

HEALING A WARRIOR WORLD

JULIE A. SGARZI

What She Said:
The only cure
I know
is a good ceremony,
that's what she said.

—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

This is a story about following a thread, and, like Ariadne, finding a way in and hopefully a way out again. The labyrinth of this meander is the consuming cycle of violence and suffering that remains long after war or conflict subsides, miring individual combatants, families, communities, and nations in a complex maze of consequences. What fates befall the returning warriors of the 21st century? How can we as a culture ameliorate their wounds and facilitate healing a generation of young men and women who have experienced such brutality, presumably on our behalf? The stories that follow provide a helpful thread in this exploration.

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In May 2008, I attended a stunning presentation given by Deborah O'Grady at the Art and Psyche Conference in San Francisco. Ms. O'Grady, a landscape photographer, spoke about her part in the creation of an original work, *Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio*, composed for the 60th anniversary season of the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra. The piece (music by Mark Grey, libretto by Dr. Laura Tohe, visual score by Deborah O'Grady, produced in 2007) is rooted in the Navajo sacred myth of the hero twins, Monster Slayer and Child Born for Water, but is contemporized in the story of Seeker, a Navajo veteran returning from the Iraq War. The oratorio is inspired in part by the traditional Navajo (or *Diné*) "Enemy Slayer Ceremony," which is conducted to assist warriors ritually in returning to life among their people and on their native lands. Rarely has a theme or presentation inspired me to pursue its various threads so wholeheartedly. Deborah O'Grady's evocative photographic images and personal reflections on the creation of this complex project compelled me to attend a performance of *Enemy Slayer* at the Colorado Music Festival in Boulder, Colorado and to listen as the composer and librettist reflected on their unusual collaboration. This uncommon union of a socially charged theme about an emotionally wounded returning veteran, combined with a community-based rite for the restoration of soul conveyed through music, language, and image, awakened a desire for a more textured way to understand our shared cultural wound.

Yellow ribbons, parades, and medals ceremoniously acknowledge our returning heroes, yet often fail to nurture the fragile psyche that returns disoriented and wounded. We have ceremonies and sacred rites for those killed in battle, but unlike the Navajo people, we lack the needed rituals to contain the full impact of the experiences of these surviving warriors. Collectively, we muse that they are the lucky ones, returning without the visible scars of war, and in our yearning for a normality that would deny the darkest shadows of combat, we subtly, unconsciously expect the warrior to resume his or her pre-war persona as quickly as possible, devoid of the ravages of combat, loss, and brutality he or she remembers all too well. The Navajo tradition has long honored the role of the warrior, recognizing that in sending a "brother" off to battle, the community has unleashed the warrior's archetypal power. The community, therefore, bears a responsibility to help contain and transform that archetype so that the warrior may return home proudly,

of *Enemy Slayer's* text, is a *Diné* poet, writer, professor, and daughter of a Navajo Code Talker. Intrigued by the project, she crafted the story to address the noble tradition of the warrior in Navajo society while simultaneously reflecting on the psychic suffering afflicting so many returning veterans. Respecting the guidance of Navajo elders, the team began a collaboration that echoes the sacred ceremony and traditional story without violating its spiritual integrity. Musical themes hint at native sounds without attempting to replicate the rhythms or songs performed during sacred ritual. The libretto recalls recitations and images central to the "Corn Pollen Path" or the "Beauty Way," which lies at the heart of the lost soul's journey home, but it does not attempt to explicitly re-enact any part of the ceremony. Deborah O'Grady contributes a "visual score" that integrates a sense of place integral to Navajo life, grounding the composition in the physical landscapes and images of the story. Her beautiful photographs trace an outer journey among the four mountains sacred to the Navajo people, simultaneously framing the inner, psychic restoration and renewal so desperately needed by Seeker in his struggle to survive after the war. The libretto uses both Navajo and English with lyrics and translation projected on either side of the stage. As required for an oratorio, the production includes a full orchestra, a large chorus intoning the voice of tribal and community wisdom, and a principle soloist performing the role of Seeker. *Enemy Slayer's* added visual dimension provides a compass guiding the viewer along Seeker's journey. These intersecting elements, however, make the production complex and extremely dense, compelling the viewer to absorb the power of a (sometimes) dissonant score, the complex lyrical interactions between chorus and protagonist, and the visual montage that binds the story within its sacred, literal, and metaphorical landscapes. However, if one engages this labyrinthine performance with the curiosity of a seeker, one discovers intimations of potentially curative properties studded throughout that may help in addressing the psychic well-being of our nation's contemporary war veterans.

