Shading in the Landscape:
Framing the Novels of Frank Waters

by

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Let's See What It's All About

It was such an interesting place. Such a beautiful place.

Thirty years ago my parents headed west. For different reasons they left their urban lives in New York and Philadelphia and ended up in Santa Fe—the mountain village, the artist retreat, the hippie heaven. My mother had followed the suggestion of friends from home and decided it the town to try life there as a ceramic artist. My father, politically active and liberal minded, sought a job as a district attorney and found the beauty of Santa Fe more accessible than the more remote towns of Durango and Taos. After a while in Santa Fe, my father set up his own law practice; my mother built her own ceramic studio.

They had both driven west attracted by the intimacy of the life that surrounded this small town. The serene remoteness of the New Mexican town, the tranquil peaks and valleys, must have seemed a welcome relief from their metropolitan cities, which had been declining steadily since the early seventies under the weight of a country at war, and the increasing worries of an urban life: rampant crime, economic stagnation,
and reactionary racial tension. In the open desert landscape of New Mexico, however, my parents could create their own spaces free and apart from the congestion, noise, and concrete of the cities. They could seek out opportunity and cultural harmony in these small towns. If it didn’t work out, my parents believed, at least Santa Fe would be an interesting place to work for a while. It was easier then: they could find friends at lawyer’s conferences and crafts fairs or the food co-op. They could live outside of urban development. My father first lived on a ranch on the outlying plains of town. My mother pitched a tent, while she built her own house in the hills.

They followed in the footsteps of generations of East coasters, Anglos mostly, who had struck West years before with varied purposes – in search of gold, land, and wealth; or cures for a draining illness; or new cultural foundations, sources of artistic inspiration. Some stayed for a short time. Some for a very long time. Many, like my parents, stayed on to raise children, in ways unlike their own urban upbringing. In my childhood, Santa Fe remained a small town full of adventurers, artists, and hippies, who tried to stay true to the unique charm of the town they first knew by protecting and celebrating the unique cultures and enchantments of the place. Along with Taos, the Santa Fe community committed to upholding the influential intertwining histories of socially conscious artistic creation.

The Santa Fe of today is different, however, from my first memories of it. We no longer live on dirt roads or know everyone in town. The remaining free wanderers are now psychologists, dentists, and lawyers. Even so, many still are active preservers of the place’s many beauties. Many still fight to limit development—a gut response to the rapid growth of the past three decades. And though it is no longer the small town
my parents found so attractive, it retains a great deal of its charm. We still think of Santa Fe as home, even though to many it is a world-class vacation destination.

Santa Fe and Taos have always relied on their reputations as vibrant artistic and culturally active communities. Today, that reputation sustains the economies of both towns. Santa Fe is the third largest art market in the country, after New York and San Francisco,\(^1\) and the wilds that surround it attract tourists looking for places to ski, hike the forests, paint the beautiful desert, experience Native American cultures, or find solace in the untouched nature. Above all, it is the power of sweeping landscape and longstanding cultural heritage that continue to encourage hundreds to make their way to Northern New Mexican small long-established towns. These migrations, those of my parents and their generation, undoubtedly find their true beginnings in the paths of artists and writers who began to imagine New Mexico as the real America from its conception as a state in 1912 and into the twentieth century.

\(^1\)According to the Santa Fe, New Mexico Convention and Visitors Bureau website: “Santa Fe has long been a center for arts and culture. Due to sales, it now ranks as the country's third largest art market with nearly 300 galleries and dealers. There also are more than a dozen major museums showcasing an array of art, culture, history and traditions.” Santa Fe New Mexico Convention and Visitors Bureau, Information About Santa Fe for Tourists and Visitors, Available: http://santafe.org/Visiting_Santa_Fe/About_Santa_Fe/index.html2008.
Frank Waters, a young man from Colorado Springs, happened to wander into New Mexico in the early 1930s. He found there established and thriving communities of artists and writers. Faced with the hardships of the depression, the arts community had maintained a special vibrance, a pulsing life spirit. Waters was greatly attracted to the artists and writers he met in Taos and he was also especially drawn to the pueblo communities that dotted the Northern New Mexico area, to which he felt strangely well accustomed. Waters’ time spent in New Mexico exemplifies the lives of many who discovered inspiration in the untouched mountains and American Indian Pueblos of the early twentieth century. He first lived in the mountains of northern New Mexico, attending Pueblo ceremonial dances and frequenting the rustic bar-halls of the small Southwestern towns, a collection of Hispanic villagers, Pueblo Indians, and

