipe’s having let the anonymous narrator shoot the rifle, which apparently had been “blessed” for the deer hunt, could be described as an act equivalent to “cursing.” Felipe let his younger friend shoot the rifle “in vain.” Thus, in this instance Felipe’s attitude towards Pueblo ritual was apparently no different from the attitude he expresses towards Anglo-American law when he gets mad and yells and cusses. Felipe’s lack of concern about proper observance of hunting ritual has put the anonymous narrator into a position of potential “scofflaw” within Pueblo culture.

As the brothers speed towards “the heart of the reservation,” they track Baca in reverse, stopping to listen to make sure he is still chasing them, slowing down so “the policeman could see which road they had taken” (105). In the journalistic accounts of the murder, this hunting behavior is called luring the victim into an ambush. Felipe’s words, however, suggest that he sees himself in terms of hunting, of stalking and shooting a quarry that volunteers itself, that wills its own death, as the deer or antelope is supposed to do in the properly conducted hunt.<sup>3</sup>

### The Blind Specular Face-off

Felipe couches his description of the face-off with Baca in terms of being able to see and not being able to see:

“Aiee, I can see stupidity in a man. Sometimes even my own. I can see a man’s drunkenness making him do crazy things. And Luis Baca, a very stupid son-of-a-bitch, was more than I could see. He wanted to die. And I, because I was drunken and *muy loco* like a Mexican friend I had from Nogales used to say about me when we would play with the whores in Korea and Tokyo, wanted to make him die. I did not care for anything else except that Luis Baca who I hated was going to die.” (106)

Yet, if Felipe can see the “stupidity” and “drunkenness” in others and in himself, there are two things in this passage that he does not *see*. One is something that the reader can see, namely, that his own story of crazy play abroad contradicts his earlier irreverent declaration of his hatred of all Mexicans. When he was outside of the state and the country in which the reservation is contained, outside of the bailiwick of the law that he hates, Felipe did not hate Mexicans when he was drunk and “*muy loco*.” The other is something mentioned in language that makes it hard to analyze. Why does Felipe describe Baca as “more than I could see”? Is there something in Baca analogous to the remainder, the wildness that would not quite fit not the marine uniform? Is this “more” that Felipe cannot see something he also cannot see in himself, but should be able to see mirrored in Baca, namely, that Felipe too wants to die? Is it that the two of them, outside of the law symbolized by Baca’s police uniform, should be able to take off their “uniforms” and play together as he and his Mexican friend had played in Asia?

The face-off is not a replay of *High Noon*. It is not a shoot out in town between the outlaws and the law. Rather it is more like a suicidal game of chicken in the manner of *Rebel Without a Cause*. This is a game played on the cusp of paradox, where losers are winners, where the distinctions between outside and inside, wild and civilized, disappear, where the very logic that informs the game tends to undermine itself. Outside of town, but inside the reservation, two ethnically marginal players, both losers, so to

speak, meet. The Mexican, who represents the law, is presented as “stupid,” “crazy,” and is repeatedly referred to as illegitimate, i.e. he is a “bastard” or “son-of-a-bitch.” The Indian presents himself as “*my loco*” and “drunken.” These two are fatally drawn to each other by something that Felipe has difficulty defining, that he construes as hatred and implies is fear. Fear of what? Within the narrative there is the implication that it may be both fear of admitting that something draws them together and fear of showing fear.

Felipe refers to Antonio’s having pretended not to be afraid of rattlesnakes when they were kids in order to describe both Antonio’s and his feelings as they await Baca:

“Are we just going to scare him so he won’t bother us no more?” Antonio asked me.

I looked at Antonio, and he looked like he used to when we were kids and he used to pretend not to be scared of rattlesnakes.

“I don’t know,” I said. I was going to shoot the man. I don’t know why, but I was going to. Maybe I was kind of scared then. (106-7)

Thus, as an adult Felipe would be proving to himself, to Antonio, and to Baca, what he tentatively admits to the anonymous narrator, namely, that he was afraid. In knowing that he will shoot Baca, without knowing why, perhaps Felipe senses that Baca, like himself, does not want to appear afraid, and like himself, will not turn back. Yet he still wants Baca to turn back: “He had slowed down because of the narrow place, and I thought he would stop and turn back. But he didn’t” (107). Here, perhaps rather than wanting to “win” the game of chicken without the ultimate face-off, Felipe wants Baca to acknowledge the fear that binds them, just as he and his younger brother were bound by the fear they pretended not to feel when as kids they played with rattlesnakes. Yet Felipe’s ignoring his own motive amounts to his not being able to see both his and Baca’s courses as identically suicidal, in his not being able to see that the logic of chicken is such that by definition the winner is a loser: if the point of playing chicken is to prove that one is not afraid of fear, then both players paradoxically prove they are afraid upon entering into the game and upon refusing to stop the game. Felipe and Baca are bound by fear of showing fear and by blindness to this fear.