Enemy Slayer unfolds as a six-part story, beginning with the Prologue and proceeding through the four cardinal directions, symbolized by the four sacred mountains, strikingly imaged in O'Grady's photographs. Each direction and mountain embodies a transformational stage in Seeker's struggle to survive the transition from archetypal warrior, through the emotional traumas of memory, guilt, and disorientation,

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returning finally to an accepting sense of self. His journey moves from *Sisnaajini*, Mount Blanca of the East (Spring/Birth) (Fig. 1), to *Tsoodzil*, Mount Taylor of the South (Summer/Youth), to *Dook'oolid*, Mount Humphreys of the West (Fall/Adulthood), to *Dibé Nitsa*, Mount Hesperus of the North (Winter/Old Age/Death), culminating in his return to the East for rebirth and renewal.² This full circuit of the four directions and the return to the East facilitates Seeker's assimilation of wartime memories and reflections on his experiences, his feelings of pride, guilt, worthlessness, shame, and his final recovery of humility and honor. Throughout this story, the Navajo community recognizes that Seeker cannot find his way alone. He must be guided and protected by the voice of his people, the ancestral wisdom of a tradition, and the resonance of a landscape that steadfastly supports him throughout his "dark night of the soul." The oratorio Chorus conveys the loving, unrelenting presence of Seeker's ancestral and contemporary community. They refuse to let him lose his way, constantly reassuring him, reminding him of his real name, his "warrior name," and of the path that can redeem him in wholeness and peace. The members of the Chorus immediately recognize Seeker as part of their community and intuitively appreciate the horrors he has witnessed and participated in. They welcome him in the Prologue, singing:

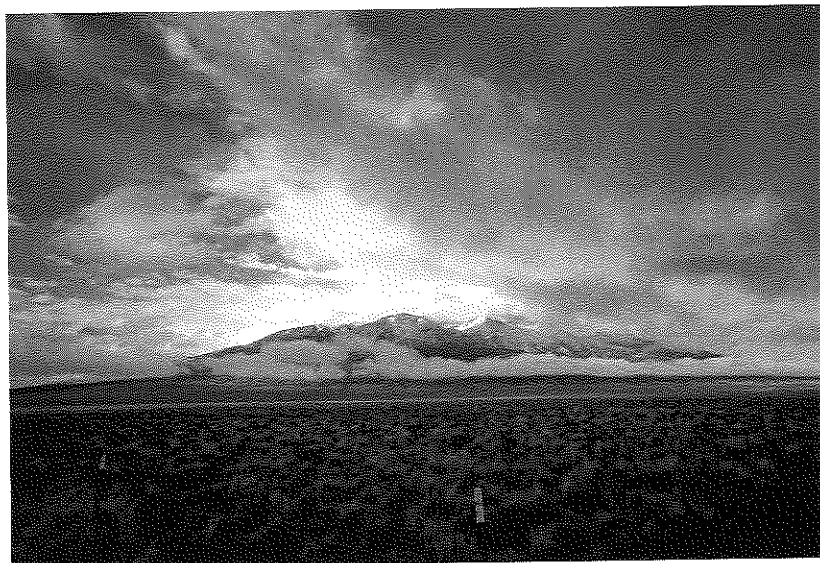


Fig. 1: Mount Blanca (Photograph courtesy of Deborah O'Grady)

