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James Welch's Winter in the Blood: Thawing the Fragments of Misconception in Native American Fiction

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James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*: Thawing the

Fragments of Misconception in Native American Fiction
(TITLE)

BY

Mario A. Leto II

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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ABSTRACT

The conventional scholarly view of Native American literature asserts that Native authors often portray their characters as alienated and despairing individuals that are incapable of attaining the means for dispelling those negative feelings. As a result, the characters are presumably destined to forever wander the barren reservation, unable to grasp their fleeting cultural traditions or the modern Euroamerican way of life. James Welch, with his novel Winter in the Blood, challenges that stereotypical scenario by allowing his nameless protagonist to discover a previously unknown link to his traditional Blackfeet heritage. Through the knowledge of his ancestors and the unconscious cycle of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, the protagonist breaks the constricting bonds of western literary critics by finding hope for the future of Native Americans through a fusion of traditional and modern mythologies: a spiritual journey grounded in tradition and focused on the individual as the savior of a vanishing culture.

DEDICATION

Ironically enough, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Mary Rowlandson who so ethnocentrically passed judgment on her Wampanoag captors and therefore opened my own ears to the suppressed voices of our Native American brothers and sisters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Michael Loudon for the time and patience he gave in helping me complete this vast undertaking, and for being the only person in the whole Charleston area ready and willing to discuss the topic of Native American literature, a subject I hold close to my heart.

I also wish to acknowledge Dr. P. Ann Boswell and Dr. John David Moore, who introduced me to James Welch, for serving as my readers.

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PREFACE

Since Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative started me thinking about the Native American point of view in history and text, I thought it pertinent to fashion this thesis in a way that allowed the larger Native American community to speak for itself. In certain sections it became increasingly important to me to allow Native Voices to carry the truth of the past, present and future, an aspect of Native American literary criticism that is so frequently overlooked by contemporary western critics. Where literature and scholarly interpretation are discussed as entities unto themselves, I allow the voices of various Euroamerican critics to be heard; but where the text asks for a discussion of literature in reference to Native American sensibilities, I single out those writers and critics with Native American cultural backgrounds. Some of those very people are Paula Gunn Allen, Vine Deloria, James Welch, Patty Harjo, Ward Churchill, Old Lady Horse and N. Scott Momaday. My intentions in doing this are simple: a voice of the people *by* the people. It only seems fair.

INTRODUCTION

James Welch's debut novel, Winter in the Blood (1974), exemplifies the contemporary Native American on a Montana Indian reservation. The nameless protagonist symbolizes the deprivation that sweeps his poor, distant Blackfeet community. In reality, Euroamerican pioneers have left the Native American communities estranged and alienated from the modern, white world around them. With the destruction of sacred land, animals and traditional rituals came the inevitable destruction of the Native individual and, consequently, the Native community. It is no wonder that, in the late-twentieth century, a novel about a Native American on the reservation, amid a modern world of industry and technology, will depict the protagonist as despairing and alienated, caught in a no-man's-land of drinking binges, one-night stands and unconforted memories of a barely conceivable past.

But Welch's novel signifies more than that; it exhibits the potential of empowerment for the individual on the reservation to break those self-destructive bonds; and where others have left off at uncertainty and confusion, Welch picks up and offers hope and relief for the reservation Indian. Contrary to the assumptions made by popular western critics, Welch's protagonist makes a transformation from the start of the novel to the end, finding a way, through what Joseph Campbell calls "the hero's journey," to mediate his feelings of alienation and despair. In a sense, the protagonist creates his own mythology, one that centers itself deep within the individual, making redemption for the whole community possible through the lone hero.

Welch is not the only Native American to notice the movement toward redemption in contemporary Native American life. Other writers of the time follow a similar pattern of redemption for their characters to arrive at the same hopeful outlook. The only individuals that don't recognize the onset of self-empowerment in contemporary Native Americans are the critics; but the presumption of inevitable, permanent despair is understandable because modern western critics have yet to understand the mythological viewpoint of the Native cultures of North America. For the critics, alienation and despair are ends in themselves, part of what is called modernism: an inability of science and reason and world-wide religions to provide moral, philosophical, scientific, religious or social truths. But for the Native American, that same alienation and despair is a signal for the individual to begin an unconscious mythological adventure called the hero's journey. Where the modern western world views alienation solely as an end, the Native American sees it merely as a beginning, the start of a death and a rebirth into a new consciousness--a passage, a rite, a transformation enabling the individual to dive deep within the self to alleviate those feelings of emptiness. James Welch effectively portrays this cycle of redemption in his novel Winter in the Blood.

CONFRONTING THE CONVENTIONAL SCHOLARLY VIEW

A conventional scholarly view of fiction written by Native Americans asserts that late-twentieth century reservation Indians are in a hopeless situation: Euroamericans have taken away vital Native American resources--foremost animals and land, subsequently, customs, spirit, pride and courage--that render traditional mythologies useless in attempting to sustain cultural values. How is it possible, then, for native cultures to find spiritual meaning in an overwhelmingly white modern world? The unchallenged critical view holds that they haven't, and that they can't, and thus we accept unconsciously the image of the drunk, despairing Indian on the barren reservation. John Scheckter, in his article "James Welch: Settling up on the Reservation," asserts that

Welch writes of the American present. He does not want...to recall an intact Indian past. Nor does he try...to forge a hopeful Native American future. Welch's figures dwell in an unremitting limbo of time and landscape, haunted by myth and history they can barely conceive, facing a future of continued unpleasantness at best. (7)

Scheckter predicts a grim future for the protagonist in Winter in the Blood, "continued unpleasantness at best," even in the face of traditional cultural mythologies, because "myth and history" are presumably inconceivable ideas for the degraded Native American.

Scheckter is wrong when he suggests that Welch fails in his attempt to forge a "hopeful Native American future." The protagonist's recollections of his past are not, at the beginning of the novel, intact; yet, by the end of the novel, fragmented pieces of his cultural history, as well as his recently confronted family history, unite to overcome

current barriers in the community that allow the protagonist to escape from his alienation and despair--prerequisites for a "hopeful future."

Scheckter concludes his article by asserting that Welch's "ironic subtext" is "the audacious, energetic, often futile insistence of the individual upon standing upright amidst all of the urges toward horizontality--all those threats of discontinuity, of loss of direction, of horrendous assault by circumstance" (18). According to Scheckter, Welch's protagonist fights a losing battle; resistance is futile as there is no escape from alienation and despair for the Native American on the reservation. More importantly though, a point that Scheckter fails to address, is not the mere *struggle* of the individual, but the minor success derived from that struggle, the unrelenting hope and the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel that at first seems dim but is at least visible, contrary to the previous hundred years.

As grim as Scheckter's interpretations of Welch's characters may seem, he is not alone. In the preface to the *American Indian Quarterly's* special symposium issue on Welch's Winter in the Blood, Peter Beidler briefly outlines and addresses the fact that early reviewers of the novel

tended to feel that the novel was a negative expression, an exploration of an American Indian wasteland from which no traveler could return. Despite the fact that the narrator gains both knowledge of his ancestry and the ability to face the memory of his brother's tragic death, these reviewers found him at the end not significantly different from what he was at the start. (95)

These are western critic sentiments that echo the words of hopelessness written by Scheckter. The critics seem to assume that Welch wrote Winter in the Blood with no practical objective in mind.

Some of the earlier reviewers that Beidler mentions are Reynolds Price, Gererd Reedy, Roger Sale, Blanch H. Gelfant, and, finally, Anatole Broyard who sums up the sentiments of all the aforementioned names by saying that Welch's "narrator's life seems not so much significantly meaningless as merely meaningless" (95). Overwhelmingly narrow-minded criticism of Welch's novel calls for a questioning of the efforts of early reviewers to step beyond the established boundaries of the word on the page, and asks for a deeper analysis of traditional Native mythology as it pertains to sustaining cultural values through an aesthetic medium, the novel. Perhaps without even realizing it, some critics were close to uncovering the true meaning behind the apparently pervasive hopelessness that engulfs the atmosphere of Winter in the Blood.

Alan R. Velie, a prominent scholar of Native American literature, similarly expresses his reservations about the protagonist in Welch's novel and the Native American's quest for "meaning" in a predominantly white, modern world. Velie, on the other hand, is not as harsh in his stance, refraining from offering absolutely no hope whatsoever for the protagonist. He states, in his book Four American Indian Literary Masters, that

in the Montana that Welch depicts in his novel and poems, Indians drift in and out of white towns and bars, estranged from their traditional culture and the security and meaning it afforded them. Welch is saying that history ended for the Indians

when their traditional way of life ended, and days that were once filled with meaning for them are now meaningless. History is over, and the gods are dead; events continue to transpire, but there is no pattern to existence, only dreams of the past. (79)

According to Velie, it is the "white towns and bars" that are the cause of despair for the Native American on the reservation; those aspects of modern life are not, and never were, a part of "traditional [Native American] culture."