Blindness seems to alternate with vision in this face-off, a motif that can be read into Felipe's not seeing well when he opens fire: "But he didn't [i.e. turn back]. He shifted into first and came on very slowly. That's when I put my rifle on a flat rock and aimed it. Right at the windshield where the steering wheel is. The sun was shining on the windshield very brightly and I could not see very well" (107). I have analyzed Felipe's description of the face-off in terms of alternating blindness and vision of what the reader can see that the narrators cannot see, namely, the paradox and internal contradiction that inform the game of chicken that Baca and Felipe are playing.

Baca's dying word also lends itself to such an analysis and suggests that he may overcome his blindness at the moment he sees he has lost:

"*Compadre,*" he said. He held up his right hand and reached to us. There was blood on his neck and shoulder. (107)

The literal meaning of Baca's pathetic last word, *compadre*, poses no problem: friend, companion, brother. What, however, is his motive in speaking this word? How is Baca's motive related to Ortiz's motive in putting this word in his mouth, rather than the words given in the alleged confession that Evers cites: "I give up. Don't shoot" (248)? Is Baca desperately trying to save himself by shamelessly making up with the "goddammy Indio" whom he has harassed, mocked, and chased, when he realizes he has driven into his last stand? Or, has the taste of his own blood in his mouth allowed him to see, in this specular face-off, that he and Felipe are doubles, *compadres* who have been *muy loco* to play their suicidal, racist game? Is this the gloss on Baca that Felipe cannot see, and that Baca may or may not have seen, but that his last word expresses, namely that he is no different from the Mexican who in Asia was Felipe's friend, that he and Felipe are bound by something more ancient than the law that he has been representing?

This crazy game has not been played outside the bailiwick of the law that Baca's uniform and pistol represent, but in an interior that should nevertheless be beyond that bailiwick,<sup>4</sup> an interior near the "heart of the reservation," on a road "that goes around the mesa and to a spring called Spider Spring" (106). The *muy loco* chase

has been in the direction of a place that traditionally could be associated with Pueblo origins, with the mythological story of the Emergence. It is possible to see Spider Spring as a place at which Felipe and Antonio could receive “mythological” assistance from Spider Grandmother. According to Elsie Clews Parsons, Spider Grandmother or Spider Woman is one of the first to come out at the Emergence (239). Also, according to Parsons, Spider Grandmother offers aid to the mythological Pueblo twin brothers in their martial feats: “In Keresan mythology Sussistinnako is the universal mother, and Sussistinnako is Spider. The War Brothers always have a grandmother, and usually she is Spider Woman” (192). “Ritually Spider Woman is associated with war but in all the Pueblo tales where she figures she is a benevolent, helpful old woman who takes care of stray girls (even the Earth Mothers) or bereft husbands or anybody in distress, having ideas or medicines for all emergencies” (Parsons 193).

Spider Woman has also been placed at the origin of storytelling and the Pueblo creation. For example, in *Ceremony* Leslie Marmon Silko endows her with verbal power that in many ways resembles that of the Christian Word: “Thought-Woman, the spider, / named things and / as she named them / they appeared” (1). It is the spider who is thinking the story of Tayo, Silko’s WWII veteran who engages in crazy and suicidal play with fellow veterans, but who, unlike Tony, her fictional portrayal of William Felipe’s brother, Gabriel, and unlike Ortiz’s character, Felipe, ultimately refrains from violence.

Spider Spring could thus be seen to figure an interior source of non-Western storytelling and ritual that cannot be contained or adequately explained by the law and its narrative. As a place whose name recalls what Parsons calls “Keresan mythology,” Spider Spring could function in the text as an unreached and perhaps unreachable *topos*, a source of storytelling that is paradoxically both outside and inside linear narrative temporality, a source from which would emerge a “mythological” temporality or narrative circularity that would de-legitimize Anglo-American law and its narrative of guilty/not guilty, good/bad, oppressor/oppressed, sane/insane. Yet, Felipe and Antonio do not reach Spider Spring. They pass through “a narrow passage” (106) and stop nearby, where Felipe and Baca play out their face-off as enemy doubles. In

other words, figuratively and literally, they stop short of an interior that is like the Asian exterior where Felipe and his Mexican friend could take off their uniforms and play wildly without being scoff-laws or enemies.

