

STORM'S SEVEN ARROWS: NATIVE AMERICAN NOVEL AND VISION  
QUEST

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ROBERT G. GREENUP

Storm's Seven Arrows: Native American Novel and Vision  
Quest

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An Abstract  
Presented to the  
Graduate and Research Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts

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by  
Robert G. Greenup  
April 1990

## Abstract

This thesis to examines the unique artistry of Hyemeyohsts Storm's Seven Arrows, an extraordinary example of a new literary genre, Native American fiction.

The examination reveals how Storm incorporates many of the elements of Native American storytelling and the traditional novel genre into an original work of high literary merit of a distinctly American character.

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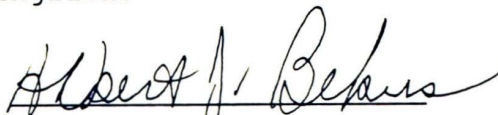
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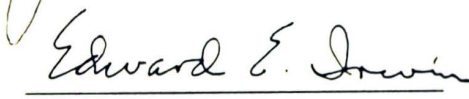
To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Robert G. Greenup entitled "Seven Arrows: Native American Novel and Vision Quest." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

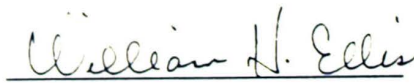
  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis  
and recommend its  
acceptance:

  
Second Committee Member

  
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and  
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Dean of the Graduate  
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## Chapter One: Introduction

Nineteen seventy-two saw the publication of an extraordinary literary work, Hyemeyohsts Storm's Seven Arrows. The work is a literary depiction of the confrontation between the culture of the Plains Indians and the European culture of the advancing "whiteman," and the eventual assimilation of the Native Americans into the new Euro-American culture. Storm uses fictional characters, elements of the novel, story telling, allegory, and myth. However, he does not rely wholly on conventional narrative techniques or form as a means of expression. Neither conventional critical terminology nor various traditional techniques of interpretation can be totally applied to this work. It is something new.

In terms of traditional literary classification, Seven Arrows fits into the somewhat nebulous genre category of Native American literature. According to Charles Larson in his Native American Fiction, the author of a work in this genre must have a distinct Native American ethnic identity. Hyemeyohsts Storm is on the roll of a Native American tribe, specifically the Northern Cheyenne. Larson also requires that the subject matter of the work be distinctly Native American, and clearly be a literary work. But these considerations of Storm's work merely serve as a starting point for further analysis. In fact, such generalizations, while perhaps

useful, have some unfortunate consequences.

The general tendency in the study of Native American Literature has been to concentrate upon its non-literary content. Thus the vast majority of critical attention directed toward Seven Arrows has been of the ethnoliterary variety; that is, critics have examined the book for its anthropological and historical content and rarely for its literary merit. Noted Native American scholar and author Paula Gunn Allen observes that "contrary to popular and much scholarly opinion in Western literary circles, aesthetics are not extraneous to politics" (Allen 3). There does seem to be a literary apartheid in practice in regard to Native American Literature, a situation not at all unlike that situation in 1936 regarding the study of Beowulf addressed by J. R. R. Tolkien in his famous essay, "The Monsters and the Critics." He writes:

It may well be asked: why should we approach this, or indeed any other poem, mainly as an historical document? Such an attitude is defensible: firstly, if one is not concerned with poetry at all, but seeking information wherever it may be found; secondly, if the so-called poem contains in fact no poetry. (Tolkien 53)

One could easily pose Professor Tolkien's question in regard to Native American Literature. A non-literary approach to Seven Arrows fails to consider aspects of a work that transcends both historical account and traditional literary



form. This study will concentrate on the unique literary aspects of Seven Arrows to reveal the significance of Storm's innovations.

Seven Arrows begins with an introductory section in which Storm does two important things. He establishes a narrative voice and he provides the reader with a conceptual toolbox for the reader to use in reading and interpreting the material that follows. First, Storm addresses the reader in first person as a story teller to his listener and develops a persona with a characteristic tone and manner of address that resonates throughout the work. Storm never directly addresses the reader after his introduction, but the reader retains an extraordinary sense of his presence. This technique allows Storm to be a part of his own work in a most unobtrusive manner and to maintain his close relationship with the reader.

Storm also explains through a series of stories and his interpretation of these stories how to approach Seven Arrows itself. The process to be used by the reader is made very clear. First, Storm explains the key symbols used throughout the text. Then he explains that each section of Seven Arrows is to be read and interpreted in a manner which he describes. Next, Storm applies his interpretation section that follows. Storm explains that these interpretations are meant to be cumulative, that the interpretation each section is necessary for the reader to fully understand the section that follows.

The narrative section of Seven Arrows has twenty-five

sections or chapters. Each is structurally self-contained but also interconnected to the preceding and following sections with some degree of unity and continuity. A large cast of characters changes from section to section yet sometimes overlap. The narrative is set in the Great Plains of the United States, beginning at a time when the very first contacts are being made between the Native American tribes of the Great Plains and the "whitemen," or Europeans.

The opening section begins with the day-to-day cares of a tribal camp and ends with a brief allusion to the coming of the whiteman. Through the course of the narrative, the steady intrusions of the whiteman become an issue of central significance to the Tribes as encounters with the white man become more and more frequent. Storm spends little time depicting the actual encounters between the whiteman and the tribesman. Rather, he focuses upon the effect of these encounters on the Native American way of life.

The narrative depicts the increasing effect of the coming of the whiteman through a series of interconnected personal stories. These personal stories concentrate on the Medicine Teachers who attempt to remain true to the old ways. Slowly but surely, exposure to the whiteman's world corrupts more and more of the Native American world as the Medicine Teachers try harder and harder to stem the tide of corruption. They conduct numerous ceremonial rites and attempt several teachings trying to revitalize the tribes, but they meet with small success. The narrative progresses to

what at first seems to be a point of assimilation of the Native American into the Euro-American culture. However, in Storm's vision, assimilation becomes transcendence. Storm's narrative is not much different from other works of Native American fiction that have dealt with the same or similar topics. However, the manner in which Storm uses this narrative to convey his themes makes Seven Arrows quite unique.