The underlying message in Velie's analysis of the novel unwittingly discloses the truth that the reservations are the only remaining link to traditional cultures, for only on the reservation can the Native American find "security and meaning." Velie fails to address this underlying message, leading the reader to believe that because of the white towns and bars, because of the "estrangement" they afford, hope ceases to endure, "there is no pattern to existence, only dreams of the past."

David M. Craig writes in his article, "Beyond Assimilation...", that "the essential movement in *Winter in the Blood*...is toward the reservation, toward the Indian world of nature, fragmented relationships, and the Indian past. It is also a return to the roots of the self" (187). The estrangement that comes with the white towns is a part of modern society as industrial white America has established it. The Native American in the late-twentieth century cannot avoid the modern world. The cycle of going out, into the world, and facing that despair and estrangement becomes a maturation process--a death and a rebirth only occurring through an inward journey in search of spiritual meaning found deep within the self. For the Native American, that search must begin by a return to the

reservation, back to a traditional heritage and "Indian past," just as Craig suggests. Only the reservation holds the remaining link to a traditional way of life and a "return to the roots of the self." Without the reservation and Euroamerican society, without discovering one's previously suppressed traditional culture and returning to the roots of the self, security and meaning for the individual are nonexistent.

In this new light, Welch is not simply saying that "history is over" or that life is "meaningless." On one hand, he accepts the inevitable despair and estrangement that accompanies the Native American in the modern world, but he goes further to suggest the possibility of release from that estrangement found through commencement of the hero's journey, back on the reservation, back in touch with traditional cultures and, more importantly, traditional mythologies--this retro-progression can, and must, be accomplished under the oppressing realities of contemporary white society. Velie, then, is correct in saying that the white modern world is at fault for the Native Americans' alienation and despair, and he is also correct in saying that only through traditional cultures do Native Americans find meaning in their confusing lives, but he avoids the fact that meaning can still be found, that traditional cultures still exist in a mutated form adapted to the modern world.

Paula Gunn Allen, in her collection of essays The Sacred Hoop, illuminates the problem that contemporary critics of Native literature fail to acknowledge:

traditional American Indian literature is not similar to western literature because the basic assumptions about the universe and, therefore, the basic reality experienced by tribal peoples and by Western peoples are not the same, even at the

level of folklore. This difference has confused non-Indian students for centuries.

They have been unable or unwilling to accept this difference and to develop critical procedures to illuminate the materials without trivializing or otherwise invalidating them. (55)

Welch's novel has been under direct attack from these "trivializing" western literary critics.

Discovering a previously suppressed cultural heritage and using that heritage to reaffirm the strength of the traditional community could mean nothing more to the western critic than a "brief moment of realization."

James Welch, then, in his novel Winter in the Blood, steps beyond the western literary mainstream, risks the assumptions made by the typical western critic and upholds the promise of a hopeful future by challenging the wrongfully standardized scenario of the forever alienated and despairing Native American on the reservation.

HISTORICAL REMNANTS OF NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL DESTRUCTION IN THE LATE-TWENTIETH CENTURY

Welch's protagonist, at the onset of the novel, *is* in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Historically speaking, the Euroamerican drive to systematically "settle" a large portion of North America nearly destroyed hundreds of traditional Native American cultures. In Native American Testimony, Old Lady Horse, a Kiowa Indian, describes the near extinction of the buffalo and its effect on the Kiowa tribe:

Everything the Kiowas had came from the buffalo. Their tipis...clothes and moccasins...meat...and containers [came from the buffalo]. The buffalo were the life of the Kiowas.

Most of all, the buffalo was part of the Kiowa religion. A white buffalo calf must be sacrificed in the Sun Dance. The priests used parts of the buffalo to make their prayers when they healed people or when they sang to the powers above...

There was war between the buffalo and the white men... Up and down the plains those men ranged, shooting sometimes as many as a hundred buffalo a day...

The buffalo saw that their day was over. They could protect their people no longer. (Nabakov 174-5)

As the buffalo was being slaughtered throughout the plains region of North America, so were the practical and spiritual lives of the Native cultures that came to depend upon the buffalo for everyday needs.

The Kiowa Tribe once lived in the high plains region in modern-day western Montana (Taylor 17). The Blackfeet Indian Tribe, from which James Welch and the protagonist in Winter in the Blood claim their Native American ancestry, was also from the high plains region. As the buffalo was an invaluable resource in every cultural aspect of the Kiowa Tribe, a plains tribe, so was it to the Blackfeet, to the protagonist's ancestors.

After the extinction of the buffalo and the initial disruption of traditional Native cultures, the white man began the process of "religious conversion." Since the Native's way of life was "wrong", since their "primitive ways" were being overcome by the technologically advanced European way of life (an aspect of cultural Darwinism frequently used by the white man as an excuse for conquering "primitive" cultures around the world), and since the modern white man's way was primarily the Christian way, it only "made sense" that an attempt be made to convert the "ignorant savages" to Christianity to "save their souls"--or, in a less clouded sense, to make westward expansion less fraught with conflict and turmoil. As Vine Deloria Jr. points out in God is Red,

the status of native peoples around the globe was firmly cemented by the intervention of Christianity into the political affairs of exploration and colonization.

They were regarded as not having ownership of their lands, but as merely existing on them at the pleasure of the Christian God who had now given them to the nations of Europe... The natives refusing to accept the gospel were thus made subjects of the just Christian war because they had refused to accept the truth that had been revealed some 1,500 years before. (256)

Once the Euroamerican explorers decided that the newly discovered North American continent was part of their Christian God's master plan, *anything* found on that sacred land mass became the subject of Christian law, a set of rules and regulations securely bound in European politics.

Native American nature religions, then, were deemed "primitive" by white Europeans. The Native inhabitants were at fault in the eyes of Euroamerican colonizers only when introduced to the word of the Christian God and, subsequently, only when they had consciously chosen to reject it: denying the divine word of God as spoken through his human disciples was reason enough for the white Europeans to pillage and conquer the resisting Native Cultures. All of this could be accomplished with a certain peace of mind--how could God be wrong?

Governmental authorities then took the task of Native American cultural genocide one step further by saying that the practice of certain Native American religious ceremonies was illegal, and that individuals caught in the act of performance could be punished under Euroamerican law. Sam Gill, in Native American Traditions, writes that "from the early 1880s up to the time John Collier became Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933, there was a persistent governmental effort, made through directives to Indian agents, to discourage, in fact to outlaw, the practice of tribal religious traditions" (15). So not only were traditional religious practices becoming more difficult to perform in the midst of westward expansion, but they were becoming illegal in the eyes of the U.S. government. The small amount of spiritual freedom left for Native Americans was being destroyed through government sanctions. Native ceremonies that continued to be

performed, despite the possibility of repercussions, had to be done in private, out of sight from the leering eyes of the Euroamerican--and even that was becoming more difficult with the onset of the reservation system.

Through the restriction of tribal movement by use of an invisible barrier called "the reservation," further destruction of Native cultures inevitably ensued. Native Tribes that used to roam the plains of central North America, in search of food and escape from unbearable weather, were soon forced to live within certain boundaries on relatively minuscule allotments of land allocated by the U.S. government. Roy Harvey Pearce writes, in Savagism and Civilization, that

[the Native American] had to be dealt with; his newly acquired lands had to be taken over; and still he had to be brought to civilization, or die. What eventually resulted was the Reservation system, whereby Indians were segregated and gathered together on specific pieces of land assigned to specific tribes. These were to be savage islands in the midst of civilized seas. The good hope was that once they were on their islands, Indians would be at long last liable to proper civilizing.

(239)

The idea of civilizing "primitive" Native cultures was, of course, the Euroamerican rationale for another destructive pawn in the game of Native American genocide.

But the reservation itself wasn't the end of Native American cultural destruction, it was only the beginning. Along with the reservation came the Euroamerican's most ingenious act of cultural eradication--the gradual breakdown of the extended family unit and, in turn, the destruction of the community and the traditions that accompanied it.