Seeker returns home
 Earth Surface child returns
 From across the big water
Traveling lightly on a rainbow
And leaves the reign of blood
 He calls forth, 'shik'ei,shidiné'é' †

In the East, Seeker proudly claims his heritage and his honor as a warrior. He is confident in his ability to slay the enemy, but is quickly inundated by a tormenting memory of his slain companion. Images haunt him as he sings: "In my mind, I see the mound of earth/and the plastic flowers baked by the sun that cover you now." Inner demons begin to devour Seeker and the hero's welcome wears thin. As he sinks deeper into despair, the Chorus reminds him of the Navajo "Beauty Way" and the "Path of Corn Pollen," (see Fig. 2) which provide the teachings necessary to sustain a soul in need. Moving south, Seeker admits that he "smoked himself in the mad smoke of war," forgot his brother's warrior name, dropped his turquoise shield, and allowed his brother to be killed. He is bereft and begs forgiveness, surrendering to

|| Death, you perfect equalizer, twin brother to
 || War, you shiny, beautiful prostitute of the powerful!

Moving west, Seeker no longer feels like the hero society praises. He becomes increasingly despondent and wants only his own death. The Chorus reminds him:

Your spirit weighs heavily
 And has wandered away
 From your heart and mind;
 War causes imbalance in you and in the world.

He is warned to be careful about wishing for his own death. The Chorus rightly admonishes:

You are speaking for all of us
Nihiyázhí nílí ††
You were not born without a reason

† my relatives, my people

†† You are our beloved child

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Fig. 2:
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You are a miracle
Brought to life,
Given breath.

The Chorus continues imploring Seeker to return to the path of *h0zh=*, or the "Beauty Way," in order to restore the balance that he needs personally, and that the community desperately needs as well. ~~They understand that the fate of one member and the fate of the entire collective are mutually dependent.~~ As the journey proceeds north, the Chorus pleads for Seeker to remember his true nature: "remember the stories, / remember the songs, / remember the prayers, / remember who you are." They remind him that he embodies the wisdom of his people; this arms him with the courage and strength he needs to slay his inner demons and thus become the true Enemy Slayer who will restore his own psychological balance and that of his people. Seeker realizes that he must "take myself back/I make the world safe." His survival is intimately entwined with the well-being of his world. As he apprehends this interdependence, Seeker slowly regains his footing and participates in a personal restoration and redemption. From this point forward, Seeker knows that he has defeated the real enemy, the enemy within, and he rejoices that he has found the way to recover his lost soul:

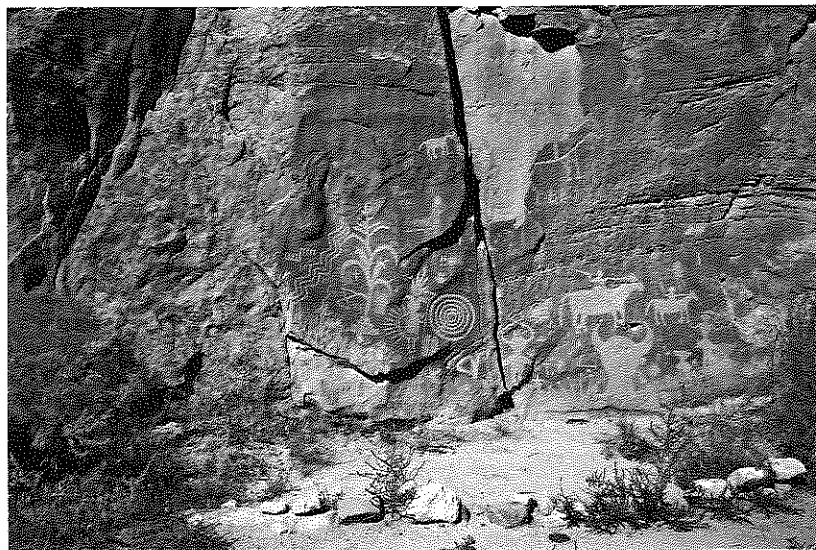


Fig. 2: Dinetah Petroglyphs showing symbols associated with healing ceremonies (Photograph courtesy of Deborah O'Grady)