Larson, who has made one of the few critical literary examinations of Seven Arrows, acknowledges its uniqueness, but he makes no thorough examination specifically focusing on the nature of that uniqueness. Larson's focus is upon classification rather than detailed analysis. He calls for a finer delineation of Native American works by defining a more specific genre of Native American fiction which includes those works by Native American authors dealing with Native American subjects that are of a narrative nature and are created primarily from the author's imagination rather than from history or fact. This new genre would include such works as N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize winning novel House Made of Dawn or Dallas Chief Eagle's novel Winter Court (Fiction 1-16). Larson's distinction has significance for this study primarily because it acknowledges that some kind of ongoing literary evolution exists among Native American authors that is producing more sophisticated literary forms, such as the Native American Novel.

Seven Arrows is a part of that evolutionary process, but



not in the same way as these other works. Momaday's and Dallas Chief Eagle's novels, in terms of form, are mostly products of the Western European literary tradition. Seven Arrows is not. Rather than wholly accepting a form alien to his cultural roots, Storm creates a hybrid, the marriage of not only two ethnic traditions, but also a union of several literary forms in a most original fashion. It is a work of fiction, yet it retains many of the story-telling elements of Native American tradition, so many elements that it cannot comfortably be called a novel in the traditional sense. A comparison to the more traditional form of the novel is useful in understanding the uniqueness of Seven Arrows.



## Chapter Two: Seven Arrows the Novel

Seven Arrows is a novel. Ian Watt, one of the critics who helped shape the modern concept of the novel, says that any definition of the novel form must be narrow enough to have some useful meaning yet broad enough to include a wide variety of works usually placed within the novel category (9). A Handbook to Literature outlines those characteristics--the use of characters, either in static form or in the process of development as a result of events or actions; the use of some organizing idea, such as plot or theme; the use of prose; and the use of the narrative as the form of expression--that traditionally describe the novel (298). In addition to these criteria, the Handbook also states that a novel should pass "a dual test of artistic success and imitative accuracy or truth" (300). Of particular relevance to the examination of Seven Arrows is the requirement for "imitative accuracy." Ian Watt calls this "imitative accuracy" formal realism, which he defines as a depiction of reality based upon truth to human experience. Watt calls conformity to formal realism "the lowest common denominator of the novel genre" and thus distinguishes the novel from earlier literary genres that conformed to established history, myth, or fable (Watt 11-13).

In Seven Arrows, Storm uses many characters, including himself as a central persona, although he concentrates on none of the fictional characters for very long. Most of his

characters are fictional, but some are historical although these historical figures do not ever play a central role. In the course of the narrative, a dozen or so characters are introduced, move from supporting roles to main characters, then are killed and replaced by others. Storm thereby emphasizes the Native American priority of the community over the individual. At the same time, this technique allows Storm to present a composite depiction of the gradual encroachment of the whiteman's world upon the Native American lifestyle.

Storm also uses plot, but it is a plot devoid of the conventions of unity of time and place. For example, Grey Owl, the first character who serves as a "representative," leaves Seven Arrows with the simple statement "He was almost asleep when the attack came" (63). The reader is never given any details other than that. The narrative continues as other characters talk about Grey Owl's death and another character, Hawk, becomes the momentary focus. The narrator never names or examines the exact battle that takes Grey Owl's life thus the reader cannot place historical tags on any event in the entire narrative. At the same time, specific events happen to specific characters in specific locations, but Storm identifies none of these with specific historical references. Yet Storm presents a clear linear progression, and the reader has a clear sense of the sequence of events and the passage of time, although the novel's distorted sense of time is well illustrated by the concluding section of the work, where a character who is strongly identified with the

conflicts of the nineteenth century shocks the reader by climbing into a pickup truck. Specific dates, just as specific characters, would only serve to limit Storm's depiction of the communal nature of experience.

Storm expresses theme through an interactive process. In his study, Larson notes that there are two parallel structures in Seven Arrows, an outer narrative and an inner structure comprised of interconnected "teaching stories." The stories serve as glosses for the overall narrative, and the outer narration makes the individual stories clear. For example, a central theme of Seven Arrows is perception and change in life. In the narrative, Grey Owl sees many of the gifts that white traders have brought to a tribe which he visits. He examines the gifts and witnesses the effects that these new items have upon the tribe. The uniqueness of the whiteman's gifts have led to uncharacteristic covetousness, which then leads to dissension and disharmony. Grey Owl can perceive this effect, but the tribesmen cannot. Without perception, they cannot assimilate the materialism introduced into tribal life. They turn to another of the white man's gifts, "fire water," and are attacked and destroyed while under its influence.

The events lead young Hawk to the Medicine Chief so that he might understand what has happened to his friend, Grey Owl, who was killed along with his hosts. Hawk hears the story of "Jumping Mouse," which concerns a mouse unsatisfied with his normal habitat and so goes abroad in search of wider



horizons. He meets several other animals along the way who each help him to explore further and further. During his journey, the mouse gives up both of his eyes, leaving himself blind. Yet, he awakens to find that he has become an eagle. The story, a part of the larger overall narration, provides specific application of the theme. The mouse undergoes change through perception and sacrifice in order to become the eagle (68-85).

In his introduction, Storm explains that "within Seven Arrows there are many ancient Stories taught to me by my Fathers and Grandfathers. But there are also new Stories that I have written from within my own understanding and experience." He states that Seven Arrows is "constructed in the same manner in which I was taught by my Fathers to tell stories" (11). The stories in Seven Arrows are realistic but "almost entirely allegorical in form, and everything in them should be read symbolically" (10). Thus, in Seven Arrows there is no simple separation of the literal fiction and allegory.

