



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Interconnected Narratives and their Cultural Significance in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*

Professor Brajesh Sawhney  
Department of English  
Kurukshetra University  
Kurukshetra, Haryana  
India

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* is a literary work that defies conventional categorization, presenting a unique amalgamation of various storytelling forms. Through a fusion of photographs, mythology, gossip, short stories, and poetry, Silko creates a multifaceted narrative tapestry that transcends traditional genre boundaries. The text not only showcases Silko's artistic versatility but also serves as a profound reflection of storytelling's significance within Laguna Pueblo culture.

Contextualizing the importance of storytelling within the Laguna Pueblo culture is essential to understanding the depth of *Storyteller*. For the Laguna Pueblo people, storytelling is not merely a form of entertainment but a vital means of preserving cultural heritage, passing down ancestral wisdom, and fostering community bonds. As Paula Gunn Allen notes, "Silko's *Storyteller* exemplifies the centrality of storytelling in Laguna Pueblo culture, where stories serve as repositories of knowledge, history, and communal identity" (27). The act of storytelling is deeply embedded in the fabric of Laguna Pueblo life, carrying the weight of cultural continuity and spiritual significance.

*Storyteller* embodies Silko's innovative approach to storytelling, presenting a narrative that transcends the confines of a single literary genre. "Silko intentionally rejects the literary conventions of Euro-American genres because they are inherently unsuited to the inscription of Pueblo worldview and lived experience. In addition, these conventions have historically served to maintain and propagate ideologies of domination over American Indian cultures" (107) rightly observes Carsten. Clifford Geertz has put it as "blurring of genres" (172). Silko's creative vision intricately weaves together diverse modalities, demonstrating a cohesive integration of different storytelling forms. Kenneth M. Roemer emphasizes, "Silko's fusion of photographs, mythology, and various narrative styles in *Storyteller* showcases her mastery in creating a narrative collage that reflects the richness of Laguna Pueblo storytelling traditions" (146). Through this fusion, Silko forges a narrative landscape that blurs the boundaries between past and present, oral and written traditions, and personal and communal experiences.

The significance of this cohesive integration of diverse storytelling modalities in *Storyteller* lies in its ability to convey the cultural richness and complexities inherent in Laguna Pueblo heritage. Silko's text becomes a mosaic that pieces together fragments of history, folklore, personal anecdotes, and communal narratives. Catherine Rainwater underscores this aspect, stating, "In *Storyteller*, Silko's fusion of various narrative forms serves as a conduit for expressing the interconnectedness of personal and communal experiences, offering readers a nuanced understanding of Laguna Pueblo culture" (86). This interconnectedness within the narrative allows readers to traverse different storytelling modes, providing insights into the intricate layers of cultural identity and heritage.

*Storyteller* bears a resemblance to a family photo album, characterized by dimensions where its width surpasses its height. This deliberate structural aspect serves as an initial indicator, highlighting the significance of both photography and the communal ties to the reader. Instead of adhering to a conventional linear narrative, Silko arranges her memoir akin to the arrangement of pictures within the Hopi basket. The Hopi basket is not only depicted as the inaugural text-image in *Storyteller* but also serves as the guiding principle shaping the entirety of the book's organization:

There is a tall Hopi basket with a single figure  
Woven into it which might be a Grasshopper or  
A Hummingbird man. Inside the basket are hundreds:  
Of photographs taken since the 1890's around Laguna.

My grandpa Hank first had a camera when he returned from Indian School, and years later,  
my father learned Photography in the Army.

....

It wasn't until I began this book  
that I realized that the photographs in the Hopi basket have a special relationship to the stories as I  
remember them.

The photographs are here because they are part of many of the stories and because many of the stories  
can be traced in the photographs. (1)

The introductory poem serves a multifaceted purpose. Initially, it primes the reader for the forthcoming Laguna narratives involving tales like "Grasshopper and Hummingbird Man," the presentation of Laguna photographs, and the immersion into family customs encapsulated within this book. By showcasing the contents of the basket, it disrupts the stereotypical depiction of the "Indian" narrative, offering a perspective beyond the confines of this narrow lens. Furthermore, it establishes a foundation for the book's organizational structure, firmly rooted in the symbolic significance of the Hopi Basket. Lastly, it aligns Silko and her work within a lineage of familial traditions encompassing both photographers and storytellers. The introductory poem serves as an essential prologue to *Storyteller*, setting the stage for the thematic exploration and narrative journey that follows.

The photographs act as a visual extension of storytelling, conveying cultural nuances, and offering a deeper understanding of the Laguna Pueblo community. For instance, Silko describes an old photograph saying, "There is a photograph of my mother and my Aunt Susie... They are wearing squaw dresses" (7). This visual depiction of traditional clothing not only offers a glimpse into the attire but also reflects the preservation of cultural practices and serves as a testament to the endurance of tradition.