Through the use of the reservation, Native American cultural destruction continued at an increasing rate. First came the development of government rations, the rationale being that the more the Indian relied upon the modernized U.S. government, the sooner he would forget his traditional ways of life. Then came the allotment of farm land to individual families: segregate the tribal families and force them to sustain themselves through farming, in turn eradicating tribal interdependence. And a third way, and by far the one with the worst, most long-standing effect on Native Tribes, was to send the children to U.S. government boarding schools, in effect cutting off a

generation of Indians from their traditional upbringing. It was felt by governmental and Christian authorities that if they could break the chain of traditional beliefs and lifeways, they could create new citizens who would take their education (which included table manners, grooming, hygiene, housekeeping skills, and obedience) and melt away into the mainstream of America. Eventually, they would forget that they were once Indians. (Welch, Killing 227)

If Euroamericans could sever the ties that bound one or more tribes together, if they could make the Natives "forget that they were once Indians," then victory was close at hand. In the simplest terms possible, the Native American way of life was "wrong" and was standing in the way of European "progress"; traditional Native lifeways had to be changed at all costs--the sooner the Indian lived like the white man, the "right" man, the better.

Little did Native Americans realize, though, that traditional culture on the reservation was, in less than a hundred years down the road, to be their most utilized tool for redemption in the white modern world. The most destructive element in the Native

Americans' struggle to retain their traditional cultures was ironically going to be their saving grace in the mid to late-twentieth century.

The unfortunate outcome of European colonization in North America and the brainwashing slogan of "manifest destiny" was that the Native American cultural cycle was being considerably disrupted; their native mythologies were being diluted and becoming obsolete. By the mid-nineteenth century, over a hundred years of living a spiritually peaceful life was coming to a close for the Plains Indians. Some leaders were inclined to resist violently, like Crazy Horse from the Oglala Sioux tribe. Other leaders sought a more peaceful solution, attempting to adapt to the rapidly advancing changes. Whatever the reaction, the result was always devastating to traditional cultures. The white man was there, in much greater numbers, and was still coming. A drastic decline in sustaining Native American communal mythologies had begun.

In an attempt to preserve traditional mythologies, Native customs and rituals continued to be handed down from generation to generation, but the number of Native Americans practicing those traditions increasingly declined. Dependence on government rations and the impending white man's way of life, forcefully introduced through reservations, boarding schools and government acts restricting certain religious ceremonies, were making cultural traditions useless. Finally, by the mid-twentieth century, the decline of the Native American community had all but signaled the dissipation of traditional cultures and mythologies. Louise K. Barnett, in her article "Alienation and Ritual...", asserts that

unlike white Americans, Indians have recent memories (historically speaking) of a radically different way of life, elements of which many of them continue to value and preserve, or wish that they could preserve. Something other than mainstream culture has a reality for them that it cannot have for the average white American. Given these differences from the dominant group, it is predictable that the protagonist of a novel who is an American Indian will be alienated--socially or culturally separated from other people. (123)

For the protagonist in Winter in the Blood, as for many Native Americans in the mid to late-twentieth century, the problem of alienation finds its roots imbedded much deeper than Barnett suggests. Not only is the protagonist alienated from "mainstream culture" that dominates every facet of North American life, but he is also alienated from his traditional community that struggles to sustain their traditional lifeways.

In losing their land, in losing their native customs and traditions, and in losing their pride and courage in unsuccessfully attempting to retain their native mythologies, Native Americans were reduced to silent, distraught human beings who turned to look for an outlet and found only drugs, alcohol, and despair in searching further. Thus we have the refined label of "savage," a contemporary stereotype of degradation for the remnants of destroyed cultures--the Native American on the reservation.

CULTURAL DESTRUCTION AND WELCH'S PROTAGONIST

James Welch, fully understanding the history of Native American colonization and near cultural destruction, makes it a point to frequently reiterate, in his novel Winter in the Blood, the long-standing effects upon the contemporary Native American on the reservation. With the destruction of the buffalo and other wild game came the destruction of a nomadic, hunting way of life full of customs and rituals. In Welch's novel, the effects of this destruction are evident in the anonymous protagonist's recollections of his late father, First Raise. Still a traditional man at heart, First Raise was caught between the desire to continue a traditional lifestyle and the modern world that would not allow him to do so. The protagonist remembers, "he had dreams" (7). Every year First Raise dreamt of "taking elk in Glacier Park" (7). He made the extensive plans every fall to carry out his dream, from calculating time and mileage to the amount of food and supplies he would need. Most importantly he "inquired around, trying to find out what the penalty would be if they caught him... He had to know the penalty, almost as though the penalty would be the inevitable result of his hunt" (7). First Raise knew that he could no longer carry out his dreams of a traditional way of life without feeling the effects of modern society.

But First Raise never made his trip, denied of his dream and the need to fulfill an urge that would reaffirm his Blackfeet identity. The only satisfaction First Raise could squeeze from his dream was the "planning and preparation" that were "all part of a ritual-- something to be done when the haying was over and the cattle brought down from the hill" (7). Under the tremendous weight of the Euroamerican empire, First Raise could barely salvage part of a ritual and the little satisfaction it afforded.

At another point in the novel, Welch displays the lingering effects of Christian intrusion into traditional Native American culture. The protagonist's mother, Teresa, is a Catholic and frequently spends time with the Catholic priest from a neighboring town. The protagonist has a difficult time understanding Teresa's relationship with a white priest who "refused to set foot on the reservation. He never buried Indians in their family graveyards; instead, he made them come to him, to his church, his saints and holy water, his feuding eyes" (5). The question does not need to be asked, and isn't, but can undoubtedly be heard: why would a Native American want to be affiliated with a religion that refuses to accept her as an equal? Without a sufficient answer at hand, the protagonist rebels in the most subtle way he knows how. Unaccepting of their relationship, he ponders a letter from the Catholic priest addressed to his mother, Teresa:

I wanted to read it, to see what a priest would have to say to a woman who was his friend. I had heard of priests having drinking partners, fishing partners, but never a woman partner. I wanted to read it because this woman partner was my mother. But I didn't want to see my mother's name inside the envelope, in a letter written by a white man who refused to bury Indians in their own plots, who refused to set foot on the reservation. I felt vaguely satisfied as I tore up the letter between my legs and let the pieces fall to the floor. (58-9)

The protagonist knows that he wants no part of the Catholic religion, and therefore tries to do what little he can to make that same decision for his blinded mother.

The whole effect that Christianity had on Native cultures, however, is best illuminated when considering the other side of the spectrum and the alternative choices

that beset the protagonist in his confused state of mind. Moving from the white man's contemporary religion to the Native's traditional way of life, the protagonist finds no relief in the customs he has never been exposed to, and, therefore, doesn't understand. When encountering his grandfather for the first time, a fact unknown to the protagonist, he scoffs at the old man and the things he has to say. The protagonist says,

"...I can't help but feel that there's something wrong with you. No man should live alone."

"Who's alone? The deer come--in the evenings--they come to feed on the other side of the ditch. I can hear them. When they whistle, I whistle back."

"And do they understand you?" I said this mockingly.

His eyes were hidden in the darkness.

"Mostly--I can understand most of them."

"What do they talk about?... Do they talk about the weather?" (68)

In poking fun at the old man, at his relationship with the animals and the natural world around him, the protagonist is also poking fun at a traditional Native American way of life. But the mocking and scoffing do not come from the protagonist's pure reluctance to believe in the old man's traditions; it comes from ignorance. Having been raised by a mother with Catholic beliefs, beliefs that ridicule traditional Native American mythologies, it is doubtful that the protagonist has had any exposure to traditional Native lifeways. His choices, then, are modern religions that fail to treat the Native American as an equal, and traditional religions that are seldom practiced, deemed wrong by modern, Euroamerican society, and thus lack influence upon upcoming Native American generations. In reality,

the protagonist is left with no religion at all, no sense of the spiritual inner-peace needed to survive in the modern world.

Finally, Welch shows the continuing effects of the Euroamerican attempt to integrate the Native American into white society. The inevitable problem that resulted from integration was that Euroamericans still did not consider the Native American as an equal. Integration demanded that the Natives cut their hair, wear European clothes, obtain a respectable job in the white community, learn how to maintain good hygiene and house-keeping skills, forget their Native culture, learn proper English, practice an acceptable religion, and then, supposedly, they would be better off than before they were "discovered," but still not as good as the Euroamerican. When the protagonist spent time at the rehabilitation clinic in Tacoma for a knee operation, he was offered a job and a chance to make something of himself:

They liked me because I was smarter than practically anybody they had ever seen.