Whatever the reader, or Baca as he dies, might see in this face-off where the wild remainder, fear and racist hatred, approach, but do not reach, Spider Springs, a place associated with Spider Grandmother and the founding discourse of Pueblo civilization, neither Felipe nor Antonio experiences an epiphanic conversion to multi-cultural brotherhood upon hearing Baca's last word. Felipe shoots Baca again as he is trying to unbuckle his pistol belt. Antonio uses this pistol to administer the *coup de grace* to Baca, whom Felipe, judging from the mixture of bestial and Catholic soteriological imagery that he uses to describe the cop's demise, does not consider to be in a state of grace.<sup>5</sup>

The two brothers walked to the car and stood over the still-moving body of Luis Baca. Antonio reached down and slid the police revolver out of the holster, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

"Luis Baca, the poor fool, made a feeble gurgle like a sick cat and went to hell." (108)

The cat has been caught by the mice he was playing with. Just as Felipe's voice was that of the culture whose law proscribes drinking to him because he is Indian, just as his "cussing" was done in words that paradoxically affirm the "values" of Western religion, so his story about where Baca was headed belongs, at least in its imagery, to the Western linear narrative that to a certain extent is informed by soteriology.

The anonymous narrator at first does not know whether to believe Felipe's story. But when his parents confirm the truth of the story, repeating what Felipe had repeated, namely, that he "would probably die in the electric chair," their telling him to forget it, the opposite of Felipe's moral admonition that he should remember his story, helps to establish it in his memory. In remembrance of Felipe, the anonymous narrator, like a good Catholic boy, includes him in his evening prayers: "Every night, for quite a while, I prayed a rosary or something for him" (108). The soteriological *telos* of the Rosary is to obtain grace for his friend (i.e. to save him from joining Baca in his infernal destination). Yet in

mentioning his participation in Catholic ritual, the narrator also either juxtaposes or equates the Rosary with a vague, unnamed “something.”

Thus, in the very last line of the story, the anonymous narrator appears unwilling or unable to name “something.” This something, if equated with the Rosary, could refer to other Catholic prayers that can also be uttered in order to ask for mercy for those who risk damnation. Likewise, it could refer to Pueblo rituals, like stories of Spider Grandmother, the Emergence, or blessing a gun for the hunt. These are things that most Pueblos traditionally keep secret, despite the prying of anthropologists and the occasional indiscretion of informants and writers. Such rituals could be interpreted as complementing and abetting Catholic ritual (this would be a theologically liberal, tolerant, and syncretic view), or as theologically opposed to Catholic ritual (this would be an intolerant and rigidly ethnocentric view). According to the latter interpretation, a person who practices such things would literally be what Luis Baca calls Felipe, i.e. a “goddammy Indio.”

Perhaps this “something” could be likened to the verbal remainder that would not fit into the Marine uniform but which nevertheless could be hidden by it. Perhaps this “something” could be related to the storytelling tradition of which, according to Evers, this story becomes a part as the anonymous narrator tells it: “The veneer of Christian hope gives little solace, and it is finally the telling of the story itself which is the narrator’s best response to his experience with Felipe not as a polemic or an apology, but as a *culturally sensitive documentary*” (258; my emphasis). Speaking in terms of genre of discourse, Evers’ use of the term “documentary” clothes the storytelling tradition in the *uniform* of the social sciences, seemingly contradicting his contention that Ortiz turns “that small line segment of history [that is the story of the Felipe brothers and Nash Garcia] into circles of form” (247). Is “The Killing of a State Cop” a Pueblo narrative in sociologist’s clothing or a sociological documentary dressed up like a Pueblo?

The question of whether Western culture in either its religious or secular narrative manifestations is only a veneer on an ancient Pueblo fundament, or a worldview that linguistically and conceptually has permeated pre-contact Pueblo culture to the core, is hard to answer. Simon Ortiz “was sent to St. Catherine’s Indian School

in Santa Fe” (*Woven Stone* 14) for part of his education. There, owing to encouragement by the nuns, he began to read widely and to write. He has repeatedly expressed his belief that his Acoma identity and worldview are fundamental in shaping what he writes in English. Even though his aspiration to become a writer came from canonical American and European authors, he maintains that Acoma storytelling and ritual informed his understanding of Western texts:

A commitment as an Acoma Native American, however, was strong and firm, although at times, like others I’m sure, I was prey to self-doubt and I wavered. . . . I had read or was reading a lot of American and European classics by Shakespeare, Dante, Flaubert, de Maupassant, Tolstoi, Blake, Eliot, James Joyce, and such. Although I was acquiring wide knowledge of this literature and non-Native American thought, I also knew I would never strive to be anything other than an Acqumenh hahtrudzai, a Native American of my homeland and people. When I read and ingested the ideas, views, feelings, and visions from this literature, again I *felt* strongly the stories, songs, experiences, feelings, and visions of my own indigenous people were *somehow* continued in the aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional experience and knowledge I was gaining. (*Woven Stone* 18; my emphasis)

Here, however, despite the strength of his convictions, Ortiz nevertheless resorts to language that suggests he cannot explicitly state the relationship of the Acoma fundament or essence to Western culture: He “felt strongly” that “somehow” the Acoma tradition was “continued” in his understanding of Western culture. Perhaps the language of this autobiographical passage reflects Ortiz’s use of the vague and unnamed “something” in his story about the Felipe brothers.

