

Haunting Memories and Healing Recollections: Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko and its French Translation

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Abstract: This article explores how memory—the central issue of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977)—has induced a specific type of writing that makes its translation a more challenging task in terms of stylistic, lexical, and syntactical choices. Tayo, the main character, is haunted by painful memories of his traumatic war experience, powerful nightmares and daytime visions blending seamlessly into the vacuity of his present life on the reservation. However, memory is also a healing force when it means going back to the traditional Indian way and adapting it to the broken present. Silko navigates between storytelling and storywriting, weaving a circular vision of time into the linear format of the novel and bridging the gap between her Indian ancestry and her white academic education. Translating *Ceremony* raises many interesting issues, three of which are discussed here: the treatment of intermingling narratives whose chronology the readers have to reconstruct for themselves, the network of echoes and repetitions that structure the novel, and the description of the Indian landscape. The article finally asserts that translation contributes to the circulation of memory and is a positive force ensuring the survival of texts written to resist acculturation.

Introduction

Ceremony is a landmark publication in the advent of Native American literature. Published in 1977 by Leslie Marion Silko, it received much critical acclaim and soon became a commercial success and was translated into several foreign language (Norwegian, German, Japanese, Italian, French, Dutch). It is often part of the selection of Native American

novels on university syllabi next to *House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday (1968) and *The Death of Jim Loney* by James Welch (1979). Those are the titles readers remember as they have become the “memory” of Native American literary Renaissance. Whether they should be seen in terms of “ethnic minority fiction” or as part of mainstream American fiction is subject to debate. For instance, Joseph Bruchac states that the “‘mainstream’ in America is being turned back by a tide of multiculturalism” (Bruchac 1994, xviii). According to Robert N. Nelson, Native American novels have distinct features that set them apart: their authors are “Native American” (like the protagonists), the settings “include Indian reservations,” they allude to, or widely incorporate, “tribal traditions”¹ (Nelson 1993, 3). As a consequence some of their content is perceived as being difficult to grasp for the readers who are not “tribally literate” (to use Nelson’s word), those who do not share the memory of the tribal heritage. Memory is an essential dimension to Native American fiction and to *Ceremony*. According to Robert Dale Parker, Native American Literature was “invented” by “Indian writers,” drawing on both “Indian and literary traditions” (Parker 2003, 1). In trying to keep tribal culture alive, Native American writers have explored memory in different ways. Memory is what is left of all that has been destroyed and eradicated by colonization, industrialization, and forced assimilation. It is the main force enabling Native Americans to resist acculturation. Cultural memory was traditionally transmitted through storytelling, an endangered activity in a world ruled by the written word, where communities and families have been increasingly scattered across the whole

¹ The choice of the most appropriate word to designate the people from Native American tribes is still highly controversial. The issue has not yet been settled, which explains what may seem like confusion in most essays and books about Native American art and fiction. Christina Berry writes in her article published on the All Things Cherokee website: “So what is it? Indian? American Indian? Native American? First Americans? First People? We all hear different terms but no one can seem to agree on what to call us” (Berry, 2013). Although the word “Native American” seems more neutral, many Native Americans object to it as it is seen as a creation by the Federal government aiming at erasing the sufferings of the Native tribes and making the colonial past more acceptable. The actor and political activist Russell Means declares: “I am an American Indian, not a Native American! I abhor the term Native American. It is a generic government term used to describe all the indigenous prisoners of the United States” (Means, 1996). Silko uses both the word “Indian” and “Native American.” In this article the word “Native American” has been kept to refer to the ethnic origin of the people involved but the word “Indian” has been preferred to indicate the cultural connotations as in “the Indian way” or “Indian memory” since it is closer to the ideas developed by Silko.

country. Native American writers therefore invented a new type of storytelling that can survive and thrive in their new environment, translating traditional memory and storytelling into novels. Those novels are hybrid forms, close enough to the template of the Western novel to be recognized and understood by all while being innovative enough to cater for values and notions radically alien to Western culture. However, Indian memory is also a traumatic memory and offers many common points with other works and narratives problematizing memory such as writings by holocaust survivors and by victims of intense trauma (see Brodski 2007). Writing is not only a means of transmitting memory and struggling against oblivion, but it also transforms the unbearable memory of the trauma—which lies on the side of death and destruction—into a resilient force that makes life possible. The memory of the horror beyond the scope of human understanding is translated into words in order to help the victims make sense of the events and reappropriate their lives.