By means of sacred prayer
I am cleansed of war
 am renewed with the four directions
I am restored in a sacred manner

Upon his final return to the Eastern Mountain, the Chorus sings a greeting to the morning spirits, reminding Seeker of his blessings, borne of love, compassion, and *hOzh=* (peace and spiritual harmony). This cathartic resolution initiates a sense that as a warrior, Seeker has found a framework that blends the wisdom, compassion, and steadfastness of a tradition with the powerful presence of the archetypal energies needed to wean him from the murderous drives of the soldier; his nobility and courage in the face of the inner enemies that would destroy him are restored. In the end, Seeker acknowledges that he is a "child of dawn, daylight, evening twilight, and darkness." He does not deny the shadow side of his experience, but finds the equilibrium that the Chorus spoke of, which permits him to go on living, having restored his balance within his interdependent community of people and natural surroundings.

Would that a single ceremony or the embrace of a deeply held tradition could heal our wounded warriors and restore harmony to our communities. While there is no single magical ritual that can be imported from another time or culture, the Navajo ceremonial tradition points toward an understanding that has much to offer to our time and society. As a collective, we have a duty to extend to our returning warriors our capacity to contain the darkest shadows of war without ignoring their traumas in favor of the facile glorification of the hero. In celebrating the heroic, our community has unwittingly buried the consequences of war that are implicit in the hero's shadow. Contemporary society has pathologized the loss of soul and the psychic wounds that inevitably accompany the struggle to release the grip of the warrior archetype in order to resume a civilian life on a human scale. The struggle of the returning veteran, however, is not pathological: It is the inescapable corollary to the role of warrior. The Navajo understand this and anticipate the need for a sacred ceremony specifically attuned to the warrior soul, fully aware that the archetypal nature of war and the warrior demand a healing process that addresses the deep soul impact implicit in the experience. The "combat fatigue" and "shell shock" of earlier times have

morphed into a clinical pathology—Post Traumatic Str (PTSD). The physical and psychic exhaustion imaged in “fatigue” becomes something quite different when imagined associated with a prior unnamed “trauma.” The trauma is combat and war itself—a reality conspicuously absent from the description of this state of mind and heart. For many, the trauma is not “post,” not in the past, but a living presence that infuses waking and dreaming life. It lives as ongoing combat, rife with the archetypal energies of war and the warrior, long after the departure from the battlefield. True compassion—a suffering *with*—is essential for the returning veteran and our wounded collective psyche. Instead of expressions of compassion, our culture offers its returning warriors a disembodied response; we do not speak of the impact of war and many of us may never personally engage with someone who still bears the physical and emotional scars of battle. As a society, we do not accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions as they affect the returning soldiers or the possibility of post-war healing both here and abroad.

In Seeker's world, there is no need for a diagnosis of pathology. The tradition remembers that all warriors must be held, protected, and supported when they return from an archetypal assignment. Returning veterans are young individuals who have intentionally been transformed into warriors on our behalf. They were trained to act and respond in particular ways. Those skills and afflictions accompany them home and remain part of their physical and psychic structure. Wisdom understands that everyone subjected to such experiences must be embraced as both hero and frail soul simultaneously. We must collectively assume our responsibility to them to facilitate their repatriation to an inner and outer landscape that recognizes them as neighbor, lover, parent, or friend, while they slowly disassemble the archetypal garb of warrior. After the parades pass by and the banners fade, what ceremonies, rituals, or words do we have to assist these veterans? In many ways, therapy groups, online communities, and veterans' associations have become the places where rituals of return, are engaged in; the rituals enacted here do not shy away from the unspoken truths and memories, even as they honor the veterans' heroic testimonies. But these are gatherings among the soldiers themselves. We, the perpetrators of the assignment to war and the beneficiaries of their courage, remain isolated from those conversations and do not

consciously engage them with compassion and acceptance. Calls to support our troops fail to delve below the surface; they indulge only superficial hero-worship and misplaced sentimentality. Of course we support the troops. Who does not feel compassionate support for the thousands of 20-, 30-, and 40-year-olds who are placed at risk of injury and death every day in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of choices made by our ruling "elders"? Rather, it is our willingness as individuals and as a community to acknowledge the ugly impact of our decisions on these young men and women that is the real measure of our support. Can we take the steps necessary to preserve and redeem the psychological and spiritual wholeness of each warrior as he or she returns filled with the images, memories, and traumas of service?