In my reading of this story, I have suggested that the reversals in the chase, the uncertain motive for the killing, the logic of the game of chicken that Baca and Felipe play in the face-off, and Ortiz’s practice of placing a vague unnamed “something” at crucial points in the text, attenuates the narrative’s linearity, undermines the conceptual oppositions of narrative stereotypes, and, in a manner of speaking, casts the interaction between Baca and Felipe as play in “circles of form.” These circles of form turn continually

toward this “something” which can only be glimpsed as the reader sees that Baca and Felipe should be *compadres*, and would be *compadres*, could they but see that they do not have to be trapped in the stereotypes that inform the linear narrative of Hollywood, racist law, history, or the interpretation of rigid and intolerant theological doctrine.

In this story, as in his other texts, both in narrative and in verse, Simon Ortiz repeatedly questions himself and persons from different ethnic backgrounds who tend to be blinded and trapped by narrative stereotypes. In undermining these stereotypes, he shows paradoxically that in becoming an American writer, he has best realized his commitment to be Aacqumeh hahtrudzai, “a Native American of [his] homeland and people” (*Woven Stone* 18).

### Notes

1. The theme of a Native American revolt against European domination is more strongly suggested in “Tony’s Story” where Silko changes the date of the killing of the state trooper from Good Friday to August 10, San Lorenzo Day, the day on which the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 began. This opens the way to reading Tony as a modern analogue of Popé, the alleged leader of that revolt. In a later autobiographical piece concerned with Acoma history and the interaction of Acoma and Western culture, Ortiz inserts a poem that construes the Felipe brothers as revolutionaries: “Walking away / from Shakaiya / I remembered 1952. / The Felipe brothers / had risen and tried / to stem state power. / Desperate. / Action. / Hot and thirsty / again, clouds / in the northwest / towards Ambrosia Lake / no hope at all. / They killed the state / cop, southeast / of Shakaiya” (*Woven Stone* 356).

2. In a short story entitled “Woman Singing,” in which Ortiz explores the stereotype of the “drunken Indian,” the stereotyping of Mexicans is put into the mouth of Wheeler, the Anglo boss of the Idaho potato farm that employs migrant workers: “And I don’t mind giving you a ride in my truck. Place down the road’s got a bunch of Mexicans, had them up at my place several years back, but they ain’t no good. Lazier than any Indian anytime, them Mexicans are. Couldn’t nothing move them once they sit down. But you people—and for this reason I don’t mind giving you a lift to town—Willie and your friend there do your work when I tell you, and that means you’re okay for my farm” (*Fightin’* 30). Wheeler’s condescending and somewhat backhanded compliment, it turns out, is probably motivated by his attraction to the pretty wife of one of the inebriated Indian workers.

3. The belief that animals, when properly hunted, give themselves to the hunter in a harmonious economical exchange is found not only among the Pueblo but in numerous Native American cultures. In an essay in which she underlines the

harmony between animals, man, and the landscape, Silko expresses this exchange in terms of love: "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" (*Yellow Woman* 26-27).

4. At the time of his death, Nash Garcia apparently had been authorized to enter the Acoma Reservation by the Acoma Pueblo Council ("Robbery" 2). As Evers has pointed out, official attempts to explain the killing resulted in scapegoating the inadequate BIA and tribal enforcement and trumpeting the need, often voiced by tribal councils, for more troopers to provide better enforcement. In the *Albuquerque Tribune*, the *Albuquerque Star*, and the *Albuquerque Journal* there was hardly so much as a hint that troopers like Garcia might have been abusive in their enforcement or that the law needed to be examined and revised. In general, the blame was placed on bootlegging, which seems to be done primarily by Mexicans, and on the general lawlessness on Indian land. The call for help from local white police to counter the effects of demon rum is portrayed as being voiced by Indians: "The Association of Indian Affairs told of brazen bootlegging activities in the checkerboard regions. Around Star Lake, northeast of Grants. It quoted Indians as saying: 'There are fights and murders. Children at home and at school are molested; teachers are hampered in their work; poor old people and babies suffer. Conditions are getting worse every day'" ("Slaying" 2).

5. Soteriology is the theological doctrine of salvation as effected by Christ. This doctrine informs the linear narrative of Christian history, the end of which for the protagonist is either conversion and Heaven or failure to convert and Hell.

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