Through the case study of *Ceremony*, I will demonstrate how memory can be a haunting force of destruction as well as a healing type of energy. Memory is both the theme and the material chosen by Silko for her novel. Her literary approach is characterized by a specific type of writing that makes interlingual translation particularly challenging in terms of stylistic, lexical, and syntactic choices. The novel was translated into French by Michel Valmary, who later translated two other books—Archie Fire Lame Deer's *Gift of Power* (*Le cercle sacré*) and James Welch's *Killing Custer* (*C'est un beau jour pour mourir*). The translation was published in 1992 by Albin Michel in the Terre Indienne collection, which specializes in Native American fiction (director: Francis Geffard), and its French title was *Cérémonie*.

After studying how memory is at the core of the themes and textual identity of *Ceremony*, I will focus on three points: 1) writing/translating the fluctuating and unstable time of memory through a limited choice of possible grammatical tenses; 2) the construction/destruction of echoes, memories, and correspondences; 3) the translation of words and names referring to the landscape that is central to Indian memory. Finally, I will examine the close relationship between writing and translating

in the case of Indian memory and discuss whether the translation of Native American fiction is possible/advisable/necessary.

Memory as the Main Theme and Material of *Ceremony*

The theme of memory is crucial to *Ceremony*. The protagonist, Tayo, is a Laguna Pueblo of mixed ancestry, a “half-breed”² living on the reservation near Albuquerque in New Mexico. When the story begins, he is back from the Second World War. Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or “battle fatigue” according to the white psychiatrists who have discharged him from the hospital, he is unable to resume his old life. He is haunted by memories of the war and overwhelmed by guilt as he feels responsible for all the disruption that took place when he was away: the death of his cousin who went to war with him, the death of his uncle Josiah, and finally the drought that he sees as retribution for his swearing at the rain in the prisoner camp in the Philippines: “The old people used to say that droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave” (Silko 1977, 46). These destructive memories disrupt his present life and make him mentally and physically ill as they invade his everyday life in the form of nightmares and daytime visions that leave him empty. His war memories are interspersed with his childhood memories as he is also trying to cope with his sense of alienation as a “half-breed” brought up by his aunt after his own mother left him. However the past, which is a source of suffering, is also the key to his recovery. Knowing that white medicine cannot save him, Grandma convinces him to visit a medicine man because “The only cure/I know/is a good ceremony” (Silko 1977, 3). Although the visits to Ku’oosh and then Old Betonie do not succeed immediately and the healing ceremony cannot be completed, Tayo gradually recovers his ancestral memory. He learns to understand the traditional signs and rites, becomes able to read the landscape around him again and to realign his life with a broader universal pattern of meaning. Thanks to his recovering the traditional cultural memory of his ancestors, Tayo can complete the ceremony by himself, adjust, and find his place back on the reservation. His

² Although “half-breed” may seem offensive, it is the word used by Silko to describe Tayo’s as well as her own ancestry (Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and white).

healing is symbolic of and preparatory to a more global change as rain returns to the region saving the crops and cattle. Tayo's journey, out of his destructive memories, which are manifestations of evil and witchcraft and back to the healing memory of the Indian way, enables him to restore balance and harmony in the universe as thought can again circulate between the fifth world (the world inhabited by human beings) and the other worlds inhabited by spirits.

Memory is at the core of *Ceremony*. The different encounters with the medicine men, the traditional one and Old Betonie, the modern one, with the women Tayo loves, all avatars of Tse'pina, the spirit of the mountain, are various memories of the same quest or the same healing ceremony. It is by remembering them and understanding their correspondences that Tayo progresses on his way to recovery and that the readers gradually understand the way the novel is structured and what it means. The novel functions like memory itself, giving birth to seemingly disconnected episodes that make sense when put together, reassembled and realigned. Moreover the conventional narrative structure of Tayo's quest is framed by and intertwined with traditional stories and poems, memories of traditional Laguna storytelling, as if the real creator of the story was not Silko but Thought Woman. The book begins with the poem:

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman,
is sitting in her room
and whatever she thinks about
appears [. . .]
I'm telling you the story
she is thinking.