Seven Arrows, then, has characters, plot, and theme. It is a prose narrative. Storm's intent is clearly, at least in part, to present a reality. Storm thus attempts "imitative accuracy," and his artistic success seems sure. In short, Seven Arrows meets all of the criteria necessary to classify it as a novel. However, Storm's work contains many more elements not addressed and not included in the conventional novel form, so many elements in fact, that Seven Arrows may



fail the test as a novel not by failing to meet minimum criteria but by exceeding the guiding limits. The real concern is just what extraordinary elements set Seven Arrows apart? It is to those elements that this study now turns.

### Chapter Three: Storm's Printing and Graphic Techniques

Perhaps Storm's most obvious departures from conventional characteristics of the novel form are the visual and graphic elements he uses in Seven Arrows. Larson, when he reviewed Seven Arrows upon its publication for Books Abroad, stated:

Topographically, the book is unique in itself: almost square in shape, printed in double columns, illustrated by dozens of photographs of animals and traditional Indian life and nearly a dozen color paintings of medicine wheels created specifically for this volume. But this is not to suggest a novel with pictures in the Victorian novelist's sense or a children's story told primarily by illustration. Instead, the photographs and color paintings have been fully integrated into the text of the novel itself. It is impossible to think of the book without them and our memories of the novel, after finishing it, are also images of haunting Indian faces. (89)

Storm informs the reader that he intends Seven Arrows to be "constructed in the same manner in which I was taught by my fathers to tell stories" (11). Storm's model is the oral performance of the Native American storyteller. Those elements noted by Larson, as well as other non-verbal elements, such as special capitalization and even Storm's

choice of brown ink and paper, are the author's means of retaining many aspects of the oral performance otherwise lost in a translation into a non-oral medium.

Folklorists have long realized "that the [written] text is nothing more than the skeleton of the performed folktale" (Fine 4). They have debated exactly how to flesh out this "skeleton," or, indeed, if such a thing is possible at all. Storm, recognizing the inherent problems, wished to construct his work as faithfully as possible upon his model, the Native American teaching story:

There are many old stories within Seven Arrows . . . These stories were meant to be told, not written. In this way the Teachers, whether speaking verbally or in sign language, were able to give inflections to particular words to reflect their symbolic content. (10)

Storm realizes that he cannot restore sound to the form, but he does use many unique techniques to provide at least a semblance of the "inflections" and other non-verbal aspects and associations of a performance to Seven Arrows.

Some of Storm's most striking techniques are his uses of the visual arrangement of the text itself. Using the square shape of the book, and a double column arrangement of print, Storm organizes the visual, physical text itself into geometric patterns. These patterns have a rhetorical purpose. When Storm wants to draw special attention to a particular illustration, photograph, or visual design, the facing page

of text uses only the lower half of the page, an arrangement of one half of two vertical columns. Storm's juxtaposition of illustration and text provides a visual cue to the reader to consider the illustration. For example, the Medicine Man Hawk tells a young warrior a teaching story concerning a herd of buffalo. A portion of the text that relates the story is arranged on the bottom half of two sets of facing pages (182-183, 184-185). The upper half of both sets of pages contains a long, horizontal photograph of a migrating buffalo herd. All of these buffalo are all shown moving from left to right, nicely blending into the direction the reader follows as he or she reads the text. The eye of the reader returns to the photograph with the completion of each vertical column of text. The reader is forced to consider the visual depiction of the buffalo with the text.

Sometimes Storm simply leaves out a column of text. The omission amplifies the text that is there. During longer sections, Storm alternates pages of full vertical columns with pages of half columns, such as the long central section where Night Bear and Green Fire Mouse visit the camp of Hides on the Wind. The reader, following this vertical and horizontal pattern with the reading eye, experiences a sense of rhythmic movement similar to the hand gestures of an oral storyteller.

Many illustrations, photos, drawings, and paintings gloss the text. While they sometimes depict the action described in the text, the illustrations also produce complex



structures beneath the text, what Bernard Dick calls "the subtext" (83). The subtext, consisting of elements not explicit in the text, evoke connotative suggestions for the reader.

For example, the photographs never specify any characters or events. Rather, they portray people, animals, objects, or places that invoke an emotional or intuitive sense of similar subjects in the text. The first section of Seven Arrows depicts two women performing normal tribal household chores (32-33). At the center of two vertical columns of text is a photograph of a common Native American household tool. The photograph provides a historical and cultural perspective that the reader carries into the interpretation of the text. A later section depicts a group of boys, not yet warriors, and their encounter with a wolverine. Included in those pages are a photograph of an eagle feather headdress, the symbol of a young man's passage into manhood, and a photograph of a wolverine (93-97). There is nothing in the text that links the headdress specifically to these particular boys, or that connects the animal in the photograph to the animal of the text, but the reader is given some visual context to accompany what he or she is reading. Early in the book, Storm shows the reader a photograph of a strong, proud Native American face (55). The accompanying text is about Grey Owl, a proud Cheyenne. Specifically this is a photo of a Zuni chief. There are no Zunis portrayed in Seven Arrows. The reader is not asked to identify the photo

as Grey Owl, but he or she understands that Grey Owl was a man very much like the noble man in the photo. It is very much like being told a story around a campfire and populating the story with the faces and people sharing your huddled circle. Storm's photos dramatically provide the reader with points of reference, visual cues which allow the reader's imagination to interact with the written word to create the world of the story within their own minds. Significantly, Storm uses the tools of the storyteller, not the historian or anthropologist. Rather than rely upon descriptive, complex language for depiction, Storm uses these visual techniques that demand active creative participation from the reader. This added depth of participation creates a much more personal experience for the listener. Similarly, Storm's techniques help make Seven Arrows a very intimate experience for the reader. The incorporation of these visual elements duplicates much of the interactive intimacy of an oral performance.