While consistent numbers are difficult to secure, sources estimate that over 1.6 million U.S. active duty military personnel and over 416,000 National Guard and Reservists have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001.³ Each of these returning veterans enters a family and community in a rippling embrace of those personally touched by the realities and memories of these twin wars. Among the MTV generation, the contemporaries of these young warriors, nearly 70% of those surveyed said they knew someone who had served in Iraq.⁴ "In some ways we think it's the defining issue of this generation," observed Ian Rowe, Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Partnerships at MTV.⁵ The defining issue of a generation, yet its consequences remain largely unspoken. Nearly 4,000 soldiers have been killed in Iraq, leaving behind spouses, children, and families grieving, struggling to adapt to a new rhythm of life. Many thousands more—over 24,000 wounded in Iraq alone with more than 10,000 suffering injuries preventing redeployment⁶—return home with disabling physical handicaps that affect their lives and those of families and friends.

Many more veterans return in need of material, medical, and psychological assistance to cope with the legacy of war and the stress of re-engaging in their civilian or non-combat lives. Estimates place the number of Iraq combat veterans suffering from PTSD at between 12-20% with nearly one-third of all returning veterans seeking assistance for mental health disorders, while many in need still do not seek services because of the stigma associated with such afflictions, particularly in the military.⁷ Further complicating such a horrific

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portrait is a relatively new dimension to the story of the returning warrior. The Army's fifth Mental Health Advisory Team survey estimated that about 12% of combat troops in Iraq and 17% of those in Afghanistan were taking prescription antidepressants or sleeping pills to cope while on active duty.⁸

In some ways, the prescriptions may seem unremarkable. Generals, history shows, have plied their troops with medicinal palliatives at least since George Washington ordered rum rations at Valley Forge. During World War II, the Nazis fueled their blitzkrieg into France and Poland with the help of an amphetamine known as Pervitin. The U.S. Army also used amphetamines during the Vietnam War

When it comes to fighting wars, though, troops have historically been barred from using such drugs in combat. And soldiers ... have been prescreened for mental illnesses before enlisting

Any drug that keeps a soldier deployed and fighting also saves money on training and deploying replacements. But there is a downside: the number of soldiers requiring long-term mental health services soars with repeated deployments and lengthy combat tours.⁹

The use of psychotropic drugs for combat personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan far exceeds that of any previous U.S. military engagement, and the military has acknowledged an easing of screening standards for new recruits in an attempt to field sufficient troops. These two realities combine with serious and sometimes lethal consequences. The suicide rate among active duty soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan has increased to the highest level since the keeping of records on suicides in the military was initiated in 1980. Approximately 40% of those suicides were taking prescribed psychotropic drugs like Prozac and Zoloft at the time of their death.¹⁰ Multiple deployments further exacerbate the mental health and well-being of the troops, complicating their reintegration into society at the eventual end of their tour. More than 170,000 U.S. Military and 84,000 National Guard and Reservists have served multiple tours in Iraq.¹¹ Such practices impact the incidence of PTSD and related mental health conditions, contributing to a radically more intense homecoming experience for the veterans themselves and for the communities they return to.