Those traditional passages draw on Silko's personal memories of the stories she was told when a child on the reservation or memories she has revived from the collection of stories published in Franz Boas's *Keresan Texts* (a transcription of traditional tales published in 1928, see Nelson 2001). There are altogether 28 "storytelling memories" (whose length varies from a few lines to four pages). Silko blends traditional Indian forms—based on circular patterns, repetitions and circulation from memory and myth to reality—into a novel, a genre

favoring a linear conception of time, a sequential and historical development of the story, and a clear-cut distinction between past and present, memory, and reality. She thus creates her own language, one that can express memory. Moreover, the novel is a way for Silko to come to terms with her own mixed ancestry and her sense of alienation. She started writing *Ceremony* after having been away in Alaska for two years where she felt she had been exiled. The novel is a personal remembrance ceremony enabling Silko to weave the loose threads of her attachment to her Native ancestry and of her white academic education back into significance: “Writing a novel was a ceremony for me to stay sane” (Arnold 2000, 24).

Memory and the Blurred Frontiers between Past and Present

The treatment of diegetic time is quite unconventional in *Ceremony*, as noted by most critics and reviewers. Although analepsis is a common device in most conventional novels, time shifts are so frequent in *Ceremony* that they blur the frontier between the main narrative and the secondary narratives that are Tayo’s various memories and visions. The story shifts to and fro between the time of Tayo’s return to the reservation after he is back from the war, and various memories—childhood scenes, war episodes, and other times before he left for the war. Those shifts back in time are not systematically signaled as such—there are few dates, few accurate references to places which would help the readers to chronologically reorganize the diverse fragments constituting Tayo’s story. The fragmented narratives are the representations on paper of the disruptive forces released by Tayo’s memories and the readers must agree to getting lost in the succession of embedded stories going back in circles rather than following a straight time line from beginning to end. Like Tayo, the readers will understand later and what they remember will then make sense, as Night Swan (one of the female characters Tayo meets during his quest) tells him: “You don’t have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later” (Silko 1977, 100).

Only when the tense of the first verb of the analepsis is a pluperfect is the shift clearly indicated. Even then, the following verbs are in the simple past (also the prevailing tense of the

main narrative), which creates ambiguity as to the exact point where the main narrative is resumed, as in the following example.³

“You see,” Josiah **had said**, with the sound of the water trickling out of the hose into the empty wooden barrel [. . .]. He **pointed** his chin at the springs [. . .]. He **took** off his hat and **wiped** his forehead [. . .].

Tayo **knelt** on the edge of the pool and **let** the dampness soak into the knees of his jeans. (Silko 1977, 45–46)

Although it is quite clear that the first paragraph is a memory because of the use of the pluperfect and the situation (Josiah is dead by the time Tayo returns from the war), the status of the following paragraph (“Tayo knelt...”) is ambiguous, and the similarity of the setting misleads the readers into believing initially that it is part of the same memory sequence whereas the main narrative has been resumed.

The translation into French reads thus:

“Tu vois, lui **avait dit** Josiah par-dessus le bruit de l’eau qui dégoulinait du tuyau dans les tonneau de bois vide [. . .]. Du menton, il **avait montré** les sources [. . .]. Il **avait enlevé** son chapeau et **essuyé** son front [. . .].

Tayo **s’agenouilla** au bord du bassin sans se soucier de l’eau qui trempait les genoux de ses jeans. (Silko 1992, 55)

The translator has made a grammatically safe choice. The shift from pluperfect to past, which is quite frequent in English fiction, has been neutralized through a more consistent use of a *plus que parfait* in French. The *passé simple*, used for the main narrative, is deemed inadequate as soon as the diegetic chronology is upset—a stylistic rule many, but not all, French novelists adhere to. That “safe” choice is not consistently applied. For other time shifts the *passé simple* is used for anterior actions but only after a series of *plus que parfait* has clearly delineated the time frame:

He **stood** outside the train depot in Los Angeles and **felt** the sunshine; he **saw** the palm trees [. . .] he **realized** why he was here and he **remembered** Rocky and he **started** to cry. [. . .]

³ Words discussed in the ensuing analysis are given in bold in the quotes.

The new doctor **asked** him if he had ever been visible and Tayo **spoke** to him softly and **said** that he was sorry but nobody was allowed to speak to an invisible one. (Silko 1977, 15)

Devant la gare de Los Angeles, il **avait senti** la caresse du soleil; il **avait vu** les palmiers [. . .] il **comprit** pourquoi il était là, il se **souvint** de Rocky et il se **mit** à pleurer. [. . .]