Like the photographs, the many drawings in the book--with the exception of five drawings in the introductory section and a single exception in the narrative, a diagram used to directly illustrate a particular Medicine Wheel--provide subtext rather than illustrate specific actions or characters. The drawings, distinctive Native American designs of geometric arrangements of circles, lines, and points, contain no obvious verbal connections to the surrounding text. Nonetheless, the reader tends to interpret

these drawings using the keys provided by Storm in his text. For example, Storm provides a drawing of seven concentric circles with two perpendicular lines intersecting their center (287). The reader understands from the text that, according to Cheyenne teaching, each of the four cardinal directions--north, south, east, and west--holds a specific type of wisdom. The reader also learns that true wisdom is gained by perception from many different points. To see a thing in its entirety one should move around it in a circle and view every aspect from all vantage points. The reader understands that the term "seven arrows" refers to a process in its entirety which produces ever-expanding perceptions that teach both of these lessons. The process is symbolically depicted by many items arranged in groups of seven. By the time the reader first views this drawing, he or she is aware of the symbolic significance of the four directions, the circle, and groups of seven. Using the tools provided by Storm's introductory section and the information in the preceding text, the reader can easily interpret this drawing as a graphic representation of the union of these concepts.

Other drawings, as well as the paintings, depict Medicine Shields. Storm explains the significance of Medicine Shields in his introduction:

My father, whose Name was Hyemeyohsts and who gave his name to me, was a Shield Maker and my Teacher. He taught me the construction of many Personal



Shields. He also taught me the construction, Painting, and Medicine Ways of many other Shields. . . . This was Hyemeyohsts' Gift to me, as it was his Gift from his fathers and from the Medicine Power, the Great Spirit. (8)

These Medicine Shields described here by Storm were not used for any kind of physical protection. Rather, they were totally symbolic in design intended to convey specific meanings to those who beheld them. Some were Personal Shields and depicted the personal Medicines, or spiritual attributes, of individuals. Others were Clan Shields that served a similar purpose for a clan. Still others were Sacred Shields that symbolically depicted the sacred teachings of the Great Spirit (Storm 8-10). Seven Arrows contains drawings of many Personal Shields that may or may not be the Shields of Storm's characters. Storm never tells us, and the Shields are not specific. Nonetheless, Storm has provided the reader with enough information to help him or her understand the graphic symbology of the Shields; thus, the shields gloss the text in much the same manner as the photos.

For example, within the text of the story of "Jumping Mouse" appears the drawing of a Medicine Shield (80). The shield contains the images of a lodge pole, a plain broken by mountains, and a river divided into areas of day and night. Storm provides no direct interpretation, but this particular shield conveys the relationship between separation and unity, the theme of "Jumping Mouse." The plain, mountains, day, and



night are all united by the encompassing circular shape of the shield, and are all centered around the lodge pole. Such unification often occurs through a process of change. This is one of the lessons being taught by "Jumping Mouse." The drawing depicts the concept graphically while the text conveys the theme through narration. The same drawing appears three more times. Each appearance coincides with a specific movement toward change within the narrative (145, 285, 367). The shield reminds the reader that change is a part of the Medicine Teachings and should be understood in relation to those Teachings.

The paintings are all, with three exceptions, paintings of Sacred Shields. The exceptions are equally symbolic, but they simply do not take the form of a Medicine Shield. One of these paintings, for example, depicts seven feathers hanging from a rainbow in front of a forked tree growing out of a Medicine Shield on a great plain. The painting is clearly not representational but symbolically depicts concepts reflected by the text.

Similarly, within the other plates the reader observes the many spiritual ideas and associations of Seven Arrows rendered as graphic art. For example, one plate depicts four maidens each in her own quadrant of a circle, each surrounded by symbols of a different season of the year (between 22-23). The Shield clearly depicts the Cheyenne association of the four seasons with four women and the four directions of a compass. All of them to provide a subtext to the book that

would have been provided to Native American listeners by the shields themselves.

Within the text itself, Storm depicts an interactive relationship between the storytellers and listeners of the narrative. The storytellers often stop in the course of a story to clarify or amplify some point. The listeners often interrupt the storyteller with questions. Storm uses this technique to answer questions that often occur to the reader just as they have occurred to the characters. Storm tells the reader that "Questioning is one of the most vital paths to understanding these stories" (10). The technique involves the reader in the interactive process between the listener and his storyteller.

Storm also uses a much simpler textual technique, capitalization. He explains this technique in his introductory section:

Within Seven Arrows, and particularly within the old Stories, the words to which the Teacher would have given inflections are capitalized. These words are symbolic Teachers, and it is very important that you approach them symbolically rather than literally. These capitalized words may sometimes seem inconsistent, but do not be confused by this. The Coyote is known among the People as a gentle trickster, and his way is a part of Sun Dance Learning. (11)

In addition to these techniques, Storm uses the color of

the work itself as a subtle subtext. The entire book is printed in brown ink upon beige paper. All of the photographs are printed in tones and shades of brown rather than black and white. The only exceptions to the use of brown are the brilliant color plates. The effect is difficult to describe and can only be fully appreciated by experiencing Seven Arrows itself, but it amounts to replacing the rather harsh, cold, solid contrast of the black-on-white appearance of most books with a softer, mellower visual appearance. Aside from creating a unique physical appearance for his book, Storm has managed to convey a sense of subtle, neutral harmony with such a color scheme. Too, the brown tones suggest historical photographs and aged paper and thus provide a sense of historical perspective and lend a sense of physical age to the book. Removing many of the visual associations normally associated with books makes it easier for Storm to create the verbal "feel" of Seven Arrows, the close, intimate feel of a circle of listeners around a warm campfire under the big sky of the plains.

