

Leslie Marmon Silko. *Storyteller*. (New York: Seaver Books, 1981. Distributed by Grove Press.) 278 pp., \$17.95, \$9.95 paper.

In recent years, Leslie Marmon Silko has become a major force in Native American literatures. Her poetry, short prose, and novel, *Ceremony*, have been highly praised in critical circles and have earned her the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Award. Her popularity is due, at least in part, to the fact that she is a good storyteller whose respect for the power of language permeates her writing, evoking a like respect in her audience. This power enables her to explore contemporary Indians' sense of loss and alienation resulting from the clash of Native culture with an unfeeling, unsympathetic Anglo culture. However, at the same time she arouses an optimistic perspective broad enough to relegate this clash to manageable dimensions within the Native American mythos, giving new expression to traditional ceremonies and creating new stories to deal with the conflicts of modern Indian life. In effect, she is a storyteller in the traditional sense of the title; her purpose is to preserve the stories of her tribe which, as in any oral tradition, express communal consciousness, and to aid in the creation of new stories which reflect recent changes in the world. Her new book is a significant step toward these goals.

Storyteller is a collection of traditional stories, imaginative prose, verse, and autobiographical sketches purposefully interwoven with photographs taken over four generations by Silko's family and friends. The recurrent center of the work is Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico where she was raised. However, the book encompasses peoples other than Pueblo—Navaho, Zuni, the Yupik of Alaska—and in the opening pages we find her invocation to all Native peoples of North America. "As with any generation/the oral tradition depends upon each person/listening and remembering a portion/and it is together—/all of us remembering what we have heard together—/ that creates the whole story/the long story of the people." The call is for the reassertion of the communal spirit through the reaffirmation of storytelling as a palpable, vital force in a world in a state of flux since "time immemorial."

In a sense, *Storyteller* is an autobiography. Photographs blend with stories to form a unified whole defining what it is to be Laguna, to live and grow on a particular tribal landscape. However, it is also, through shared common experience and sentiment, the story of contemporary generations of Native Americans. In its pages one finds the concerns which form the kernel of the writings in this genre—dispossession, the destruction of the land, and the search for identity in a world turned chaotic by the intrusion of white values. To Silko's

credit, as one reads the work, the awareness slowly dawns that the traditional power of the story to mediate such adversities is at work strengthening tribal identity, insuring the survival of the people.

Silko's attempt to represent the oral tradition on the printed page is both relevant and provocative. Its flowing language and engaging style (coupled with pointed humor too often neglected in many works) could very well mark the evolution beyond the conventional and somewhat restrictive forms of prose such as the novel. Its autobiographical nature lends an immediacy to its concerns and adds to its strength as a positive force in Native American literatures. In any event, *Storyteller* and such forthcoming works as *Native American Women in a Changing World: Their Lives as They Told Them* by Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen M. Sands are sure to add to a steadily growing body of competent, valuable writings which depict the integrity of cultures which shared this continent centuries before the European intrusion.

—John Purdy
Arizona State University