Quand le nouveau docteur lui **avait demandé** s'il avait jamais été visible, Tayo lui **avait répondu** d'une voix douce qu'il était désolé mais que personne n'avait le droit de parler à un être invisible. (Silko 1992, 23)

Whereas the English original allows for more indeterminacy (the readers will not immediately understand that the first passage is the memory of a scene that took place just before Tayo's return and that the second passage is another shift in time, neither the continuation of the preceding passage nor the resuming of the main narrative), the French readers are guided by the translator's choice, which clarifies the order of the successive time sequences.

Although choosing between *imparfait*, *plus que parfait*, *passé simple*, and *passé composé* to render a simple past is a controversial point, the *passé simple*—even if it is an obvious choice for a translator—may not be the most appropriate tense in the case of *Ceremony*. The use of the *imparfait* in some passages makes it possible to keep some referential indeterminacy as shown in that example where it is not clear if the second passage is still part of Tayo's memory of the war or of the main narrative:

Rocky had reasoned it out with him; [...] Tayo nodded, slapped at the insects mechanically [. . .].

He **had** to keep busy; he **had** to keep moving so that the sinews connected behind his eyes did not slip loose and spin his eyes to the interior of his skull where the scenes **waited** for him. (Silko 1977, 8–9)

Rocky s'était efforcé de le ramener à la raison ; [. . .] Tayo avait acquiescé; d'un geste machinal de la main, il avait écrasé quelques insectes [. . .].

Il **fallait** qu'il s'occupe ; il **fallait** qu'il reste actif pour que les muscles qui se rejoignent à l'arrière de ses yeux ne se relâchent pas, les faisant ainsi pivoter vers l'intérieur du crâne, là où toutes ces scènes **l'attendaient**. (Silko 1992, 16–17)

Even if it is not conventional to use the *imparfait* for single past actions, that tense might have the potential to accommodate Silko's literary treatment of memory, as some French writers have done to give extra depth to their past narratives, J. M. G. Le Clézio, for instance (see Lepage 2008).

Alternatively, using a *passé composé* instead of a *passé simple* as the prevailing tense for both the main narrative and the memories would have been a way to signal the shift from conventional fiction writing and would have insisted on the connection with oral tradition.

Grammatical constraints and the translator's wish to conform to the more conventional writing norms do not explain all the occurrences of *plus que parfait* in the French text. They illustrate the translator's symptomatic wish to guide his readers, to help them through the maze of the original novel, as in the following example where a whole sentence has been added:

They unloaded the cows one by one, looking them over carefully. (Silko 1977, 77)

Quand Tayo eut ouvert le grand portail du couloir d'entrée du corral, Robert ouvrit la porte de la bétailière. Ils firent sortir les vaches une par une, en les inspectant attentivement. (Silko 1992, 88)

The time of the action as well as the identity of the characters have been made explicit in French. However, reducing ambiguity and reordering Tayo's memories imposes a Eurocentric vision on a hybrid text. In fact, it brings more confusion to the readers as it prevents them from being aware of the blurred frontiers between past and present and between memory and reality, essential to the understanding of the novel. Indeed *Ceremony* reintroduces in the linear development of the novel the memory of a more ancient time, the Indian vision of time, which is circular, cyclical, always moving but not going directly from one point to another:

The Pueblo people and the indigenous people of the Americas see time as round, not as a long linear string. If time is round, if time is an ocean, then something that happened 500 years ago may be quite immediate and real, whereas something inconsequential that happened an hour ago could be far away. Think of time as an ocean always moving. (Arnold 2000, 149)

Memory as Repetitions, Echoes, and Resonances

Repetitions and echoes are the backbone of the writing in *Ceremony*, and the coherent structure they create counterbalances the confusion brought about by Silko's fluctuating treatment of diegetic time. Repetitions work at the level of sentences and paragraphs but also at the higher level of the whole novel.