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2 A note on terminology: In this essay, I refer mainly to the Pueblo and Navajo Indians of New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. I make no claims for any other Native American group. As Taos Pueblo Indians designate themselves as “Native American Indians,” many of the legal and scholarly papers I read refer to them as Indian, and, in their writing, both R.C. Gordon-McCutchan and Frank Waters refer to the groups as either the Tribe or as Taos Pueblo Indians, I decided to refer to the Native American Indian groups addressed in the essay as either, American Indian, Indian, or Pueblo Indian to ease any confusion. At times, I use Native American if the source does. I use these terms with every sensitivity to the nature of their histories and I hope any reader will understand my choice.
other wandering men and women from across the country (Waters Time). In 1938, with the help of Mabel Dodge and Tony Lujan, who lured some of the most important artists and writers to New Mexico, Waters moved to Taos. That move changed the pace of his wandering life, as he developed a profound desire to understand and capture in his writing the beauty and power of New Mexico.

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Waters has been an elusive subject to research. Known, for the most part, only to New Mexicans, his writing has been left undiscovered by the rest of the country. There exists in academic scholarship, despite his prolific collection of writing, only scattered reflections on the events of his life. Hidden within his own works, however, are profound moments of truth and perspective about his life and his journeys across the States. The most complete narrative of his life comes from his memoir, *Of Time and Change*, published posthumously, as well as from a collection of essays compiled by long-time friend and scholar Vine Deloria Jr. Both assemble Waters’ life through a collection of personal recollections. The memoir weaves together portraits Waters’ wrote of those he befriended while in New Mexico. He incorporates, unfortunately, only a brief sketch of his own life before Taos. Deloria’s collection of essays, *Frank

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3At the time that Dodge arrived in New Mexico she was technically Mabel Ganson Evans Dodge Sterne, and still involved in her third marriage with artist Maurice Sterne. She would later marry Taos Indian, Tony Lujan, to become Mabel Dodge Luhan. For the sake of consistency and clarity, I continue to refer to her as Dodge, and to Tony Lujan by his last name. When Mabel took Tony’s last name, she Americanized the Spanish Lujan to become Luhan, presumably so American friends would pronounce her last name correctly. Though, as she told Waters, she used Lujan for her post-office box, but she published her memoirs and novels under Mabel Dodge Luhan, so I use *Luhan* for all in-text citations and bibliographic references Frank Waters, *Of Time and Change: A Memoir* (Denver: MacMurray & Beck, 1998). 48.
Waters: Man and Mystic, enhances Waters’ memoir by including memories of his childhood and early life. This small insight into his life, though brief and selective, has proved very helpful in developing an idea of Waters’ early life. This is especially true, considering that little variation, or distinctive insight, exists in the biographical narratives written about Waters’ early life.

The critical works by Waters’ scholars Thomas J. Lyons, Charles Adams, and Alexander Blackburn, are all interesting, definitive collections of criticism and anthologies of his work. They all, however, incorporate similar vague narratives of Waters’ early life. There has only been one short critical biography of Waters’ life, written in 1969, by Martin Bucco, which is perhaps responsible for the indefinite story. All repeat the beginning: Born under the shadow of Pikes Peak, to a Southern white mother and part-Indian father, Waters life was a series of repeated attempts to unite the two essentially disparate parts. His life becomes legend in its simplicity. Fortunately, his experiences in Taos, however, are slightly better documented in his memoir and by Lois Rudnick, Marta Wiegle and Kyle Fiore, and Lynn Cline, whose biographies and critical essays about the Santa Fe and Taos literary colonies see him as an active and prolific participant.