The significance of these visual elements within *Storyteller* is evident in how they connect readers to the cultural landscape. Roemer highlights, "Silko's utilization of photographs in *Storyteller* serves as a visual bridge that connects readers to the lived experiences of the Laguna Pueblo community, fostering a deeper immersion into the cultural ethos" (148). The photographs transcend the limitations of written narratives, offering a tangible glimpse into the historical and cultural realities of the community.

Moreover, these photographs encapsulate a collective memory and preserve familial and communal histories. As Silko narrates, "Some of the photographs are of my family... They are wearing jewellery... those are old photographs" (10). These images not only document familial connections but also capture the adornments, embodying the significance of jewellery within the community, revealing cultural values and traditions.

The interplay between text and images in *Storyteller* serves to enhance the storytelling experience by allowing readers to engage both visually and verbally. Silko's strategic placement of images amidst the written narratives encourages readers to contemplate the relationship between the visual and the textual. The photographs complement the stories, often reinforcing or elucidating the written accounts.

Through the visual elements, Silko achieves a narrative depth that transcends words alone. Rainwater observes, "Silko's incorporation of photographs in 'Storyteller' amplifies the textual narratives, inviting readers to unravel the intricate layers of cultural nuances and familial connections that words alone may not fully capture" (87). This deepens the reader's engagement with the stories, offering a more holistic understanding of the cultural landscape depicted within the text.

The segregation of stories in *Storyteller* into distinct categories caters to diverse audiences while exploring various themes that encompass both childhood innocence and the complexities of adult experiences. Through the separation of narratives, Silko encapsulates a wide spectrum of emotions, from tales of innocence and animal stories to profound adult experiences, tragedies, and life lessons. This segregation serves not only to engage a broad audience but also to preserve the cultural heritage and convey the richness of Laguna Pueblo storytelling traditions.

Silko delineates a segment of stories within *Storyteller* that caters to a younger audience, conveying themes of innocence, wonder, and moral lessons. "Successive narrative episodes cast long shadows both forward and back lending different or complementary shades of meaning to those that came before them and providing perspectives from which to consider those that came after" (Hirsch 1). These narratives often revolve around animals and feature moral teachings embedded within the tales. For instance, she writes, "There were stories that were for children, stories about the little animals" (23). These stories, often reminiscent of fables, impart moral values and lessons in an accessible and engaging manner for younger readers.

The segregation of these children's narratives and animal tales within the larger framework of *Storyteller* signifies the importance of preserving cultural values and imparting wisdom to younger generations. Allen

observes in this regard, "Silko's inclusion of children's narratives and animal tales serves as a means of transmitting cultural teachings, ethics, and values to younger audiences within the Laguna Pueblo community" (26). These stories not only entertain but also educate, passing down cultural knowledge and morals.

In contrast to the children's narratives, *Storyteller* delves into profound adult experiences, presenting tales that explore the complexities of life, tragedies, and human relationships. Silko presents stories that navigate the depths of human emotions, reflecting on themes of loss, grief, love, and resilience. She writes, "There were other stories... about the people who had gone through hardships" (38). These narratives offer a deeper exploration of adult experiences, resonating with readers through their emotional depth and complexity.

Silko's portrayal of adult experiences underscores the multifaceted nature of human existence, offering life lessons and insights into navigating the complexities of the world. Roemer notes, "Silko's exploration of adult experiences in 'Storyteller' reflects the richness and diversity of human emotions, addressing themes that resonate universally across cultures" (147). These stories serve as a mirror reflecting the human condition, fostering empathy and understanding among diverse audiences.

Silko's narrative reveals the essence of communal identity, perpetually evolving through the art of storytelling. Within Native American tradition, the notions of individual identity and linear progress remain distant concepts. The act of storytelling becomes a focal point, bringing forth a contemporaneous perspective where past, present, and future converge in the act of narration.

In this oral tradition, the role of the listener stands as pivotal. Engaging actively by posing questions, the listener influences the direction of the tale, prompting the storyteller to adapt the narrative to the immediate context. This symbiotic relationship between the storyteller and listener imbues the storytelling tradition with a dynamic fluidity, free from the rigidity imposed by anthropological or ethnographic approaches. By deconstructing these constraints, the essence of the story remains intact. "There's something pretty wonderful about oral narrative the way it was practiced at Laguna Pueblo because it's always contemporaneous- past, present, and future always in one moment. Because the storyteller footnotes herself and makes fun of herself and recollects" (Sayler 61).

Through the storytelling journey, we transcend temporal boundaries, traversing from a distant past to an envisioned future. Individual recollections seamlessly meld with the collective memory of the community and the expansive memory encapsulated within the landscape itself. The story becomes a conduit, interweaving personal and communal memories, bridging the gap between the individual and the collective, all while preserving the fundamental essence of the narrative tradition.