That's what they said and I believed them. It took a nurse who hated Indians to tell me the truth, that they needed a grant to build another wing and I was to be the first of the male Indians they needed to employ in order to get the grant. (22)

Integration fails when the dominant society fails to consider the conquered society as equal on any plane. Instead of a compliment and an opportunity for decent work, the episode at the clinic in Tacoma only heightened the protagonist's sense of alienation and despair.

Because of the nurse and her "Indian hatred," the protagonist was made to feel worthless and inferior. Her need to express her hatred of Native Americans wrongfully

changed a personal compliment on individual intelligence into a hand-out to someone thought otherwise unable to succeed in Euroamerican society. The nurse, in pointing out the fact of the protagonist's Native heritage, made him a statistic instead of a human being.

As Welch has shown, modern religions are demeaning to the Native American; traditional mythologies are not understood, or, in the case of *First Raise*, unable to be practiced in a traditional fashion; and the prospect of integration into white society is short-lived. The protagonist has nowhere to fit into society, no community with which to bond, no sense of himself or the world around him. The protagonist, therefore, is alienated, despairing, and distant from his own Indian community and white society alike.

THE PROTAGONIST'S ALIENATION AS EXPRESSED THROUGH MODERNISM

In the construction of his text, James Welch uses modernist techniques to authentically portray the protagonist on the twentieth century Indian reservation. The similarities between Welch's aesthetic approach to the novel and the ideological assumptions of modernism are overwhelmingly evident. From a general perspective of modernism, we see the protagonist in Welch's novel as questioning, inward-turning, lost, isolated and caught in a no-man's land incapable of providing religious or social truth. He is more aware of his uncertainty and his confusion, and he senses that an alternative belief system is needed. Welch's use of modernist techniques to express the desolation of modernism in Winter in the Blood exhibits a radical intensification of interior monologue, a disappearance of third-person narrator, a non-linear plot, a radical juxtaposition of past and present, and an exploration of the deep self; his characterization can be seen from a mythic perspective and an explicit use of obscure Blackfeet symbolism. Many of these modernist attributes and techniques will become evident as I analyze the novel in an attempt to reveal Welch's protagonist as an alienated individual, lost in a no-man's-land of time and landscape, without direction and without a spiritual foundation on which to base his confusing life.

In showing the alienation and despair of the protagonist in Welch's novel, in bringing out the modernist attributes and techniques that Welch uses, the accepted, dominant scholarly view will become evident. Welch, on the other hand, takes the use of modernism one step further to suggest that, yes, it depicts the alienated individual in

modern society and the sense of hopelessness that accompanies that individual, but that, no, the hopelessness does not need to be everlasting; and that seen within the framework of a mythological consciousness, escape from those alienating feelings is possible.

In chapter one of Welch's novel, the protagonist returns home from a drinking spree in the neighboring white towns, commenting on his home life, hinting at the frequency of this pattern:

Coming home was not easy anymore. It was never a cinch, but it had become a torture...

Coming home to a mother and an old lady who was my grandmother. And the girl who was thought to be my wife. But she really didn't count. For that matter none of them counted; not one meant anything to me. And for no reason. I felt no hatred, no love, no guilt, no conscience, nothing but a distance that had grown through the years... The country had created a distance as deep as it was empty, and the people accepted and treated each other with distance.(2)

The alienation the protagonist feels magnifies his lack of emotion for himself and the community around him, reciprocally heightening his sense of hopelessness and despair. The vicious circle of despondency allows him no escape from his confused state of mind.

The distance created between the individuals in the protagonist's community stems from the Euroamericans' raping of traditional Native cultures; the heart of the problem, then, the distance and the isolation, lies in the individual Native as directly affected by over one hundred years of cultural genocide. Even in his confused state of mind, the

protagonist himself can identify the source of the distance, making no excuses for his, or his community's, alienated state of being:

But the distance I felt came not from country or people; it came from within me. I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon. And that was why I had no particular feelings toward my mother and grandmother. Or the girl who had come to live with me. (2)

The protagonist takes it upon himself to carry the burden of distance and alienation that prevails in his Blackfeet community.

Not only has the individual on the reservation's alienation stemmed from the major destructive events of the late-nineteenth century, but from the continued presence of the white industrial society in the early to mid-twentieth century. Sanjeev Sharma, in his article "From Loneliness to a Wedding Ring...", writes about how the post-war periods in American society, periods of major industrial and technological advancement, are major factors of the Native American's alienation and despair that prevails throughout Welch's novel. He writes that "the effects of these factors [of postwar technological and political developments] are most evident in the Native American communities, for whom the war and the post-war periods have been full of stress and alienation, distancing people from their own selves, their communities and land" (25). This stress and alienation, Sharma continues, raises the individual's (the protagonist's) "consciousness of their ethnic heritage as it manifests itself through tribal history, legends, myths, traditions, rituals, ceremonies and cures. This ethnic emergence is a direct offshoot of the American cultural ethos" (25). The heightened awareness of "cultural consciousness" in a predominantly Euroamerican

society arouses and answers the question: How can the previously traditional Native American survive in the predominantly white, modern world? Western historians claim that they can't. Efforts to sustain cultural values have, for the most part, failed. Attempts at integration have been coerced and thus have also failed. No other source of release from the Native American's distance and alienation has been found, creating, not a culture of proud Native Americans, but a ghetto of confused zombies with no outlet aside from anger, alcohol and a distancing of themselves from the truth of individual cultural empowerment.

Welch begins Winter in the Blood by explicitly conveying to the reader the alienated state of being with which the protagonist is struggling, and continues to reiterate that fact throughout the whole of the novel. The distance between the protagonist and his mother ensues with dual arguments over the details concerning the death of a pet duck and the death of the protagonist's father. No conclusions are ever reached, and the two-chapter discussion ends with the protagonist, revealing his alienation once again, thinking "I never expected much from Teresa and I never got it. But neither did anybody else. Maybe that's why First Raise [his father] stayed away so much" (21). Along with the protagonist's concluding comment comes the revelation that his father was also a victim of individual alienation and despair.

Welch further develops the protagonist's alienation in the novel through a conversation with Lame Bull, his mother's recent husband. In the humorously despairing conversation, argumentation and a lack of agreement on the protagonist's age create a "sense of dislocation and alienation" between the protagonist and Lame Bull (Sands 98):

"I haven't seen such a poor year since the flood. Ask your mother. She'll tell you... You, of course, are too young."

"I was almost twenty," I said.

"...You were not much more than a baby in Teresa's arms..."

"I remember that. I was almost twenty."

"Ho." Lame Bull laughed. "You were not much more than a gleam in your old man's eye." (8)

Lack of agreement between the protagonist and Lame Bull, as well as a lack of *desire* to agree, heightens the sense of distance between the two. As Kathleen M. Sands writes, in her article "Alienation and Broken Narrative...", "the story is brief and terse; conflicting versions result in separation of the men rather than a sharing of a common event" (98).

Even the protagonist's girlfriend, the one that his mother thought he was married to and thus "treated her with politeness" (4), was as distant from him as the rest of his dislocated family. The Cree girl represented nothing more to the protagonist than a one-night stand, another person to fill in that empty void. And realizing this, being helpless at the same time, he comments, "Just a girl I picked up and brought home, a fish for dinner, nothing more" (22). In this particular instance it becomes evident once again that the feelings of alienation, the lost wanderings and careless attitudes permeate the rest of the characters as well. No more did the protagonist care for the girl than did she care for him, the evidence shown by her leaving in his absence, taking with her his electric razor and gun, most likely to be pawned for liquor money in the nearby white towns and bars.

The protagonist's periodic stints to the white towns and bars are overwhelming evidence of his despairing, alienated state of being. Not only does Welch begin the novel with the protagonist's return home from a three-day drinking spree, but two more trips are made during the remainder of the story. During his last trip, the protagonist comments on a feeling, one that he has obviously had before. He thinks to himself, "Again I felt that helplessness of being in a world of stalking white men. But those Indians down at Gable's were no bargain either. I was a stranger to both and both had beaten me" (120). Once again, this time in the protagonist's own words, there are the feelings of alienation and despair, the recognition of these feelings, and the apparent helplessness to do anything about them.

Finally, Welch's protagonist comes to a conclusion about the state of despair that he has thus far been enduring. He says, in chapter 31,

I had had enough of Havre, enough of town, of walking home, hung over, beaten up, or both. I had had enough of the people, the bartenders, the bars, the cars, the hotels, but mostly, I had had enough of myself. I wanted to lose myself, to ditch these clothes, to outrun this burning sun, to stand beneath the clouds and have my shadow erased, myself along with it. (125)

The solitary despair that the protagonist has been enduring has finally become too much for him to handle. There is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide and no more excuses to make.