I repeat Waters’ early narrative, because, in light of a more extensive archival project, it is what Waters recognizes as an accurate representation of his life. Waters’ narrative that he created for himself is the central way to understand his role as an American author and his own literary and personal aspirations. For an overview, his words paint a much clearer picture than anyone else’s could. His expressions, despite the fallacies of memory, are honest assessments of his work. The essays bring readers
closer than ever to understanding his life. “There’s an intimacy,” writes New Mexico author Rudolfo Anaya, “as we hear Frank’s voice…In every single page we are with Frank as he moves back and forth in a time that shaped the lives of the Taos artists—a time that was also shaping the life and literature of Frank Waters” (Waters *Time* xii). The essays work simultaneously to explore Waters’ own interpretations of his life and his relationships and feelings about the community that shaped him. In many ways, his interpretations of cause and effect appear less circumspect than the interpretations of his critics.

* * *

Waters was born Frank Joseph Waters in 1902 into a world of rapid change. His ancestry illuminates the history of the American frontier as his parents’ stories reflect the story of American westward travel at the turn of the century. Like many families who left the diminished South after the Civil War, Waters’ Southern family moved west to Colorado in the early 1870s. His grandfather built up his prosperity in Colorado Springs until he lost most of his fortune investing in gold mines in a small gold rush several decades after the more lucrative Colorado Gold Rush.

Waters’ father, moved to Colorado around the same time. Waters claims his father to be of part Cheyenne Indian heritage, quite possible as Colorado was home to many Cheyenne prior to the influx of Anglos during the gold rush. His father’s Indian heritage and his activity in the other Native American communities that surrounded Colorado Springs greatly affected Waters’ early life. His father often took him to the Ute community in the mountains surrounding Colorado Springs and Waters’ recalls a
visit to a Navajo trading post in New Mexico. These visits were his first introduction to the spirituality and mysticism of the American Indian that he would later revere in his work. The thought that “four sacred mountains….places of power from which the land and people drew life and energy,” encircled his home in Colorado Springs, was one his first realizations that the land possessed a deep essence underneath that could be more than significant to many people (Waters Time 5). In his later stories, Waters often connects these experiences to an understanding that under the physical human world there existed an intangible world in which everything, every place, mountain, and spirit was interconnected. He describes a transformative change that occurred one day at his grandfather’s mines near Pike’s Peak. While playing in the mountains, he suddenly understood the composition of the “millions of grains of sand, which were mysteriously and precisely fitted together into one mighty, single whole—a sacred place of power, as the Utes regarded it” (Time 5). It was something he claims to have never forgotten and a theme that seems to have embedded itself, not only into his memoir, but also as he believes, into most of his life’s work.

Since leaving Colorado Springs in the early twenties, Waters had spent years traveling throughout the states, working odd jobs, and writing novels about his early wandering and home life in Colorado. By 1938, he had enjoyed little-to-no attention for his earliest books, most of them under contract with the once profitable New York publisher Horace Liveright. As he recalls later, his first books claim inspiration from both Joseph Conrad’s fin-de-siècle adventures and the popular dime-story Westerns of his time. His earliest stories reveal traces of the mythical romanticization of the primitive of both genres. Waters’ first novel The Lizard Woman, (published first as
Fever Pitch in 1926 but restored to Waters’ intended title later,) is a short, dramatic narrative about the experience of one man in the desert and the timeless universality Waters found in the border landscape between the United States and Mexico. The themes that arise in this novel, about the spiritual association between people with the land, would go on to shape some of Waters’ best prose. His later novels, People of the Valley, The Man Who Killed the Deer, and The Woman at Otowi Crossing, although reminiscent of his earlier inspiration, tell a more unified and less violent story of his America.