The diverse array of themes and narratives within *Storyteller* holds significance in catering to a wide audience, appealing to readers across different age groups and cultural backgrounds. Silko's ability to incorporate various themes, from childhood innocence to adult experiences, ensures that the text resonates with a broad readership. As Catherine Rainwater observes, "Silko's inclusion of diverse themes in 'Storyteller' fosters audience engagement by appealing to different age groups, experiences, and cultural perspectives" (85).

Moreover, the diverse themes and narratives encapsulated within *Storyteller* play a crucial role in preserving Laguna Pueblo cultural heritage. The stories, steeped in cultural values, traditions, and ancestral wisdom, serve as a repository of cultural knowledge. They perpetuate the oral tradition and ensure the continuity of Laguna Pueblo storytelling practices for future generations.

The metaphor of a spider's web often recurs in discussions about *Storyteller*. It symbolizes the interconnectedness of narratives within the anthology, illustrating how stories, much like the intricate strands of a spider's web, are interwoven across time, land, and personal experiences. Silko, through her artful storytelling, skillfully intertwines various elements, binding together a tapestry of narratives. Each story in *Storyteller* contributes to the larger web of interconnected tales, linked not only by themes but also by cultural significance and shared experiences. The text acts as a loom, weaving together the threads of history, mythology, personal anecdotes, and communal wisdom.

The portrayal of the cultural landscape and historical timelines within the anthology reflects the intricate nature of the spider's web analogy. Silko's narratives encapsulate the essence of the Laguna Pueblo cultural heritage, intertwining ancestral stories, myths, and the lived experiences of the people. As the tales unfold, they traverse historical timelines, offering glimpses into the past while resonating with the contemporary realities of the community.

The impact of interconnected narratives within *Storyteller* extends beyond mere storytelling; it serves as a conduit for preserving and transmitting cultural wisdom. The interconnectedness of stories allows for the seamless transmission of cultural values, traditions, and teachings from one generation to another. Silko's narratives become vessels carrying the collective wisdom and knowledge of the Laguna Pueblo people, ensuring the endurance of cultural heritage. Through this interconnectedness, *Storyteller* becomes more than just a compilation of stories; it becomes a living archive, preserving the richness of Laguna Pueblo traditions. Each narrative thread contributes to the resilience and continuity of cultural wisdom, bridging the gap between the past and the present.

Silko's masterful weaving of interconnected narratives invites readers to contemplate the intricate layers of cultural significance embedded within the text. The spider's web analogy serves as a powerful metaphor, urging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of stories, time, land, and experiences, and the profound impact they have in preserving cultural heritage. The brilliance of *Storyteller* lies in its ability to mirror the complexity and beauty of life through interconnected narratives.

In the tapestry of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*, the interwoven narratives transcend the conventional confines of storytelling, weaving a complex and profound cultural significance within the Laguna Pueblo heritage. Silko's mosaic-like fusion of diverse storytelling forms, including photographs, myths, personal anecdotes, and varied narrative styles, forms a cohesive and vibrant narrative collage that transcends mere entertainment. Beyond showcasing Silko's artistic versatility, *Storyteller* serves as a testament to the pivotal role of storytelling in preserving ancestral wisdom, fostering communal identity, and transmitting cultural heritage. Through the interconnectedness of narratives and the metaphorical spider's web that binds them, Silko invites readers to explore the intricacies of Laguna Pueblo traditions, bridging temporal boundaries and

preserving the essence of a living oral tradition—a vibrant testament to the endurance and richness of cultural wisdom passed down through generations.

### Works Cited

- Allen, Paula Gunn. "Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Storyteller': Myth, Poetry, and Community." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 12.3(2000) pp. 24-33.
- Carsten, Cynthia. "Storyteller: Leslie Marmon Silko's Reappropriation of Native American History and Identity." *Wicazo Sa Review*, 2.2 (2006) pp. 105-126.
- Cox, James H. "Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Storyteller': Challenging the Conventions of Narrative." *American Indian Quarterly*, 36.1(2012) pp. 123-140.
- Hirsch, Bernard A. "'The telling which continues': Oral Tradition and the Written Word in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*." *American Indian Quarterly*, 12.1 (1988) pp. 1-26.
- Rahv, Philip. *The Myth and the Powerhouse*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.
- Rainwater, Catherine. "Narrative Form and Mythic Content in 'Storyteller'." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 60.2(2004) pp. 81- 106
- Roemer, Kenneth M. (1998). "Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Storyteller': Preserving Cultural Heritage." *MELUS*, 23.2(1998) pp. 139-157.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Interview with Larry McCaffery." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. University Press of Mississippi, 1981.
- , *Storyteller*. Arcade Publishing, 1981.
- Salyer, Gregory. *Leslie Marmon Silko*. Twayne Publishers, 1997