Thus, Storm uses several techniques and means to provide Seven Arrows with levels of meaning beyond the verbal depth of written language. The geometric arrangement of Seven Arrows unifies the visual and textual elements. The many designs, drawings, and paintings both elicit and guide the reader's creative participation with Seven Arrows, and, at the same time, provide the reader with a cultural and historical perspective. Special use of capitalization conveys

focus and emphasis. The actual color and tones of the book help to convey the overall emotional tone of Storm's work.

As the photographs and art of this book are meant to be taken symbolically, to suggest things outside of themselves, so too is much of the text itself. Such an aspect is not unique in itself, but Storm's specific use of the allegory in Seven Arrows is quite singular. To determine the extent as well as the significance of Storm's use of allegory in his work, this study will now examine these elements in particular.



## Chapter Four: Seven Arrows and Allegory

Storm explains his allegorical design in his introductory section: "Seven Arrows itself, from beginning to end, is a teaching story. It is a story of the Sun Dance Way. . . . It is a complete Medicine Wheel all by itself" (11). Storm goes on to explain the allegorical significance of the Medicine Wheel which is absolutely necessary for readers not familiar with the terminology and symbolism of Native American religion:

It many ways . . . the Medicine Wheel can best be understood if you think of it as a mirror in which everything is reflected. "The Universe is the Mirror of the People" the old teachers tell us, "and each person is a Mirror to every other person." Any idea, person or object can be a Medicine Wheel, a Mirror for man. The tiniest flower can be such a Mirror, as can a wolf, a story, a touch, a religion or a mountain top. . . . This book, Seven Arrows, is such a Mirror. It is a Medicine Wheel, just as you [the reader] are. (4-5)

What is unique to Seven Arrows is Storm's structure and use of allegory. The "inner narrative" (9) is really an interconnected series of what Storm calls "teaching stories." Storm informs the reader that "these Stories are almost entirely allegorical in form, and everything in them should

be read [allegorically]" (10). Since all of these stories are similar in structure and purpose, an examination of a single story, "The Two Old Men Who Kept Their Eyes Closed," can serve as a guide to understanding the complete series. In summary, the story goes as follows:

There was once an old man who discovered that if he kept his eyes closed, he could see events in the past. His friend, another old man of the same tribe, discovered that if he kept his eyes closed, he could see events of the future. They both discovered that the more they kept their eyes closed, the more special attention they received from the tribe, so they began keeping their eyes closed more and more of the time. They then discovered that their eyes were stuck closed, and they were effectively blind. The tribe met to decide how best the two blind old men could be cared for, and it was decided that the old men should learn to care for themselves. The decision angered the two old men who had been used to special treatment, and they asked to be allowed to live apart from the tribe. The tribe acceded to their request and built the two old men a campsite away from the tribe. The two old men were quite happy with their self-imposed exile until a raccoon began to play tricks on them. The raccoon would move the string that the two old men followed to the river where they got their water, causing the two old men to search in vain for a river they had no way of knowing was not there. Sometimes the raccoon would slap one old man who, unaware of the raccoon's presence, would believe it was his friend. In

the argument that always followed, the raccoon would steal the two old men's food, creating further dissension. Each old man would accuse the other of stealing the food. Eventually, all of this fun was just too much for the raccoon, and he laughed out loud, revealing his presence to the two old men. The two old men despaired that their wonderful solitude was ended, so the raccoon offered to show them a solution to all of their problems down at the river. The two old men followed their string down to the river bank; then the raccoon pushed them into the water from behind, and their eyes opened (245-251).

Traditionally, allegories have four levels of meaning. The "literal meaning" is the historical or factual level. The "tropological meaning" is the moral lesson of the work meant to be applied to human behavior. The "allegorical meaning" is the application of the moral lesson to people in general. Lastly, the "anagogical meaning" is the spiritual truth or universal truth represented by the work (Harper's 201).

On a literal level, "The Two Old Men Who Kept Their Eyes Closed" is the story of two old men with marvelous gifts who allowed those gifts to cripple them. Their self-inflicted disability results in an exile from their fellows. They are then at the mercy of an animal trickster who uses his own guile to first take advantage of the two old men, then to free them from their handicap.

The moral lesson of the story is that looking too hard



into the future or dwelling on the past may blind you to the present. Such calamity certainly does befall the two old men of the story. Their blindness is a result of their own action and causes their inaction. Their blindness leads to exile from the tribe and humiliation at the hands of the raccoon. The moral lesson teaches the individual not to close his or her eyes to the present.

An allegorical reading expands the moral idea to include mankind in general. At this level, the two old men represent all of those who would concentrate only on the past or future. The raccoon represents nature which is always immediate. Nature continues to work despite mankind's intellectual digressions, and in order to survive mankind must give heed to the natural world, the world of the here and now.

On the anagogical level, the story teaches that the world of the senses is necessary for survival in this world. Even great spiritual gifts, such as the old men's powers to see the past and future, do not guarantee survival. Indeed, here they lead to blindness. The world of the senses and the world of the spirit are one: thus the physical world is inextricably a part of the spiritual world. Seeing with the eye of the body is important and necessary for seeing with the eye of the spirit.

All of Storm's narrative reveals the same structure and content in terms of the four traditional aspects of meaning. The examination of a story as a traditional allegory is



useful in understanding the content of the individual stories of the inner narrative, but these stories do not exist separately from the rest of the work. They are an organic part of the larger whole.

The nine stories of the inner narrative all teach Native American cultural truths to both the characters of the narrative and to the reader as well. The reader's evaluation of the conflicts depicted within Seven Arrows increases his or her knowledge and perception of Native American culture.

In his introductory section, Storm states that the stories will be "unfolded for you through your own Medicines, Reflections, and Seekings" (10). Once we have read one of these stories, it will "become a portion of our awareness, or understanding" (16). Storm tells the reader that the interpretation of the story will depend upon the individual reader's perception and that the reader's perception will be altered slightly by each story. The introductory section provides a demonstration of the relationship between the reader and the story. Storm provides the reader with two stories and their interpretations as well as a discussion of how the interpretation of one story affects the perception of the second story. As has already been noted, Storm intends his introductory section to be a primer for understanding Seven Arrows.