Actually, official

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The ability of American society to empathize with returning veterans or appreciate the extent of the devastation and horror experienced by them is in part hindered by the unofficial policies of the military limiting access to graphic wartime images. While many have noted that television brought the Vietnam War into the living rooms of ordinary Americans, the limitations on reporting from Iraq and Afghanistan have minimized our visual connection to the war. Journalists Michael Kamber and Tim Arango argue, in their article "4000 U.S. Deaths, and a Handful of Images," that "the case of a freelance photographer in Iraq who was barred from covering the Marines after he posted photos on the Internet of several of them dead has underscored what some journalists say is a growing effort by the American military to control graphic images from the war."¹² The number of reporters and photojournalists covering the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to dwindle for various reasons, and the explicit images of the wars that in some small way help prepare the community to welcome the returning soldiers with a compassionate embrace are few and far between.

Over the years, society has recognized that there is a cost attached to consumption and in some places we have begun imposing disposal fees paid at the time of purchase of large appliances and similar items. We have begun to acknowledge future responsibility associated with present decisions, and have learned to integrate unavoidable later costs into our reckoning from the outset. Why not acknowledge the full cost of war, including that associated with the re-entry of returning veterans into society and the restoration of their psychological and physical well-being? We owe this to every returning warrior, not just those diagnosed with a known problem within a medical system. Each warrior suffers and returns in a very personal way, but all merit our compassionate support. If every Pentagon expenditure affecting military personnel anticipated and acknowledged the cost of care and re-assimilation of the warrior into family and community, we would begin collectively to face the full spectrum of consequences implicit in our decisions. Our collective well-being depends on this no less than the health of the individuals who have personally shouldered the burdens of our national political and strategic choices (see Fig. 3).

Finding appropriate rituals and community roles requires an acknowledgement of the necessity for individual and collective healing

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steeped in truthfulness, candor, and compassion. From that exploration can come a more nuanced understanding of the suffering and the paths to recovery for both the returning soldiers and our nation as a whole in the aftermath of war. *Ceremony*, a novel by Leslie Marmon Silko, explores exquisitely the territory of the returning soldier in the Native American tradition, delving into questions of healing and recovery necessitated by war. Set in the aftermath of World War II, *Ceremony* recounts the struggle of Tayo as he returns from war in the Pacific to his home reservation in the Southwest. The intricacies of language, medicine, and ceremony are explored as this fragile and damaged soul tries to reconcile his experiences of war with an ongoing life. Tayo's story is much like Seeker's and shares the color of experience recognized by veterans of every war. In his haunting affliction Tayo's family recognizes that something beyond traditional medicine is needed because Tayo's wounds are greater than the body and even the mind. They appreciate the need to redeem a lost soul and seek the help of a traditional healer named Ku'oosh. Ku'oosh is sensitive to the intertwining stories revealed in language and begins his conversation with Tayo by recognizing that the world is fragile.



Fig. 3: The Navajo Veteran's Cemetery in Fort Defiance, Arizona. The tattered American flags are a fitting symbol of the war-damaged national psyche that is so desperately in need of healing. (Photograph courtesy of Deborah O'Grady)

The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where in the early morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web.¹³

Ku'oosh tells Tayo that he has come to hear what had happened in the war and to listen to Tayo's experience. This is not personal therapy alone, but a process needed by both of them to initiate healing for the war-torn world and for the individuals who were engulfed in the immediacy of the drama. Tayo struggles to express himself, recognizing the impossibility of describing his experiences to someone who was not a part of that war; besides, he is even uncertain whether he personally killed the enemy or not.

But the old man would not have believed white warfare—killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns; and even if he could have taken the old man to see the target areas, even if he could have led him through the fallen jungle trees and muddy craters of torn earth to show him the dead, the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous. Ku'oosh would have looked at the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies evaporated, and the old man would have said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even oldtime witches killed like that.¹⁴

All veterans are, like Tayo, part of a war machine, whether or not they are personally engaged in combat. By far the larger number of military personnel are employed in support functions, enabling active combat troops to pursue their mission. Even among non-combat forces, memories and images of the war remain as living cells encasing the experience of war. Like Tayo, they too need ceremonial understanding and ritual assistance in healing and integrating experience into an ongoing life. Ku'oosh understands that the amorphous agony afflicting Tayo in body and soul is both personally debilitating but also dangerous to society. Ku'oosh laments with Tayo,

"I am afraid of what will happen to all of us if you and the others don't get well,"

... The old man only made him certain of something he had feared all along, something in the old stories. It took only one

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person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured.¹⁵

As Tayo continues to struggle with suicidal and destructive thoughts, the family consults another healer, Betonie, recognizing that he has made changes to the traditional ceremonies, daring to engage in a process of evolution. For some, these changes are heresy, but Betonie offers a wise reflection:

"The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done"

...