In sentences, repetitions give rhythm to the narrative and endow it with a typically oral dimension. The following passage illustrates how repetitions structure the sentences and help the readers/listeners keep track of the important notions:

He could get no rest as long as the memories were **tangled** with the present, **tangled** up like colored threads from old Grandma's wicker sewing basket when he was a child [. . .]. He could feel it inside his skull—the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with **tangled** things, things **tied** together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and **tangled** even more. So Tayo had to **sweat** through those nights when thoughts became **entangled**; he had to **sweat** to think of something that wasn't unraveled or **tied** in knots to the past (Silko 1977, 6–7)

Il ne pourrait trouver le repos tant que les souvenirs et le présent **s'enchevêtreraient** comme les fils de couleur dans le panier à couture de Grand-mère : [. . .] Sous son crâne, c'est cela qu'il sentait, la tension des fils minces que l'on tirait, et les choses **emmêlées**, **attachées** ensemble, qui, lorsqu'il essayait de les démêler et de les rembobiner, chacune à sa place, s'accrochaient et **s'emmêlaient** encore davantage. C'est ainsi que Tayo devait passer de longues nuits **en sueur** quand ses pensées **s'embrouillaient**; il devait **faire d'énormes efforts** pour penser à quelque chose dont le fil ne soit pas défait ou **attaché** au passé par des nœuds inextricables (Silko 1992, 14–15)

The translator has reduced the number of repetitions by erasing some occurrences (the two occurrences of *tangled* have been reduced to one in the first sentence) and by resorting to synonyms (*s'enchevêtrer*, *emmêlées*, *s'emmêler*, *s'embrouiller* for *tangled*; *en sueur* and *faire d'énormes efforts* for *sweat*).

The destruction is not systematic, however. For instance, the translator manages to keep the repetition of *comfort* and *comfortable* (a word difficult to translate into French) by using

bien and *bien-être* which work on both material and moral levels:

We know these hills, and we are **comfortable** here.” There was something about the way the old man said the word “**comfortable**.” It had a different meaning—not the **comfort** of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the **comfort** of belonging with the land and the peace of being with these hills. (Silko 1977, 117)

Nous connaissons ces collines, et nous y sommes **bien**. » Il y avait quelque chose de spécial dans la façon dont le vieil homme avait dit le mot « **bien** ». Il prenait un sens différent : ce n’était pas le **bien-être** que procuraient les grandes maisons, une nourriture riche ou même des rues propres, mais le **bien-être** né du fait d’être à l’unisson de la terre, la paix ressentie à se trouver dans ces collines. (Silko 1992, 129–130)

At the macro level of the whole novel, repetitions give meaning to the various interconnected episodes. Repetitions of words create a textual memory that enables the readers to interpret the story correctly, exactly like Tayo who will gradually learn to recognize the pattern underlying what he goes through. For instance, when Tayo walks to the toilets in a bar (Silko 1977, 56), the dirty wet floor mentally takes him back to his ordeal in the jungle (Silko 1977, 11). The shift from a real situation to a memory is textually signified by the repetition of the same phrase—“It was **soaking** through his **boots**/it **soaked** into their **boots**”—in the two passages. In the translation, although the readers will understand the situation, there is no textual link between the two scenes but only a semantic link as two different phrases are used: “qui **pénètre** dans ses **bottes**” (Silko 1992, 66)/“s’**infiltra**it dans les **chaussures**” (Silko 1992, 19).

Many passages echo each other as if the various episodes and the various characters were diverse avatars of the same event, Tayo’s encounter with the spirit of the mountain and his becoming whole again.

Repeated words form a network of key words whose occurrences weave a significant textual material connecting and reuniting what first seems disconnected. Through their reiteration the readers can recognize the resemblance and understand that time and storytelling are cyclical as Old Grandma concludes: “It seems like I already heard these stories

before . . . only thing is, the names sound different” (Silko 1977, 260). The network of recurring words organizes the novel around key themes such as dampness and dryness, circles and whirls, weaving and scattering. In the translation, the structure is less obvious because of lexical variety. For instance, the word *scatter* which is central to Tayo’s broken psyche is translated by two different verbs, *disséminer* and *disperser*, as well as by a whole range of words according to the cotext: *l’entouraient* (Silko 1992, 117), *franchirent le sommet* (Silko 1992, 195), *faire voler* (Silko 1992, 231), *laisser derrière* (Silko 1992, 250), *s’effriter* (Silko 1992, 214), *parmi* (Silko 1992, 168), and *s’égaillèrent* (Silko 1992, 243). The important word *scatter* has virtually disappeared from the French translation, made invisible by the translator’s decision not to maintain its repetition.