Additionally, each story aids readers in their understanding of the outer narrative as well. For example, the story of "The Two Old Men Who Kept Their Eyes Closed" is

told within the narrative to the character Mouse Bear so that he can understand what is going on around him. The Medicine Man Night Bear tells the story in order to explain to Mouse Bear how the whitemen--who preach a religion of death that seems to believe that all people are bad and thus it is good to kill--can win so many victories over the People (Native Americans), who believe that people and life are good and killing is wrong. The Native American perception of the whiteman's religion is rather frightening. Night Bear had Christianity explained to him in this way:

The talkers among them spoke of the Medicine Power that was called Geessis. This Geessis was a power among them, a chief whom they later killed. He was not surprised that they killed him. After they killed him, these men decided that he was a Power, and they began to like him. He came back as a ghost and even now walks among them invisible. This Geessis is the greatest killer of them all. He kills all of their enemies. And he rewards those who follow his path with many things. Believe me, my brother, it is a very confusing thing, this Geessis. These talkers say that it is a bad thing to do many things. And believe it or not, killing is one of them. But, as clearly as I can understand it, this only means not to kill those who follow the warpath of Geessis. All others are to be feared and killed. (240)

Mouse Bear learns from the story of "The Two Old Men Who kept Their Eyes Closed" that spiritual vision alone is not enough to insure survival. Indeed, misplaced spiritual vision causes destruction. In addition, the reader learns much about the early Native American perception of Christianity on a conceptual level. Such knowledge is extremely important for the reader to fully understand what follows. In the section following Night Bear's story, the characters Night Bear and Green Fire Mouse travel to the camp of Left Hand, who has had first-hand experience with the white man. The understanding of Night Bear's story enables the reader to understand why the characters react the way they do to the stories of the whiteman's terror told by Left Hand. They view Christianity with complete horror.

The Native Americans were judging Christianity by its worldly effects and were not aware of its spiritual aspect at all. By applying the lesson learned in the Night Bear's story, the reader begins to see that the Native Americans may have been looking only with their worldly eyes. The reader must understand that the novel's Native American characters do not separate the material world from the spiritual world. Therefore, Night Bear and the others believed that they were observing Christianity in its entire essence. Theirs was a living, very physical religion, and they assumed that the whiteman's religion was the same.

Thus, the inner stories have a structure that is very powerfully allegorical, they have strong connections to the



events in the outer narrative, as well as to the external world of the reader.

The events of the outer narrative following Night Bear's story justify the Native American perception of the "warpath of Geessis." The Plains Tribes are systematically and ruthlessly destroyed by the white followers of "Geessis." The outer narrative describes the destruction of the Native American way of life upon the Central Plains, a destruction that closely parallels the historical events.

The reader can apply what he or she learns from both the story and the narrative and can conclude that the whitemen apparently did not understand that the worldly manifestation of their religious beliefs did not match the spiritual ideal. Night Bear's simple story has made clear one of the central conflicts of Seven Arrows, the conflict of two epistemologies, the conflict of the segregated world of the European invaders and the unified world of the Native Americans.

Viewed independently of the stories of the inner narrative, the allegorical elements of the outer narrative are not obvious. Still, the outer narrative contains allegorical meaning even when viewed alone. But parallels between external meaning and the events, actions, and characters of the outer narrative are not nearly so rigidly defined as those of the stories. The allegorical elements of the outer narrative are much closer to the post-romantic notion of symbolism. That is, they have strong but



unspecified external connections, not the distinct parallel structure that traditionally describes allegory.

However, it is impossible in practice to view the inner and outer narratives separately. The outer narrative is not a "framework" for the inner story as is found in other works such as the Decameron or the Canterbury Tales. It is much closer to the arrangement Melville uses in Moby Dick where the narrator provides the story of Ahab and the whale within his own story and the two stories are inextricably mixed.

The outer narrative moves towards disintegration. It depicts not only a material disintegration, but a spiritual one as well. The inner narrative makes the spiritual disintegration perceivable to the reader. The "teachings" of the inner narrative have made clear for the reader the spiritual values of the Native American People. Such understanding allows the modern reader to observe more than the overt historical events depicted in the outer narrative, but he or she observes the epistemological conflict as well. The outer narrative becomes for the reader more than a struggle between two cultures; it becomes a struggle between two worlds.

As the outer narrative depicts a growing disharmony, the inner narrative moves towards unity. The stories take up more and more of the text as the Medicine Teachers of the outer narrative try harder and harder to reenforce the spiritual values of their culture. With each Teaching Story the reader's understanding of those values increases. But

fewer and fewer of the characters of the outer narrative listen to the stories. The spiritual truths become more and more clear to the reader as they lose more and more meaning for the characters of the outer narrative. The reader learns that as the individual characters cease to understand the teachings of the stories, they become victims of the whiteman's world. As the Native Americans give up those spiritual things that had bound them together, they cease to be a people. Their world, the world of union between the spiritual and the material, ceases to exist as the Native Americans are conquered by their own loss of faith. At the same time, the reader is learning more and more of the teaching of the stories and is able to understand more and more the nature of the spiritual disintegration.

Storm has used literary technique to depict the Native American view of reality. He creates a quantum relationship between the stories, the narrative, and the reader that brings the Native American vision of reality into focus, and then allows the reader to assimilate this complex artistic construct as his own. In such a reality, all things are connected. It is a world of union, where the literal, tropological, allegorical, and anagogical co-exist completely. The allegorical and narrative ideas of Seven Arrows are not parallel, they are the same. In this world, the allegory as defined above has exclusive meaning in terms of the four levels of interpretation, because allegory is the essence of this world itself.