Not only do the protagonist's conversations, thoughts, and actions indicate his apparent state of alienation, but so does the structure of the novel. Kathleen M. Sands writes that

the structure of the novel reflects the increased sense of disorientation in the terseness of the language and the separation of incidents. As the narrator's life lacks motivation, direction, continuity, the novel apparently does too. This merging of narrative and form allows the structure of the work to carry the theme as effectively as the narration itself. (99)

This unity of topic and form becomes evident in the fragmented memories of the protagonist's past, the lack of conversation and increased interior monologue, the back and forth binges between the reservation and the white towns and bars, and the confusing adventure with the airplane man, a man with "no past, no identity, no future, and, more importantly, no story to tell" (Sands, 99).

The protagonist, along with the rest of the characters in the novel, obviously suffers from feelings of alienation and despair. Welch makes a point to frequently reveal this condition in his characters throughout the whole of the novel. Whether the protagonist is thinking to himself, conversing with his family, friends and strangers, or recalling fragmented visions from his past, a climate of melancholy and dislocation permeates the characters and landscape of Winter in the Blood.

Welch, in creating a sense of distance and alienation in the individual, subsequently depicts the protagonist as a person struggling to grasp a meaning in life, lost in an aimless search for a transcendent being--a creator of spiritual peace found only through the

practice of cultural mythology. Consequently, he struggles with his own identity as a Blackfeet Indian, his place in contemporary society and his lack of direction as he tries to find a foundation for his lost and restless soul. The protagonist in Winter in the Blood is representative of Native Americans on Indian reservations today.

Whatever the reason for the protagonist's despair and alienation, both from himself and from his community, the fact remains that the problem is present and is a disruptive factor in the lives of Native Americans on the reservation in the mid to late-twentieth century. Not only does Welch observe and portray this phenomenon through his characters, mainly the protagonist, but so do other prominent Native American writers of the time. In his Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel House Made of Dawn, N. Scott Momaday's main character, Abel, also suffers from the effects of the industrially developing Euroamerican society. Although part of his alienation stems directly from time served in World War II, his life on the reservation differs little from that of Welch's protagonist. Similar to Momaday's Abel is Leslie Marmon Silko's main character, Tayo, in her novel Ceremony. Again, though a product of the same war, Tayo's life on the reservation mirrors that of Welch's protagonist.

The pattern is almost dullingly repetitive as the same story of the Native American on the reservation emerges from significant works of fiction written by Native Americans in the twentieth century: D'Arcy McNickle's The Surrounded, Janet Campbell Hale's The Jailing of Cecelia Capture, Anna Lee Walter's short story collection The Sun Is Not Merciful, and, most recently, Sherman Alexie's novel Reservation Blues. All of these

stories, to name only a few, portray the Native American on the reservation as a victim of Euroamerican industrial society.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY AS AN UNCONSCIOUS SOLUTION

Welch's protagonist's search for a mythology that will allow him an escape from his alienated state of being appears only to be in vain. Modern mythologies, represented by his mother, her priest acquaintance and the Roman Catholic religion, do not allow the Native American equal opportunity to become involved in a spiritually nurturing system of beliefs. Traditional Blackfeet mythology, represented by the protagonist's grandfather, is obscure and unacknowledged by the protagonist's and his mother's generations. Without a community present, according to Louise K. Barnett in her article "Alienation and Ritual in *Winter in the Blood*," a traditional mythology is impossible, and an alternative way of life is needed: "In Winter in the Blood the condition of alienation in the narrator is extreme and all encompassing. To survive physically in an environment that offers him nothing positive and much that is threatening, he turns unconsciously to ritual" (123). With no mythology readily available to follow, the protagonist has no other choice but to create his own mythology--a possible fusion of traditional and modern mythologies.

Joseph Campbell, in an interview with Bill Moyers, answers his own question: What is a myth?

The dictionary definition of a myth would be stories about Gods. So then you have to ask the next question: What is a God? A god is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe--the powers of your own body and of nature. The myths are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human being, and the same powers that animate our life animate the life of the world. But also there are myths and Gods

that have to do with specific societies or the patron deities of the society. In other words, there are two totally different orders of mythology. There is the mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you're a part. And there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society (28).

The first type of mythology explained by Campbell encompasses both traditional Native lifeways and modern religions. Both religions relate individuals to their "nature and the natural world." The second type of mythology distinguishes between the individual religions as established by their particular societies.

Since traditional Native mythologies were diluted by the infringing presence of Euroamerican pioneers in North America, and since modern mythologies refuse to accept the Native American as an equal participant in spiritually nurturing religious practices, what is then needed for the Native American on the reservation, for the protagonist in Welch's novel, is to create a new mythology that nurtures the Native American relation to the natural world, and, at the same time, allows for changes that have made traditional mythologies obsolete. In effect, there must be a fusion of traditional and modern mythologies, and this synthesis must take place in the transformation that occurs throughout the hero's journey.

What becomes essential to understand is that the hero's journey is a mythical, unconscious transformation, and to apply it to Welch's novel is to accept the spiritually nurturing results that ensue. Contrary to the contemporary scholar's view of modernism as used in Winter in the Blood, the hero's journey is an unconscious tool used to dissipate

the feelings of alienation and despair for the individual in the modern world, in this case the Native American on the reservation. Welch uses modernist techniques to portray the typical scenario of the Native American in contemporary society; he does not use modernism as a means in itself to make a final statement about contemporary Native American life. Winter in the Blood steps beyond the typical bounds of modernism and offers new possibilities, hopeful possibilities, through the use of creative mythology in the form of the hero's journey, as interpreted by Joseph Campbell.

Joseph Campbell, in the introductory chapter of The Hero with a Thousand Faces, paraphrases what Professor Arnold J. Toynbee "indicates in his six-volume study of the laws of the rise and disintegration of civilizations" (16). The problems and solutions, according to Toynbee, that civilizations encounter throughout the centuries are strikingly similar to the same problem that the protagonist and his community faces in Winter in the Blood. Toynbee says, through Campbell's words, that

schism in the soul, schism in the body social, will not be resolved by any scheme of return to the good old days (archaism), or by programs guaranteed to render an ideal projected future (futurism), or even by the most realistic, hardheaded work to weld together again the deteriorating elements. Only birth can conquer death--the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be--if we are to experience long survival--a continuous "recurrence of birth" (palingenesia) to nullify the unremitting recurrences of death. For it is by means of our own victories, if we are not regenerated, that the work of

Nemesis is wrought: doom breaks from the shell of our very virtue... When our day is come for the victory of death, death closes in; there is nothing we can do, except be crucified--and resurrected; dismembered totally, and then reborn. (16-7)

A return to purely traditional Native mythologies, or an attempt to reconstruct the severed traditions involved in those mythologies, is an insufficient solution to mediate the protagonist's feelings of alienation and despair; nor will modern, world-wide religions and mythologies allow the protagonist that same escape. Both mythologies must die within the Native American and be reborn within the context of a "creative mythology," a fusion of traditional and modern mythologies centered within the struggling individual.

The protagonist in Welch's novel has encountered death in the most blatant form possible--physiological death: the death of his father, his brother, his grandmother and the calf in the slough. Other obscure, prevalent symbols of death also exist in the novel: the death of traditional Native American cultures, the death of the protagonist's relationship with the Cree girl, the death of the monetary prospects of the airplane man and the job in Tacoma, the death of Teresa's relationship with her drinking-partner-priest, and, hopefully, the death of the protagonist's drinking binges in the nearby white towns and bars. With the prevalence of death comes the reality of birth; from death comes life, re-birth and transformation. For the protagonist in Winter in the Blood, a transformation is inevitably on the way, signifying the need to embark upon Joseph Campbell's "the hero's journey."

"The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero," according to Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, "is a magnification of the formula

represented in the rites of passage: *separation--initiation--return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (30). The protagonist in Winter in the Blood encounters, experiences and assimilates the preliminary rite of Campbell's mythological adventure, the separation. Campbell divides the separation, or departure, into five major subsections, the first four of which appear in Welch's novel: "The Call to Adventure," "Refusal of the Call," "The Supernatural Aid," and "The Crossing of the First Threshold" (Hero, 36).

The signs are clear that the separation has definitely begun. Campbell writes that "all moments of separation and new birth produce anxiety" (Hero, 52). Moments of anxiety for the protagonist are numerous throughout the novel, and most can be identified through his apparent state of alienation and despair. In the beginning of the novel, when he arrives home from his three-day drinking binge, he makes no effort to hide the distance and alienation he feels inside: "I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon" (2). He then undertakes the mindless search for the Cree girl, admitting to the lack of emotion he felt for her: "I didn't want her back--I was damned relieved when she left, so why would I want to find her?--yet I knew I would search her out again" (88). The protagonist is confused in his state of despair. He wants to find the girl, contrary to his feelings about her; but why? He can't even answer his own questions.