Waters’ time in New Mexico is arguably the most influential period in his life and writing. He describes his wandering time before coming to New Mexico to have been a “world of constant change” and it was not until his return to Taos in the late thirties that he “[felt] in touch again with the natural world” (Time 18). His approach to writing changed dramatically after befriending Dodge and Lujan. They both greatly influenced the themes and subjects of Waters’ work by introducing him to the literary and historical frameworks, which would later shape his most influential stories. Lujan was Waters’ mentor and good friend and introduced him to the world of Taos Pueblo, granting him access to Pueblo-only events. Dodge and Waters connected immediately in their search for spiritual authenticity. She induced him to expand and explore in his work, connections between American Indian and ancient Eastern philosophies, thus beginning Waters’ lifelong quest to unite the two in his writing (Rudnick Utopian 178). He would come to know both Lujan and Dodge intimately, traveling with them to New York and later to Mexico. He began to see life and his work through their way of seeing—part cultured bohemian, part spiritual Pueblo Indian. In the time he spent
in the Dodge/Lujan home, he produced several of his most respected novels about the people and the land of New Mexico. In 1942, while living in the Tony House, Waters created one of his most mature and timeless novels, a work that understood fully only through its associations to Dodge and Lujan and the traditions they carried with them.

The Man Who Killed the Deer is, in Waters’ own words, an exploration of “a universal wholeness and invisible unity...that developed the differences between the Indian’s spiritual and Anglo’s pragmatic modes of thought” (Time 14). Committed to the sympathetic treatment of the present day struggles of the traditional Indian, it saw limited, but positive, attention at its first release and a revival in the 1970s. Upon first edition in 1942, John Chamberlain of the New York Times cited the novel “as true an Indian story as any we have ever had” (Chamberlain). This is significant praise, when one considers the earlier publication of Oliver La Farge’s 1926 novel, Laughing Boy. It signals an increasing American desire to know and respect the Indian perspective, albeit only when written by a white author. Unlike his contemporaries who saw that Indian culture could never survive in contact with American society, Waters explored the possibility that there could be a healthy balance of native culture with American society. The Man Who Killed the Deer does not, by any means, however, escape the romanticization of the Indian “Other” explicit in his peers’ modernist literature. The novel depends on the desire of the Anglo to achieve an authentic spiritual self through a connection with the Indian to explicate the essential connection between the Pueblo people and their sacred land.

Theme and subject repeat themselves throughout Waters entire life. The Man Who Killed the Deer, an organic creation for Waters, depended on Taos Pueblo for its
source. Yet, the story also reproduces themes and techniques that he began exploring in his earliest novel, *The Lizard Woman*. In the novel, Waters suggests dichotomies between Indian and Anglo ways of seeing, and directs attention toward his intuition in the creative process of the novel. Reunification of spirit and land and an emphasis on the presence of a universal consciousness developed in the progression of his works until his very last novel, his memoir published posthumously in 1998.

Waters’ story and his impressions as an author find source and substance in the stories of Dodge and Lujan, who built the Taos Writers’ and Artists’ colonies to legendary stature. Dodge brought with her the money and will to boost the nascent arts community in New Mexico to national fame, capitalizing on the well-established, preexisting Indian and Hispanic cultures. Lujan was the key to Taos Pueblo, a sacred and secretive community that inspired all of the artists and writers who came to Taos. Waters, who came to spiritual and authorial maturity in Taos, owes much of his best work to the influences of both Dodge and Lujan.