Clearly, Seven Arrows transcends the literary classification of allegory as it transcends the novel form or exceeds the confines of Folk Literature. It is relatively clear what Seven Arrows is not. Such a realization is a great step toward understanding what, exactly, Seven Arrows is. Seven Arrows is a literary step forward. It is simultaneously a great leap backward. Storm's work is a powerful literary expression because it addresses a place very close to the source of all artistic appreciation and expression. That source is the human unconscious. The firstborn expression of that source is myth. In Seven Arrows, Storm artistically reproduces the power of myth. It is to myth and the mythic elements of Seven Arrows that this study now turns.



## Chapter Five: Mythic Expression in Seven Arrows

Joseph Campbell has made a significant statement about mythic expression which directly applies to Seven Arrows:

In the context of a traditional mythology, the symbols are presented in socially maintained rites, through which the individual is required to experience, or will pretend to have experienced certain insights, sentiments, and commitments. In what I am calling "creative" mythology, on the other hand, this order is reversed: the individual has had an experience of his own - of order, horror, beauty, or even mere exhilaration - which he seeks to communicate through signs. (Creative 4)

Here Campbell distinguishes between two distinct types of mythology, traditional and creative. Campbell's latter model, creative mythology, translates personal experience into mythological symbols and patterns to supplant traditional mythology as the primary means of mythic expression. Just such an idea is, of course, the basis of modern archetypal criticism. Northrop Frye and other modern critics have largely agreed with Campbell's ideas. Within the Native American culture, however, traditional mythology is still the dominant trend. In the model of traditional mythology, myth is not used to communicate human experience but to understand the universe. The "socially maintained rites" described by Campbell are the primary means of



expression rather than literary forms. Storm's mythic expression is better understood in terms of Campbell's "traditional mythology" and can be best illustrated through an examination of mythic patterns found in Seven Arrows and Storm's use of them.

In Seven Arrows, Chief Little Wolf approaches the visiting Medicine Man, Night Bear, to perform a Sun Dance so that his warriors can gain "the Power to make war." "War!" responds Night Bear, "How does one do this in the Sun Dance? This is a time for receiving the power of Brotherhood and Healing for the People." Night Bear agrees to conduct the ritual on his terms, that it be a "Dance of Peace." Little Wolf's tribe had begun to leave the traditional way of the Sun Dance in favor of adapting the whiteman's warlike ways as a means to defeat the invader. Only Little Wolf and a handful of his warriors heed Night Bear's words and participate in the ritual.

These warriors enter the lodge where Night Bear, assisted by Hawk, conducts the ritual. Much of the experience within the lodge consists of storytelling by the Medicine men and thoughtful introspection on the part of the initiates. After leaving the Medicine Lodge following the ritual, one of the participants, Singing Rock, is urged by some fellow warriors to abandon the teachings of the Sun Dance. He is told that men who follow these teachings "were like women." Singing Rock does not abandon what he has learned in the Medicine Lodge. His experience there has given him a vision

of peace that he follows and attempts to teach to his fellows throughout his remaining presence in Seven Arrows (169-225).

Northrop Frye has "identified the central myth of literature, in its narrative aspect, with the quest-myth" (Frye 242). Campbell has identified three distinct phases of the quest-myth as "separation-initiation-return" (Hero 30). Within this pattern, the individual leaves his or her normal environment and has an experience (a struggle with a monster or other supernatural experience, for example) and gains a personal revelation as a result of that experience. The individual then returns to the community enlightened, and he shares this enlightenment beneficially with society in some way. Campbell's pattern is familiar to the modern reader because it is, as noted by Frye, repeatedly depicted in literature. The quest pattern is a basis for communicating a common human experience of a change in perception or understanding due to exposure to new knowledge or conditions. According to Campbell, the myths of a people are that culture's interpretation and expression of the experiences of a universal, collective unconscious. Within the model of creative mythology, artists use these myths to express their own interpretations of experience symbolically through archetypes--such as the hero, the mother, the trickster, or the creator--which are simply large image frameworks (Rosenburg xx). For Campbell, creative mythology is the "secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation" (Hero 3).

In Western European culture, such a "cultural manifestation" most often takes shape in traditional literary forms.

Storm describes these patterns in "socially maintained rites," such as the central socially maintained rite of the Native American culture, the Vision Quest (Deloria 259). The Vision Quest ritual has many variations, but in general it consists of a separation, either actual or simulated; a period of isolation, experience, or introspection; and a return and sharing of the fruits of the ritual.

The Sun Dance described in Seven Arrows is a type of Vision Quest, a ritual meant to revitalize the participants and thus revitalize society. In the ritual a sacred place, a Medicine Lodge, is prepared. The individual enters the Lodge and is enlightened through the supernatural power of the sacred dances, songs, and stories encountered within. The individual then leaves the lodge with new insights and perceptions that are communally shared through the contributions of this enlightened individual to his community.

The story of Singing Rock and the Medicine Lodge follows Campbell's pattern closely. Singing Rock separates himself from his tribe when he enters the Medicine Lodge. While within this lodge, he experiences enlightenment through his exposure to the Medicine Stories of the Sun Dance. He leaves the Lodge enlightened, restored to the Sun Dance Way through his experience and seeks to share his enlightenment with his fellows--separation, initiation, and return.



The quest pattern is repeated throughout Seven Arrows in both the outer narrative and the interior stories. Night Bear receives his name as a result of a vision quest described in the narrative (133). The story of Jumping Mouse is a Vision Quest. The three stories told by Night Bear in Medicine Lodge during the Sun Dance described above all describe Vision Quests. Not only is the pattern repeated within the work, the entire work itself takes the form of a Vision Quest. Storm seeks to duplicate that experience by building a Medicine Lodge--Seven Arrows--and inviting the reader in.