"At one time the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong.

"She taught me this above all else: things which don't shift and grow are dead things. ..."¹⁶

As the novel unfolds, Tayo discovers a unique connection between the land of his people in the vicinity of Los Alamos and the destruction inflicted by the atomic weapon sired in his ancestral landscape. The memories, dreams, and images of his psychic landscape entwine with the realities experienced in the war. Like Seeker, Tayo also must walk the landscape's path to help generate understanding and a reconciling attitude toward his experiences.

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices ...; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter.

...
 He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time.¹⁷

Silko's novel reminds us that healing evolves with the culture and with the evolution of the illness. Fundamental understandings remain, but the implements of restoration continue to expand. For the Navajo as for us, the nature of war has changed over the decades and so have the particulars of the physical and psychological afflictions.

Ronald Schenk, in a 1988 journal article "Navajo Healing: Aesthetics as Healer," discusses "Navajo healing as cultural form at work and ... [examines] Western healing practices as a reflection of another world view in the hopes of gaining a new perspective on the larger question, 'What heals?'"¹⁸ Schenk rightly observes that the shared reality, values, and beliefs of a culture impact both the characterization of illness and corresponding treatment methods, requiring an appreciation of the operative cultural world-view to discern suitable healing techniques.¹⁹ Based on his personal experience living and working among the Navajo people, and drawing on the work of other researchers, Schenk notes that the "Beauty Way" of the Navajo intimately entwines relationship, health, harmony, and the interplay between creator and the created as the true essence of beauty. For example, Schenk notes that "to the Navajo, the sand paintings in themselves are not beautiful but *they create beauty through their healing.*"²⁰ Schenk further elaborates the importance of language in healing. "In the Navajo view, things are because they are first known, then thought, and finally spoken. ... The magical power inherent in the word itself has psychological life. The word is the speaker, the mover, the healer."²¹ The word, ritually sung or prayed, is a fundamental ingredient in the healing process, restoring balance and harmony to the individual and to the community psyche.

The Native American ceremony for the returning warrior evolves directly from a view of illness, disequilibrium, and healing at the core of the Navajo appreciation of life, implicitly weaving the interconnectedness of community and place with the well-being of the individual.

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Additionally, citing anthropologist Gary Witherspoon's work, Schenk reflects on four foundational elements in the Navajo aesthetic: control, containment, order, and creation.²² The sense of sacred container or temenos is beautifully captured in the libretto and visual score of *Enemy Slayer*. As *Enemy Slayer* demonstrates, the "Beauty Way" is intimately bound to the natural surrounding as a necessary companion in the inevitable confrontation with inner monsters that linger as a by-product of the warrior assignment. An appreciation of the cycles of birth, youth, adulthood, old age, death, and renewal helps re-establish a healthy psychic foundation, grounded externally in the presence of the sacred mountains and the symmetry of the cardinal directions. The mountains point the way and embody the mythic stories needed to reassure the fragile being along the journey home.