This project aims to introduce Waters’ underappreciated work to American literature. His later novels suggest a historically rare, but incredibly significant, view that traditional Indians could exist, peacefully and productively, in American society without losing the cultural identity that delineates them as true Indians. Even though his writing and use of language is not particularly innovative in aesthetic or formal concerns, it is exceptional in its ability to simultaneously define the importance of a protected space for Indian culture to thrive within American society and the necessity of a balance between traditional custom and modernity, in order to save the remnants of Indian culture. By inversing conventions, those of the Western and the historical
epic novel, Waters creates a new form of American literature that both questions the traditional power dynamics of society and reinforces the power of American literature to fortify or weaken the roles of the colonizer and the colonized. I intend to place his novels within a historical and literary framework that explores not only the profound influence of New Mexico’s merging histories, but also how he, in turn, challenged those histories to ultimately produce a different post-colonial native narrative. In his more than twenty works of fiction and non-fiction, Waters revealed with increasing clarity his concern for the interactions between native and land locating him in a historical and literary context that uncovers an intense American desire to truly know and understand the powerful attraction to the American landscape.
To understand how Frank Waters came to know New Mexico, it is essential to understand the story of Mabel Dodge Luhan, who built the Taos arts community out of obscurity and provided a place for Waters and many others to grow and write. Her connections to Taos are best understood in light of the historical and personal forces that drove her West originally: a past like many turn-of-the-century intellectuals and artists. She first transgressed her own boundaries between the constraints of home and the possibilities of the open Southwest, after spending several years in Europe and New York. She saw New Mexico at its very beginnings as an American outpost, five years after it entered the union and more than half a century before my parents made their own ways West.

When Dodge left New York in the winter of 1917, she left behind a modern New York and headed for an obscure native New Mexico. She left a modernity made tangible by the efforts of the bohemians in New York City. The efforts to escape the Victorian banality and structure had opened a free but confusing world of ambiguity and anxiety for Dodge (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds
142). Her life in New York, once exciting and liberating, soon felt trivial, out of her control, and inauthentic. It lacked a sense of coherence and spiritual authenticity. When she first arrived in New Mexico she found clarity in the mountains and sunlight. She felt a wholeness in the presence of New Mexico’s living cultures, which preexisted and could, it seemed to her, outlast modern American culture. They opened up her tormented mind to the possibility of spiritual “renewal” through communion with the land (Luhan *Edge* 12). The light and cultures of that stunning landscape would seem the antidote to her privileged but rootless past. She came at first, intending only a brief vacation to cure her ailing mind, but the “fresh, beautiful world” that she found convinced her to remain for the rest of her life (*Edge* 12).

Her primary incentives to make the trip west, to alleviate the pressures of her city life, appear analogous to the motivations of those suffering from tuberculosis who came to the high desert climate to alleviate their own pain. The climate offered a place for both consumptive patient and tense city-dweller to inhale a deep breath of fresh air. In Dodge’s memoir, *Edge of Taos Desert*, she recalls a landscape “reduced to such simple elements,” which gave her needed respite from the disorder of the rapid and disorienting growth of the industrial city (*Edge* 10). The simplicity of the landscape broke dramatically from the fragmented confusions of the modern city. It was an answer to both the repressive conventions of society as well as the irrepressible anxieties of new modern freedoms. In comparison to the disorder, lack of stability, and fragmentation of a growing industrial society, the Native American and Hispanic cultures of New Mexico were living examples of a spiritually authentic and unified life. For Dodge, and the others who came, the cultures offered inspiration
and peace in light of the insecurities of American modernity. Taking inspiration in those who had “maintained their cultural integrity for centuries,” moderns began to understand a new form of this authenticated American identity as attainable and reasonable (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 144).