At another point in the novel, the protagonist wakes up in a hotel room, having "slept fitfully, pursued by the ghosts of the night before and nights past" (52). Everything from his past, from the previous night on the town to scenes from his childhood, haunts him in his dreams: images of Teresa and the Cree girl, wanted posters in the post office

that remind him of his father, Amos the duck, and, eventually, his brother, Mose. These are all moments in the protagonist's life that instill fear and apprehension in him, fear and apprehension of confrontation and death. Campbell writes that

the crisis...is the "call to adventure." The summons may be to live... Or it may mark the dawn of religious illumination... But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration--a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a death and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. (Hero, 51)

In this case, for the protagonist, the call is both to live *and* to mark the "dawn of religious illumination," because without some aspect of spiritual harmony, religious guidance, the will to live ceases to exist; and what transpires is the repetitive, destructive pattern that the protagonist has thus far been enduring; his "familiar life pattern" has been outgrown.

In reality, the protagonist is no longer the little boy that Lame Bull keeps insisting he is--"You, of course, are too young" (8)--but constant reminders keep him wondering about his place in society, in the real and spiritual world around him. Even the bartender in Malta refers to the protagonist as "Teresa First Raise's boy" (56), implying not only the failure to earn the title of "man," a definite rite of passage in any male's lifetime, but also that he's not even his own person--he is "Teresa First Raise's."

The protagonist's previous lack of will to confront his past, coupled with his family's inability to let him grow up, only amounts to continued self-destruction in the face

of modern society. The difference with Welch's novel is that the protagonist *does* attempt to break the bonds of death. His desire to die and to be born again becomes evident in his struggle to break down the barriers that hold him back: his family and, most importantly, his own reluctance to change his self-destructive patterns, physically and mentally. When Lame Bull insists, "You were not much more than a baby in Teresa's arms," the protagonist responds, "I remember that. I was almost twenty" (8). And when the bartender fails to give the protagonist credit for his age, he responds, "I'm thirty-two" (56). He knows his right to be treated as an adult, given credit for his years, and he fights to get that acknowledgment, that respect--probably as much of a reminder to himself as it is to the other characters.

Confronting his past is a difficult task for the protagonist to accomplish, yet it does eventually occur throughout the course of the novel. As Campbell states, his "old concepts, ideals and emotional patterns no longer fit" (Hero 51). Confrontation, experience and assimilation are the only solutions to breaking the patterns of self-destruction. The process is slow, but the completion becomes evident after the last scene of his brother Mose's remembered death:

"What use," I whispered, cried for no one in the world to hear, not even Bird, for no one but my soul, as though the words would rid me of the final burden of guilt... (146)

Here a tremendous weight has been lifted from the protagonist--a memory finally confronted, a feeling of suppressed guilt that has been growing throughout the years. Campbell would interpret the memory of the protagonist's brother as "that which has to be

faced, and is somehow profoundly familiar to the unconscious... [it now] makes itself known; and what formerly was meaningful may become strangely emptied of value" (Hero 55).

Because the protagonist and his brother Mose had been herding cattle together the day Mose died, because the protagonist was riding the front line when the wild-eyed roan darted alongside the highway away from the herd, and because the protagonist was chasing down the calf when Mose was hit by a car, he blamed himself for Mose's death. It wasn't until the protagonist confronted this distant memory that he realized that Mose's death wasn't his fault; the horse and he were only doing their jobs. If anything could be blamed for the freak accident, it would be modern technology infringing upon a traditional way of life. The protagonist was merely a child at the time and, having not confronted his memory until much later in his life, he blamed himself. The trauma of experiencing the death of his brother, coupled with the blame he put upon himself, could have initially been tempered by immediate confrontation of the situation and embarking upon the hero's journey.

Campbell says that "the adventure may begin as a mere blunder" (58). To put it lightly, the death of Mose is a blunder indeed. In fact, if properly confronted, the literal death of Mose would have meant the death of the boy in the protagonist. With that considered, the call to adventure was the death of Mose. The fact that everyone else still sees the protagonist as a child signals that the journey of the hero needed to have begun long ago--the protagonist, in not confronting his childhood memory, symbolically remained a child; in a sense, he "refused the call to adventure." Campbell writes:

refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or "culture," the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless. All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration.

(59)

"Refusal of the call" is the next subsection in the separation stage. The individual "wasteland" that surrounds the protagonist stems from his reluctance to heed the call to adventure.

Refusing the initial call to adventure, the protagonist builds up a "wasteland" around himself: the one-night stands, the drinking binges, the fights, the absurd adventure with the airplane man. Problems create more problems, and without confronting his memories of Mose, the protagonist would have been lost in that wasteland forever--disintegrated. Following the Cree girl, to whom he shows indifference anyway, leads to the encounter with her brother when they rob the white man in the bar; so now the protagonist still looks for the Cree girl *and* tries to dodge the man he helped rob; and on top of that, the Cree girl's brother beats up the protagonist because he thinks the protagonist wants to do the same to him--chaos, a wasteland, inevitable destruction, if continued. "What these desperate fixations represent," according to Campbell, "is an impotence to put off the infantile ego, with its sphere of emotional relationships and ideals" (Hero 62). Being bound inside "by the walls of childhood,...the timorous

soul...fails to make the passage through the door and come to birth in the world without" (Hero 62).

Campbell, however, continues to say that not all who hesitate are lost. The psyche has many secrets in reserve... Willed introversion, in fact, is one of the classic implements of creative genius and can be employed as a deliberate device... It is a deliberate, terrific refusal to respond to anything but the deepest, highest, richest answer to the as yet unknown demand of some waiting void within: a kind of total strike, or rejection of the offered terms of life, as a result of which some power of transformation carries the problem to a plane of new magnitudes, where it is suddenly and finally resolved. (Hero 65)

Failing to heed the initial call to adventure, the protagonist must now make the willed decision to begin the journey. His problems have become overbearing as he realizes the inherent need to change his current behaviors.

The protagonist saves himself when he finally decides, as a result of being given no other choice, to confront his past memories and make a change in his life: "I wanted to lose myself...to stand beneath the clouds and have my shadow erased, myself along with it" (125). This *willed* decision occurs only after he decides, at the end of part three, that he "had had enough of Havre, enough of town, of walking home, hung over, beaten up, or both..." (125). He has finally decided to shut out the negative aspects of his life, the only aspects of his life, and return home, to the reservation, to eventually accept the call to adventure.

The third segment of Campbell's hero's journey is the "guide of a supernatural aid." He writes that "the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (Hero 69). Directly after the protagonist finally confronts the last fragments of Mose's death, he returns to the old man Yellow Calf and realizes in an "instant of corruption" that the old man is actually his grandfather:

I began to laugh, at first quietly, with neither bitterness nor humor. It was the laughter of one who understands a moment in his life, of one who has been let in on the secret through luck and circumstance. "You...you're the one." I laughed, as the secret unfolded itself. "The only one... you, her hunter..." And the wave behind my eyes broke. (158)

With the confrontation of Mose's death, the protagonist has initiated the hero's journey. The encounter with Yellow Calf, the supernatural aid, signifies that the next step of the journey has begun.

The priceless weapon that Yellow Calf gives the protagonist to slay "the dragon forces" is the knowledge of a paternal link, flesh and blood that represents the protagonist's previously unknown link to a traditional culture. Campbell says that

such a figure represents the benign, protecting power of destiny... a promise that the peace of paradise, which was first known in the mother's womb, is not to be lost; that it supports the present and stands in the future as well as in the past (is omega as well as alpha); ...that protective power is always and ever present within

the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world... Mother Nature herself supports the mighty task.

(Hero 71-72)

Destiny lies in the link between blood relatives and the cultures of which they are a part.

As the protagonist once lay in his mother's womb, sharing her body, he also shares her cultural identity. The protagonist's link to his cultural past gives him a place to stand in the present.

The knowledge of his Blackfeet ancestry will also give the protagonist a platform on which to stand in the future. Nothing can stand in his way now, because the power, the knowledge of his ancestry, lies in his heart. He is a man with a past, a heritage, people of which to be proud, values in which to immerse his wounded soul. Even in the midst of the "unfamiliar features" of Euroamerican society, the protagonist will carry with him the knowledge of his ancestors. Patty Harjo, a Native American writer of Seminole and Seneca descent, writes, in her essay "Who Am I?":

I am my parents and their parents and all their ancestors before them... I was born of two heritages--both proud, both noble... Their ancestral roots were transplanted to a new land of adjustment, grief, pain, and sorrow, to a future unknown.