The destruction of repetitions is not systematic, however, as the recurrences of some words are maintained. For instance *whorls* (of flesh, of skin), which appears in the morbid episodes dealing with witchcraft, is systematically translated by *volute*, making it possible for the French readers to link the various scenes together and to establish the connection with the poems relating the invasion of the evil spirit: “il se peignit le corps/les **volutes** de chair” (the poem about Pa’caya’nyi who tricks people into witchcraft, Silko 1992, 56), “D’autres défèrent des paquets en peau/pleins d’objets répugnants:/des silex sombres, des cendres de hogans brûlés/où reposaient les morts,/Des **volutes** de peau” (the poem about a witchcraft competition during which white people are invented and turned loose to destroy the Indian world, Silko 1992, 147), “Pinkie lui maintint la jambe, et Leroy trancha la **volute** de chair sous le gros orteil de Harley” (the torture scene in which witchcraft attempts to engulf Tayo’s life and the world in general, Silko 1992, 271).

By reducing the number of repetitions, the translator brings considerable changes to the material texture of Silko’s novel of textual memory. His motivations may be an adherence to French stylistic norms that still consider repetition to be inelegant despite its use by great writers. He thus imposes his own view, his own cultural memory on the original text and destroys its inner rhythm and its *signifiante* (to use

Meschonnic's (1999) word). Repetitions are essential to Silko's endeavor to write a text which reads as a memory of the oral tradition of storytelling and deliberately blurs the frontier between genres (tales, songs, poems, and novels), between storytelling and story-writing, between Indian traditions and Western culture: "So I play with the page and things that you could do on the page, and repetitions. When you have an audience, when you're telling a story and people are listening, there's repetition of crucial points" (Arnold 2000, 71).

Systematicity is essential to maintain the way lexical networks function. Each repetition is important. As Berman states when he studies how the deforming tendencies transform a text, each word must be chosen carefully and the use of synonyms is deceptive. Words have their own lives, their own textual bodies from which they derive their power: "The words of the story poured out of his mouth as if they had substance, pebbles and stone extending to hold the corporal up" (Silko 1977, 12). Silko's writing is like weaving: the intricate patterns suffer no mistakes, no holes. Storytelling and story-writing is a sacred act, a ceremony in which each word has its part to play.

Memory and the Landscape

The landscape is the central character of *Ceremony*. As stated in *Place and Vision*, in which Nelson dedicates a whole chapter to the landscape of *Ceremony*, the geophysical landscapes "serve not only as the 'settings' of these [Native American] fictions but also as principal 'characters' in them" (Nelson 1993, 9). It is only after being reunited with the landscape that Tayo can recover his vital energy. The landscape is the place where Indian memory lies, the landscape *is* Indian memory: "We are the land. [. . .] More than remembered, the earth is the mind of the people as we are the mind of the earth" (Paula Gunn Allen in Nelson 1993, 1). Describing and naming the landscape is therefore a delicate part of the ceremony of writing. Locations and directions are given with accuracy. The words connected to the landscape are the names of the places, the words describing those places as well as the names of the plants, animals, and spirits inhabiting the land. All those names recreate the landscape of the American Southwest where the Laguna Pueblo reservation is located and they bear the memory of its history.

The original Indian names have been largely replaced by English names or by Spanish names, the languages of the enemy, to use Gloria Bird's phrase in *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* (Harjo and Bird 1997), that is to say the languages of the settlers: "But the fifth world had become entangled with European names: the names of the rivers, the hills, the names of the animals and plants—all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name" (Silko 1977, 68). The Pueblo names are still there, though, in the names of the characters of the traditional stories and the names of the spirits inhabiting the land. They stand out in the English text as their morphology is quite different from that of the European names and display a characteristic apostrophe: Tse-pi'na or Ts'eh, K'ou'ko, Ck'o'yo, A'moo'ooh, Ku'oosh. . . The Pueblo names have been used in the translation without any change as if they had resisted one more displacement. Most Spanish names are maintained too: *mesa*, *arroyo*, *Casa Blanca* . . . with the exception of *burro* (*âne*, *bourricot*).

It is the English names that are problematic for the translation into French. When they are kept, which is the case of many place-names, they stand out as memories or traces of the original English text, whereas in the original they blend seamlessly into the main narrative in English. In *Cérémonie*, place-names such as *Wake Island*, *Dixie Tavern*, *Purple Heart*, or *Prairie Dog Hill* remind the readers of the European settlers' imprint on the American landscape but also suggest that the "entanglement" with English names is only a passing stage in the history of the landscape. The names and languages may change, but the landscape and its ancient memory will remain unchanged. The English language, which dominates the text of *Ceremony*, is pushed back to the margin through translation.