To paraphrase a former Indian Health Services psychiatrist, Robert Bergman, Navajo ceremonials could be likened to a Western spectacle in which a lecture, psychoanalysis, High Mass, grand opera, major surgery, and the unveiling of a masterpiece are all going on at once. In the Navajo world, art is not imprisoned in museums, performance not confined to theaters, healing not relegated to hospitals and therapy chambers, intellectual life not imprisoned in academia, and religion not compartmentalized into chapels. For the Navajo, the lecture is the performance, the prayer is the operation, the painting and song are the cure. Aesthetics, religion, biology, medicine, epistemology, and ontology are all one. Beauty is being.²³

The American worldview privileges science and the medical model in healing, favoring diagnosis and pharmaceutical treatment. Brain physiology and genetic sequencing are today's Holy Grail containing the as-yet-unfathomed secrets of well-being. However, our view of treatment and healing can perhaps continue to evolve, embracing the discoveries of the sister sciences, which explore the quantum realities of our experience. Perhaps healing, like light, can be appreciated as both wave and particle, simultaneously impacted by the observer and the observed. Our century of experience with psychotherapy and the increasing respect for dreams, stories, and images as part of the whole. Healing story is slowly opening our perceptive field. If we can find a way to incorporate all of these in a ceremonial, reverential stance afforded to every returning soldier and every receiving family and community,

we might further open our individual and collective hearts in ways not only healing to veterans, but healing as well to the nation that inflicted war on a land invisible to most Americans, on a people little known to us, and on our own younger generation. Do we ask forgiveness of the returning veterans for the risk we imposed on them? Do we think about the generations it will take to restore well-being among families of veterans in this country and in the Middle East? And do we appreciate the devastation inflicted on the landscape and natural environment as a result of our combat and weapons?

In closing her San Francisco presentation, Deborah O'Grady emphasized that she was not advocating pilgrimage to the Navajo sacred mountains and not suggesting that we imitate Navajo ceremony. She did, however, recognize that the *Enemy Slayer* story offered valuable "universal principles" that might contribute to contemporary healing of psychic wounds.

Those must include the acceptance of the archetypal nature of war, the recognition of the changes of personality affecting the soldier, validation of the soldier's intentions and experiences, inclusion of family and community in the process of reintegration and healing, and a container, a sacred space within which to create the spiritual connection to the world that allows for a real transaction between the participants and their surroundings. That everything on the earth is sacred is both an awe-inspiring characteristic of the Navajo world-view and also something very humble, something to which we can all aspire. Namely, allowing the natural world to remind us, at every moment, of its connection to that immensity, that transcendent realm we touch through psyche, art, and archetype.²⁴

The story of each veteran returning today from Iraq and Afghanistan is part of an ongoing story. The herald in *Agamemnon* laments the horrors experienced in battle in Troy even as he struggles to accept the hero's welcome offered the returning soldiers in this timeless tale retold by Aeschylus in the fifth century B.C.E. Tayo speaks from World War II and Seeker from Iraq. This story continues to unfold, and, sadly, countless warriors return sharing psychic and physical wounds with their predecessors over the centuries. If we appreciate the universality in the wound and undoubtedly in the healing, we begin to move towards an appreciation of the ceremonial rites needed to

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contain our particular modern chapter of this unfolding saga. If we could glean from the wisdom of the American native peoples an appreciation of the interconnected nature of malady and remedy, the inescapable web between physical world and psychic territory, and the inseverable bond between the collective and the individual, then we might begin to imagine the small and large ceremonies that could support the troops in a meaningful way. Like the individual warrior who does not see or know the actual victim, we are a part of the combat machinery that has created this reality in a land that most of us can barely imagine. We, each of us individually and in community, are a part of the reconciliation needed to end this suffering and shape the ongoing story in a way that does not shy away from the shadow it casts on us all. Ceremony evolves from a root meaning of awe and reverence. To the extent that we bring awe and reverence to our act of receiving home the warriors we have created, to that extent we might further the healing of the warrior world, restoring in some small measure the harmony and balance that is needed when we cast off the warrior archetype in favor of our flawed mortal existence.

Child of dawn
 Child of daylight
 Child of evening twilight
 Child of darkness ...

May there be beauty all around
 May there be peace all around
 On earth,
 On earth.²⁵

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank Deborah O'Grady for graciously granting permission to use the photographs included in this article. All photographs reproduced here are copyright Deborah O'Grady, 2007.

NOTES

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22. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
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