As a Medicine Teacher, Storm takes great pains to provide the reader with the necessary tools to interpret the experience of the Medicine Lodge. Storm's purpose explains why there is such an elaborate and extraordinary introductory section. In this section the reader is educated in the Way of Learning as practiced by the Native American. The first passage of the introduction, "The Pipe," serves as an invocation. The remaining passages consist of stories, their interpretations, and rhetorical explanations of these interpretations. The initiation "separates" a reader from the way in which he or she might normally approach the literary work. It is the first step of a ritual conducted by Storm.

To emphasize again, Storm intends Seven Arrows, "from beginning to end," to be a "teaching story . . . a story of the Sun Dance Way" (Storm 11). The techniques of the novel, oral tradition, and allegory are all used not simply to depict the mythic pattern of the Vision Quest but to recreate

the pattern as an experience for the reader. In Night Bear's Sun Dance rite it is Night Bear's stories that comprise the experience phase of the Vision Quest. The twenty-five sections of Seven Arrows comprise the experience phase of a vision Quest for the reader.

Previous discussion has examined how Storm uses structure and technique to create an organic relationship between the reader and Seven Arrows that directs the reader's perception not only of the text, but of reality as well. Storm tells us that "as we learn, we always change, and so does our perceiving. This changed perception becomes a new teacher inside of each of us" (20).

Our perception is changed by experiencing stories. "Whenever we hear a story," Storm tells us, "it is as if we were physically walking down a particular path that it has created for us" (16). Within Seven Arrows, the Medicine Men create new paths for the other characters by telling the Teaching Stories. By walking down these paths, the characters gain new ways of looking at their reality. Storm is creating a similar path with Seven Arrows. Just as Night Bear stands at the center of his Medicine Lodge, Storm stands at the center of Seven Arrows, changing our perceiving with the Medicine of his story.

Storm is not attempting to record personal experience, but to create it. Seven Arrows serves as a teacher that guides the reader on a "vision quest" of his or her own. For Storm, a mythic translation of experience is not an end,

but a means. What Storm reconstructs for the reader is not the reality of personal experience, but of collective experience. This reality is not depicted in the pages of Seven Arrows. It occurs in the reader's mind as a product of storm's artistry. Certainly many literary works of the Western tradition achieve the same end, but not nearly so directly.

Richard Chase notes that "in primitive culture myth is a relatively clearly definable activity instead of being diffused and obscured by other activities as it is in our culture" (246). In the "primitive culture" of the Native American, there is no dichotomy between reality and myth or between physical and spiritual reality. Myth is reality, a "clearly definable activity" in Seven Arrows because it is not expressed through a complex system of encoded symbols and patterns as in Campbell's "creative mythology." Storm's mythic expressions do not convey personal experience; they convey reality and thus create experience, like the rites of traditional mythology, not like the translations of personal experience in creative mythology. It is this directness that brings Seven Arrows so close to the "secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation" (Hero 3).



## Chapter Six: Unity

In the final section of Seven Arrows, Green Fire Mouse, the last Medicine Teacher to appear in the book, rides in a pick-up truck with his grandchildren and tells them a story. It is a teaching story. It is the story of "a beautiful young maiden" who is "the symbol of the way, the new lodge, like in the story of the buffalo wives. The name of the story," Green fire Mouse tells his grandchildren, "is Snow White" (371).

"On the literal level," Larson notes, "the final section of Seven Arrows is a triumph of the white man's literal world" (Fiction 125). And so it seems, on the surface. "The seven arrows!" exclaims one grandchild. "Wow Grandpaw, you gotta be kidding. Nobody talks about the seven arrows any more" (371). But Green Fire Mouse explains that the Medicine Teachings of the People, known collectively as the Seven Arrows, can all be found in the white man's story of "Snow White." As he tells this story, he infuses it with the symbols and meanings of his culture and explains these teachings to his grandchildren. His version of "Snow White" may have the images and form of the white man's culture, but the symbolic meanings and the techniques of the storytelling are those of the Native American culture. Just such a description can easily be applied to Seven Arrows itself.

An ancient man, the great Dakota medicine man Black Elk, tells us that "the Power of the World always works in circles" (Neihardt 164). A modern man, Richard Chase, notes that "we usually overestimate the difference between

primitive culture and our own" (246). Hyemeyohsts Storm, a man of both worlds, writes that "the entire world, and everything in it . . . can teach you much . . . the songs, the bibles, the cities, and the dreams. Everything upon the earth and in the heavens is a mirror for the people" (371). Seven Arrows represents the closing of a great circle, a joining of two literary traditions that Storm unifies between the covers of his book.

Seven Arrows is different not because it is a departure from Western literary tradition, but because it is a union of two traditions that transcends pre-existing literary forms. Storm uses the novel form as a basic literary model but exceeds all guiding limits of the conventional form. He creates a unique synthesis of visual and textual elements that replicate many of the elements of oral performance. Storm uses allegorical technique to recreate for the reader the Native American's world where physical and spiritual realities are one. Storm uses the reconstructed world of the Native American as a Sun Dance, a mythic rite that teaches the reader a new concept of reality.

Seven Arrows does not represent the "triumph of the white man's literal world." Rather, it represents the triumph of union. Over and over again, Storm teaches the reader that reality is unified, that there is an essential commonality of all things that, once realized, allows one to understand that change is not destruction, but growth. That is the lesson learned by Jumping Mouse; it is the lesson Green Fire Mouse

seeks to teach his grandchildren; and it is the central theme of Seven Arrows. Rather than simply convey this theme, Seven Arrows embodies it. It addresses many levels at once because, for Storm, all levels are one. There is no separation, only harmony.

"Do not be afraid," the Voice called to him. "Hang on to the Wind and Trust." Jumping Mouse did. He closed his Eyes and hung on to the Wind and it carried him Higher and Higher. Jumping Mouse Opened his Eyes and they were Clear, and the Higher he Went the Clearer they Became. Jumping Mouse Saw his Old Friend upon a Lily Pad on the Beautiful Medicine Lake. It was the Frog. "You have a New Name," called the Frog. "You are Eagle!" (85)



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