The names of plants and animals are translated into French and raise many difficulties. Most English names are both simple and precise. As they are based on a simple generic word (*grass*, *tree*, *weed*, *hill*. . .), names such as *wild rose bush*, *salt bushes*, *snakeweed*, *rabbit brush*, *foothills* create a realistically complex environment (Silko has drawn on her accurate knowledge of the Southwest landscape). The geographically-literate readers will recognize it. However, those who are unfamiliar with such settings will not be lost and will manage to

find their way among grass, trees, weeds, and hills. In French, the translator has to negotiate between two options. He can favor the exact translation which is very often a scientific term unknown to most readers: *Salt bushes/atriplex, arroche; snakeweed/bistorte, gramma grass/ bouteloue*. . . Alternatively, he may opt for a literal translation that will be understood but may not refer to an actual plant or animal. The few cases when literal translations correspond to the reality of the environment (*rock sage/sauge de rocher, bee-wee plants/l'herbe-aux-abailles, rabbit weed/herbe-aux-lapins*. . .) are not enough to compensate for the different vision of the world the numerous scientific names produce.

Moreover, the scientific words in French do not allow the correspondence between geography and myth. The words of the landscape in *Ceremony* are meaningful and contribute to weave a consistent memory of the universe that reinforces the links between the human world and the spirits. When Tayo meets the mountain lion (*puma* in French), he also meets the hunter spirit, the companion of Tse'pina, the mountain spirit. When he meets Tse, she is sitting next to a moonflower plant (*marguerite dorée*) that indicates the feminine power she represents. Tse is a woman and a spirit and the earth, as this passage underlines: "He dreamed he made love with her. He felt the warm sand on his toes and knees; he felt her body, and it was as warm as the sand, and he couldn't feel where her body ended and the sand began" (Silko 1977, 222). It echoes Josiah's comment: "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone" (Silko 1977, 45). Once Tayo acknowledges he is sand and stone like the sandstone cliffs around him, he can be whole again. In the translation, the link connecting *sand (sable), stone (pierre), and sandstone (grès)* is severed. The landscape in *Cérémonie* is therefore more scientific and more obscure than in the original; it does not work as the main representation and memory of the harmony of the Indian way. It is not the "living text" mentioned by Nelson, which can be read by the readers.

Memory and Translation as Transformation

Beyond the linguistic and stylistic difficulties the translator has to face when translating a narrative of memory such as *Ceremony*, broader questions must be addressed. Is it possible

or even legitimate to translate memory in the case of Native American fiction? Can Indian memory, which is so deeply rooted in the ancient languages and in the local environment, survive when uprooted and transferred into a culturally and linguistically alien environment?

Silko has already provided part of the answer. Drawing on Indian memory to write her novel, she has opened up a new frontier and contributed to the invention and development of the Native American novel, essentially transgenre and multilingual. She is the one who has translated—that is to say, transformed and rewritten—the oral traditional stories: “I write them down because I like seeing how I can translate this sort of feeling or flavor or sense of a story that’s told and heard onto the page” (Arnold 2000, 71). Therefore, translating *Ceremony* into another language is doing a second-hand translation in which the main choices have already been made: the degree of multilingualism, of obscurity to which the readers—and more particularly the “tribally illiterate” ones—will be submitted. The inherent tension between the source and target languages, between what we understand and what we do not, between what the translator chooses to reveal and what he/she leaves unexplained is already present in the original. Even the reception of her work and the issue of the target reader has been addressed, as Silko is aware that her readership falls into two categories—Native Americans (who know a lot about Indian memory) and non-Natives (whom she does not want to alienate). For her, making Indian memory accessible to all through her translation is a political choice: “I’m political, but I’m political in my stories. That’s different. I think the work should be accessible and that’s always the challenge and task of the teller—to make accessible perceptions that the people need” (Arnold 2000, 26).

Translators have always been suspected of betrayal and Silko is no exception. Being of mixed ancestry, born on the reservation but educated outside it, she is the perfect go-between and a highly suspicious one. Paula Gunn Allen criticized her for giving away tribal secrets which should only be known by Native people, as Nelson reminds us: “In fact, a few years ago another Laguna writer, Paula Gunn Allen, criticized Silko for using some of this oral traditional material, contending that by including a clan

story in her novel *Ceremony* Silko has violated local conventions regarding proper dissemination of such stories” (Nelson 2001).