The short time Dodge spent active in New York in the bohemian beginnings of American modernism, she found herself as a prominent cultural figure and patron of the arts. She delineated a space where her contemporaries could break from the piety and purity of their Victorian predecessors, by embracing a lifestyle of gender equality and liberated sexuality. Dodge embodied the New Woman who broke from the empty propriety or corseted fashions of their upper-class Victorian heritage (Stansell 27-34). Many in her generation reacted as she did, with feelings of both liberation and psychological disaffection for the social consequences of the rapid industrial transformation of the turn of the century (Reed Jr. 108; Lears; Stansell). On the other hand, Victorians had responded to this rapid growth and new wealth with an uptight severity that delineated separate spheres for women and men, reinforcing and supporting the patriarchal relationships of a Puritan tradition, and creating strict gender codes that defined a true woman’s place to be in the home and a man’s role to be the provider and symbolic protector of his wife and family (Stansell 27). As they began to break into a predominantly male bohemia, for these new women and especially for Dodge, severing the cultural and social power of Victorian society, became both a personal and political act.

Dodge’s life before her entrance into New York society in 1913 had been a series of moves to disconnect herself from her confining upper class family heritage.
She had spent her childhood in an elaborate Victorian mansion in Buffalo, New York with parents she describes as distant and unfeeling, overly concerned with beauty and order, but who lacked psychological depth or substance. She perceived her mother as “too good a housekeeper” to leave anything to “fortuitous chance” or to let any life arise in its own unchanged form (Luhan "Background" 7). In 1879, she began her life in a culture that stressed the importance of propriety, purity, and Christian morality. As a young woman, she found little meaning in her society’s concerns with conspicuous material representation and the protection of the delicate nature of women. According to Dodge’s biographer Lois Palken Rudnick, in Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman New Worlds, Dodge never fully identified with the Victorian models of womanhood, heroines “who sat on piano stools until they fainted” (Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 16). In her early life, she lived within the femininity defined for her, though she later confessed to a profound sense of idleness and unease ("Background" 12).

Dodge is best understood through her relationships and her travels, which all marked significant turning points in her life and helped to explicate how she came to find the Southwest as the key to an authentic self. Her journey to self-awareness and anti-Victorian desires began on a trip to France as a teenager, where she fell in love with sixteen-year-old Violet Shillito, and together they learned about a more substantive interior life outside of Victorian convention ("Background" 34-37). The superficiality of her home became more apparent after her return. She developed an interest in men only for the amusement they gave her, marrying her first husband, Karl Evans, not for love or passion, but to relieve her sense of ennui and the residual
dullness of a repressive childhood ("Background" 41-43; "European" 50). Evans died soon after the wedding, leaving Dodge twenty-two years old with one son, John (Luhan "European" 59). The restrictions of Dodge’s life left her on the verge of a breakdown, prompting her to leave home for Europe in 1904. On the boat, she met her second husband, Edwin Dodge. They traveled Europe together and eventually attempted a life as expatriates in Italy. In her villa, Dodge could act out any fantasy she pleased. She entertained European and American artists and intellectuals, including Carl Van Vechten, Gertrude Stein, and her brother Leo Stein. All had a profound influence on her interpretations of art and literature, as she had an impact on their work (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 48-50). At the time of her return to the States in 1912, she was twenty-five, disillusioned with romantic fantasy, and quite ready to be done with Victorian life.

When Dodge returned to New York City, unhappy in her marriage and her life choices, she found a flourishing bohemian community with which she could break from the shallow “genteel” culture and disparaging repressions of her parents. She was one of many women who came to exemplify the “New Woman,” a status that meant both empowerment and liberation (Stansell). Though Dodge “never really self-identified as a feminist” according to Rudnick, “she certainly was a ‘new woman’ in some very important respects” ("Mabel Dodge"). Like the other “new women,” she found the possibilities for sexual freedom and gender equality in the efforts of the bohemians. For Dodge, this community, which attempted to imbed meaning into art and literature and which allowed upper-class women a cultural power above the symbolic power they held in Victorian culture, created the necessary space in which
to finally break free from her own internal repressions. As a cultural leader and active member of the moderns’ society, Dodge gained great cultural power and became an emblem of the *fin-de-siècle* transformation. However, this liberation was not without consequences for both Dodge and her generation. Eventually the excess freedom led to questions of the true nature of an American identity. These confusions plagued Dodge and would ultimately lead her to the Southwest, where she would learn to resolve these unanswered contradictions.