Theirs was a future that seemed only a candle in the darkness, a candle of hope for a new beginning. This was a land of disappointment. It was unlike the old...

Now our sun shines bright; our future is growing clear... We are moving on. We try to grasp the good of our heritage. We try to grasp our culture that has slipped away.

We ask, "Who am I?" and our answer comes to us from the distance, "You are all the things you have ever known and will ever know." (79-80)

Native American mythologies, immersed in the supernatural, are comprised of a myriad of oral stories and traditions that transcend the bounds of typical western thought. Similarly, Yellow Calf, the supernatural aid, transcends the bounds of the typical grandfather; he represents that continuous link of Blackfeet history and identity that is immersed in the supernatural. The protagonist, through the knowledge of his Blackfeet ancestry, becomes another integral part of that same history.

Coming to grips with his distant memories, undertaking the hero's journey, and realizing that he has an ancestral link through his Blackfeet grandfather, the protagonist in Winter in the Blood can continue forward into the future, "moving on" with the knowledge of "who he is." Ward Churchill, in his book of essays entitled Indians Are Us?, explains the deep-seated importance of knowing your indigenous, ancestral links:

...an insight offered by our elders: "To understand where you are, you must know where you've been, and you must know where you are to understand where you are going." For us [Native Americans], you see, the past, present, and future are all equally important parts of the same indivisible whole. In other words, you must set yourselves to reclaiming your own indigenous past. You must come to know it in its own terms--the terms of its internal values and understandings, and the way

these were applied to living in this world--not the terms imposed upon it by the order which set out to destroy it. You must learn to put your knowledge of this heritage to use as a lens through which you can clarify your present circumstance, to know "where you are," so to speak. And, from this, you can begin to chart the course of your struggle into the future. (235)

Even in the eyes of Ward Churchill, the protagonist has taken the first step towards the dissipation of his feelings of alienation. With the knowledge of his indigenous ancestors he can begin to work toward the future and the crossing of the "first threshold" in Campbell's hero's journey.

Just because the hero has received and understands the amulets of protection bestowed upon him by the "supernatural aid" doesn't mean that the journey is over and that life's struggles are in the past; it means, in turn, that the journey has just begun, and that the "first threshold" must now be confronted and crossed. Campbell writes

With the personification of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the "threshold guardian" at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Such custodians bound the world in the four directions--also up and down--standing for the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger... The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored. (77)

The protagonist has begun the hero's journey and has acquired the amulet of protection, but he has yet to step beyond the alienating bounds of his present situation, "the first step into the unexplored."

This first threshold arrives for the protagonist at the end of part four when he encounters the wild-eyed spinster stuck in the mud--the same cow that dashed away from the herd the day Mose was killed. The cow represents, to the protagonist, a sense of previously unrecognized hatred; and as he hesitates at the thought of confronting the cow and saving it from drowning in the mud, he also hesitates at confronting the guardian and passing across the first threshold--"content to remain within the indicated bounds":

I wanted to ignore her. I wanted to go away, to let her drown in her own stupidity... If I turned away now, I thought, if I turned away--my hands trembled but did nothing... As she stared at me, I saw beyond the immediate panic that hatred, that crazy hatred that made me aware of a quick hatred in my own heart.

Her horns seemed tipped with blood, the dark blood of catastrophe. (Winter 166)

The protagonist doesn't ignore the cow, and he makes every attempt to save her. Although his efforts are futile and the cow dies, his mere attempt allows him to confront the hatred that is the guardian of the first threshold. The first threshold, then, has been met and crossed, allowing for the passage "into a new zone of experience" (Hero 182). To the protagonist, the accomplishment of crossing the first threshold comes as a great relief. He says, directly after the ordeal ends, "Some people, I thought, will never know how pleasant it is to be distant in a clean rain, the driving rain of a summer storm. It's not like you'd expect, nothing like you'd expect" (172). What was previously "darkness, the

unknown," is now entered, conquered, and familiar--beyond the "Wall of Paradise" (Hero 89). Campbell writes that "the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous...yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades" (Hero 82). The protagonist is competent and courageous as he crosses the first threshold.

And thus the protagonist has mediated his feelings of alienation and despair by undertaking the hero's journey: he has refused the call to adventure; he has heeded the call to adventure by confronting the memories of Mose; he has encountered his spiritual aid in the form of his grandfather, creating a previously unknown link to his traditional ancestors; and he has approached and crossed over the first threshold into the unknown Eden by confronting the hatred in the cow. For the protagonist, the hero's adventure has only begun as Welch's novel ends. The most difficult part has ended, and by beginning the journey, the protagonist has begun to dispel those feelings of distance and alienation that are so prevalent among Native Americans on the reservation.

But a question still remains: How has the protagonist created his own mythology? Obviously the traditional mythologies of his ancestors are no longer usable, "the spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes... It is not only that there is no hiding place for the Gods from the searching telescope and microscope; there is no such society any more as the Gods once supported it" (Campbell, Hero 387). And modern, world-wide religions are useless also, "for they have become associated with the causes of the factions, as instruments of propaganda and self-congratulation" (Campbell, Hero 389). As Campbell further points out, the animal world, the plant world, and the heavenly spheres have all been bound and conquered; the only

thing that remains in this modern day and age is the individual, "man himself is now the crucial mystery" (Hero 391). So as the protagonist conquers his own unconscious, facing the memories of Mose and his own alienated state of being, he is acknowledging the God within himself. First he needed to find out who he was, who he is a part of--his Blackfeet ancestors; and from there he can move forward into the future as a Blackfeet Indian in the modern world, an identity new and difficult to understand. Campbell writes that

it is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal--carries the cross of the redeemer--not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair. (Hero 391)

James Welch, through his protagonist in Winter in the Blood, accomplishes the task of overcoming the feelings of despair and alienation in the contemporary Native American through the implementation of ritual paralleling Joseph Campbell's hero's journey. The protagonist's brother dies in a childhood accident--"the call to adventure"; the protagonist refuses to confront those memories from his childhood--"the refusal of the call"; when he finally does confront them, the journey has begun; directly after, the protagonist encounters his grandfather who gives him a link to his traditional ancestors--"the encounter with a supernatural aid"; and the protagonist then goes on to confront the cow in the mud, the same cow from the day Mose died--"the crossing of the first threshold."

Hidden in this scheme of redeeming events lies the fact that the protagonist had to return to the reservation to actually begin the journey, confront the memories from his

past and encounter his grandfather and the hatred in the cow. The viscous cycle moved from the reservation, to the white towns, and back again to the reservation. Just as David M. Craig suggested earlier, the movement in the novel is toward the reservation, towards "the roots of the self." Only on the reservation can the Native American confront the roots of the self. N. Scott Momaday, in a collection of conversations with Charles Woodard in Ancestral Voice, reveals his own sentiments about the importance of the reservation in contemporary society:

He [the Native American] must accommodate himself to what we call the dominant society. That is his future. By doing so, he will be able to grow and adjust to the wider world. He must do that. The question is how. How to do it without sacrificing the valuable parts of one's traditions and heritages. It's a delicate situation. A delicate matter. For example, I think the reservation system is necessary in our time. The reservations give certain societies necessary land bases, and upon those bases whole heritages are defined. (199)

Until the point when Welch's protagonist returns to the reservation with the desire to change his life, he was, in fact, "sacrificing the valuable parts" of his traditional Blackfeet heritage. After discovering his previously unknown grandfather, he accommodates himself with the opportunity to "grow and adjust to the wider world." The reservation became an invaluable link to a suppressed culture, a utility of redemption for the Native American in the modern world. So the single most devastating weapon of Native American cultural annihilation turns out, ironically, to be an implement of preservation for traditional Native cultures.

CONCLUSION

James Welch distinguishes the final three pages from the rest of the novel by creating an epilogue: a section that is stylistically part of the whole novel, but ideally a post-commentary on the protagonist's implemented will to change his attitudes of the future. There are three basic aspects of the epilogue that depict the protagonist as a hopeful individual with a positive outlook on the future: a reaffirmation of traditional Blackfeet culture, a willingness to accept the inevitable fusion of the traditional and the modern, and a change from a negative, self-defeating attitude to the acknowledgment of the potential for a spiritually nurtured, self-empowered future.