For Silko, translating and rewriting Indian memory is not a betrayal but, on the contrary, a way to redeem Native traditions. Those must not be kept as museum artifacts which are the dead collectible pieces recorded and translated by ethnologists such as Boas, but they must be given the possibility to carry on as living entities. Memory pines for transmission as a way out of oblivion and eradication. Through her translation, Silko reminds the American readers of the Native American heritage of their country and promotes it as a living force in today’s world. Interlingual translation goes one step further in the same direction. Translating Indian memory strengthens it as it will be kept in the minds of more and more readers across the world, and in turn they will pass it on. It will then be safe from destruction, as when kept in the belly of the storyteller (Silko 1977, 2). Paradoxical though it may seem, translating Indian memory is a form of repatriation as it takes it back to its original purpose, helping the people understand and live in harmony. In a globalized world, *the* people may just mean people in general: “Something in writing *Ceremony* that I had to discover for myself was indeed that the old stories still have in their deepest level a content that can give the individual a possibility to understand” (Arnold 2000, 147). On a more practical level, the translation and transmission of memory may increase people’s awareness and support of the Native cause and give more visibility to the Indian alternative to the materialistic “American way of life” taking over the world. Silko is aware of the potential impact of Native memory across languages and nations: “In other words, we feel that we get cultural, intellectual, spiritual support from all the people outside the United States. [...] There are no isolated people, there is truly now a global village and it matters” (Arnold 2000, 151).

The teller/writer is one link in the long chain of the circulation of memory, and the translator another one. The important point is to keep the transmission going even if it means changes on the way. Changes are not always for the worse. In the case of Indian memory, the displacement brought about by the interlingual translation opens up new possibilities. In the French translation, the stories may thrive better in a new medium, freed

from the English language (the linguistic memory of the trauma of colonization).

Memory itself is not a fixed form. It is based on repetitions and differences, like translation—two notions at the core of Deleuze’s early philosophical thought and analyzed at length in *Différence et Répétition* in link with the power of language: “La répétition est la puissance du langage” (“Repetition is the power of language”—translation mine—Deleuze 1968, 373). The memory of an event is a repetition of the event, both similar to and different from it. Each time the memory comes back it is slightly modified, too, as repetitions are never identical. The same relationship links the text and its translations, which are the memory of the text. They are not equivalents but repetitions of the original, different but not necessarily less valuable, less trustworthy, or less authentic. The transformation process at the core of memory and translation is a regenerative power that keeps life going. The old stories, like the old healing ceremonies, must be adapted to their new environment—be it linguistic or cultural—the way Betonie has managed to devise a new ceremony to cure Tayo of his modern disease. Translation and memory are two modes of survival (“‘survival’ as a cultural practice and symbolic action, and above all as a process that extends life” (Brodzki 2007, 5)) and revival, a way to share the gift of the healing force or the burden of the trauma.

Conclusion

Memory as the main theme and material of *Ceremony* has shaped the novel’s language. It is based on correspondences and resonances that can evoke the chaos of traumatic memory and of witchcraft but that also symbolize the redeeming force of the Indian way whose ceremonies can restore harmony. The specificity of Silko’s writing requires attentive translating strategies that enable the transmission of its textual and poetic density. The memory of the text is particularly threatened when the translator yields to some of the deforming tendencies defined by Berman in his chapter “L’analytique de la traduction et la systématique de la déformation” (Berman 1985, 65–82), and more particularly clarification (thus replacing cyclical time with linear time), the destruction of rhythm (the rhythm of oral tradition), and the loss of meaningful networks which equate writing with healing

ceremonies. Like all poetical texts, *Ceremony* challenges easy solutions. Those texts need transformation rather than stereotyped equivalences. To translate them is to listen to the text and its resonances, to its *significance* rather than concentrate on its superficial narrative meaning. Translators will then be able to draw on that intimate memory of the text to rewrite it in an act of sharing and transformation, not a move of appropriation. Narratives of memory ask for translation more than anything else as transformation and circulation are their essence. Like the Indian stories they have “a life of their own” (Arnold 2000, 72) whose natural development is translation. Translators are similar to Betonie, the modern healer. “But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies [. . .] things which don’t shift and grow are dead things” (Silko 1977, 126). Translators, as life-givers of those narratives, have the responsibility of choosing carefully and creatively so that reading the translated text will be a renewed ceremony that revives the power of the original and transmits its memory.

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