The first two sentences of the epilogue begin Welch's myriad of hopeful signs that beset the protagonist during the burial ceremony of his grandmother: "We buried the old lady the next day. The priest from Harlem, of course, couldn't make it" (173). When the priest from Harlem fails to attend the burial, Catholicism is literally and symbolically absent from the ceremony. Ceremonies are held in a traditional fashion without the infringing elements of Euroamerican religions. In this respect, traditional Blackfeet lifeways are being reaffirmed.

The protagonist then goes on to say, in the third sentence, "So there were four of us--Teresa, Lame Bull, me and my grandmother" (173). Traditionally, four is the sacred number for the Blackfeet. As the protagonist moves away from a life of destructive elements, i.e. the white towns and bars, he moves closer to a traditional Blackfeet way of life. In a traditional Blackfeet sense, one could view the burial with the four participants as an unbalanced universe realigning itself with the four sacred directions.

There are also many examples in the epilogue of traditional Blackfeet culture fusing with modern Euroamerican culture. The protagonist's brother-in-law, Lane Bull, aside from wearing a modern suit with a traditionally colored tie, smells of Wildroot and aftershave lotion (174), a combination of natural and synthetic odors. While certain facets of Euroamerican society are acknowledged by the Native American as inevitable, traditional Blackfeet culture plays an equally important role.

The protagonist himself, dressed in his father's old suit, becomes the epitome of this fusion:

I was wearing a suit that had belonged to my father. I hadn't known it existed until an hour before the funeral. It was made out of a cream-colored wool with brown threads running through it. The collar and cuffs itched in the noonday heat, but the pant legs were wide enough so that if I stood just right I didn't touch them, except for my knee which was swollen up. It still didn't hurt. The necktie, which I had loosened, had also belonged to my father. It was silk with a picture of two mallards flying over a stand of cattails. (174)

Not only does the protagonist's father's suit represent the recently acquired understanding of the importance of retaining cultural, familial ties--an important aspect of Blackfeet culture--but also of his ability, and right, to remain a Native American within the constraints of modern Euroamerican society. Even the modern, silken tie displays a picture of flying ducks, a stark contrast to the protagonist's previously haunting memories of the ducks from his childhood that died in the watering hole.

And finally, in the concluding paragraphs of the epilogue, the protagonist ponders his future with an attitude of promise and hope, confidence and reassurance:

I would have to go to the agency and see the doctor. I knew that he would try to send me down to Great Falls to have [my knee] operated on. But I couldn't do it. I'd tell him that. I would end up in bed for a year. By that time the girl who had stolen my gun and electric razor would have forgotten me...

Next time I'd do it right. Buy her a couple cremes de menthe, maybe offer to marry her on the spot. (175)

By realizing the necessity to mend a knee that symbolically carries a multitude of pain, and by making the conscious choice to proceed in his quest for the Cree girl who has thus far only brought him trouble and confusion, the protagonist takes control of his life for the first time in the entire novel, and for the right reasons. His decisions for the future have been confidently thought-out while he acknowledges the potential for life-affirming growth.

Only the final sentence of the epilogue can capture the thematic essence of Welch's novel, Winter in the Blood: "I threw the [tobacco] pouch into the grave" (176). The gesture of throwing the tobacco pouch into the grave reaffirms traditional Blackfeet lifeways. It is not a return to a diluted mythology, but a continuation of traditional Blackfeet culture through time and space. The protagonist's reaffirming action connects him spiritually and mythologically to his ancestors and their traditional ways of life. He has found his place in the history of his people and made an affirmative decision to carry

the sacred traditions into the future. The protagonist *is* the mythological hero of contemporary society.

Welch, though, wasn't the only Native American with enough foresight to identify the glimmer of hope for the despairing and alienated reservation Indian. Similar novels of the same time also predict a redemption for the contemporary Native American through traditional mythologies. Momaday's protagonist, Abel, in House Made of Dawn, also goes through the cycle of growing up on the reservation, moving into the Euroamerican city, and then returning at the end of the novel back to the reservation, once again involved in traditional Native ceremonies, specifically involved in a "race towards the sun," towards a brighter, hopeful future. Momaday, similar to Welch, also uses the modernist technique of stream of consciousness to adequately portray the Native American point of view in a contemporary context. For Momaday, as for Welch, modern western literary techniques are intermingled with a sense of the traditional in Native American culture to exemplify the need for fusion and adaption of the traditional and the modern in reconciling the prevalent feelings of alienation and despair of the Native American in the contemporary world.

Silko's Tayo, from Ceremony, also goes through a similar cycle of discovery and redemption, dissipating his anguish through an encounter with a traditional medicine man. Silko uses the techniques of hallucinations, or dream sequences, interspersed with the retelling of traditional Laguna myths to portray Native American sensibilities in the contemporary world. Tayo's journey, similar to Abel's, mirrors that of Welch's

protagonist: the Native American utilizing the knowledge of traditional culture to survive in a modern, industrial society.

Although these are works of fiction, the "hope" that these authors had foreseen became a legitimate change in the lives of real Native Americans in the 1970's. It was a time for decisive measures, and the Native American community, since then, has taken affirmative action. The American Indian Movement (AIM), beginning in the late sixties and becoming a strong voice for the Native American communities in the mid-seventies, was an organization of empowerment for the Native American in the modern world; and, contrary to the militant label that the AIM movement received, the real crux of the movement centered on the traditional tribal families and the strength of the individual in the contemporary community. Just like Campbell said, "it is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero [the individual], but precisely the reverse" (Hero 91). Mary Crow Dog, in her autobiography Lakota Woman, writes about her individual life and how it was affected, and changed for the better, through the AIM movement. Her life also mirrored that of Welch's protagonist, until she met a traditional Lakota medicine man, who reintroduced her to her traditional Native culture. As a result, her feelings of alienation and despair were also reconciled.

Even as we move into the twenty-first century, Native American communities are becoming even stronger in the face of contemporary white society. The Mescalero Apache tribe has been discussing the possibility of building a nuclear storage site on their reservation in the year 2002, a deal that will generate 2.3 billion dollars (MacAdams 67-68). Although this opportunity has created a split in the community between the

traditionalists who say "don't pollute the land," and the progressives who say "let's make the money and boost our low-income community," both sides' arguments stem from two separate ideas of how to do something positive for the community. Individuals like Silas Cochise, who advocates the opportunities that will be created by the nuclear waste storage site, and Rufina Laws, who is in strong opposition to the project, are positive and strong-willed people who have summoned the strength of their indigenous heritage to stand amongst the turmoil on the Mescalero Apache reservation and speak their voice in an assertive manner. These are individuals who know where they come from, who know the history of their people, and who see an opportunity to enhance the spiritual or economic future of their community. This example is only one of many that shows how the Native American on the reservation has defeated the symptoms of alienation and despair, and in turn done something for the community that makes tribes like the Mescalero Apaches a reckoning force in the modern world.

The Arikara people of North Dakota have taken a slightly different approach to easing the transition from a solely traditional culture to one submersed in a modern, technologically oriented society. The White Shield Elementary School of Roseglen, North Dakota implemented a bilingual-bicultural program into their curriculum. The program will "aid in the improvement of student English language proficiency," as well as teach "a daily Arikara language class during which elementary students study their Arikara language and their cultural heritage" (Parks vii). In this way, young Arikara students will learn the means necessary to survive in the modern world while retaining the important aspects of their traditional Arikara culture.

The protagonist, then, in Winter in the Blood, overcomes *his* feelings of alienation and despair through the hero's journey, a creative mythology rooted deep within the self. The critics are wrong when they say that his future is grim and without hope; and they are wrong when they say the protagonist is no different at the end of the novel from how he is at the beginning. Through the novel, a transformation has begun; steps have been taken by the protagonist to dispel his confused feelings. A movement has been made toward the reservation, towards an almost forgotten traditional culture, towards the roots of the self in which spiritual harmony lies.

Perhaps somewhere down the line Vine Deloria Jr., Ward Churchill, M. Annette Jaimes, Russel Means, Bob Robideau, Leonard Peltier, Leslie Marmon Silko, Simon Ortiz, N. Scott Momaday, Joy Harjo, Sherman Alexie, Gerald Vizenor, Janet Campbell Hale, Lance Henson, Jimmie Durham, and many more Native American artists, activists and writers encountered the same trials and tribulations that Welch's protagonist encounters throughout the novel. Perhaps their futures as Native Americans seemed as grim and hopeless as the protagonist's. And perhaps their realizations and understandings of their indigenous ancestry gave them the power they needed to pull themselves from the Euroamerican machine of degradation.

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