Beginning in the 1890s, bohemian moderns had begun to question and act out against the overwhelming political and social power that the Victorian elite held at the turn of the century. The Victorian upper-class influence had filled culture, art, and literature with ideas of feminine purity and religious morality. Moderns felt this cultural output to lack substance—to be matter with little meaning, to create beautiful houses with no interior inspiration. In response, as Christine Stansell addresses in her comprehensive study *American Moderns*, the moderns “created the first full-bodied alternative to an established cultural elite, a milieu that brought outsiders and their energies into the very heart of the American intelligentsia” (3). Moderns emerged, not only from the wealthy upper classes but also from new immigrants and from working-class New Yorkers, all of who were motivated to capitalize on the new freedoms offered them. These bohemians saw themselves as intellectuals, a term which “denoted professionals who supported themselves through some vocation in arts and letters” (Stansell 43). Under the work of these intellectuals and activists, unions prospered and the publishing industry was imbued with new beliefs that mass-market literature could reach all levels of society (154-55).
attempts, to fill culture with meaning and purpose, they merged politics and art, setting the stage for a society of middle-class urban elites destined to make both profound cultural innovations and social reforms (Stansell 150-51). Dodge embodied and emboldened this culture clash during her time in Greenwich Village by embracing a space for a modern marriage of political action with artistic involvement.

Dodge encouraged in everyone who came to her salon, a belief that life could be art, and that art had the profound power to be life, as she brought together a myriad of people from every borough and background with goals to discuss, understand, and influence an assortment of cultural and social subjects and ideas. The initial yearning for a connection between real life and art sprung from, what Stansell suggests to be anarchist beliefs in “a self whose creative powers were unleashed by revolutionary ferment” (151). By facilitating “fascinations with ‘real life’ and reform sympathies” bohemians attracted the country’s attention to the struggles of immigrants, laborers, and union organizers (154). Journalists, publishers, and authors took advantage of the growing power of “free expression,” creating and marketing a literature that “claimed an aesthetic expansiveness at once political and emotional” (147). Most importantly, the bohemians created possibilities for both men and women to express themselves outside of Victorian conventions in culturally, politically, and sexually liberated ways.

Dodge’s salon was an especially important center of bohemian political and cultural organization. The salon she kept was likely influenced by Gertrude Stein’s own salon in Paris where artists and intellectuals constructed forms of both European and American Modernism. Rudnick suggests that Dodge recognized in the New York
bohemian revolution, “the same kind of psychologically and aesthetically liberating forces she found in Gertrude Stein…postimpressionism, anarchism, feminism…all proclaimed the power of the individual to shape the self and environment in terms of an inner vision” (Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 64). The salon space, therefore, became a physical expression of “an implicit belief in a new space for the sexes, where metaphorical brothers and sisters might carry on ‘life without a father,’ a phrase of …Stein’s that could stand as an epitaph for a generation” (Stansell 7). In this space, American bohemians would be the first to explore “the benefits of an unrestricted market for cultural goods (in their case, a market free of censorship), the opening of the literary profession outsiders, the creation of a new public, the diversification of subjects” (Stansell) 149. Her salon, a place of cultural creation and gender equality, became the place in Greenwich Village where modern intellectuals could investigate the inherent power of art and literature to transform the hierarchies of society.

Dodge became deeply involved in this new form of cultural production, she followed along the paths laid by the earliest bohemians to subvert the strong cultural power held by Victorian society, perceiving that authority to reside in the influences of what seemed the antithesis to modern womanhood: the Victorian matriarch. For many women, like Dodge, the Victorian matriarch, who had once been the champion of the woman’s suffrage movement and the beginnings of feminist reform, had done little to assure the political and cultural power that women fought for. Instead, these women of privileged heritage reinforced the existing gender restrictions of Victorian society, promoting the moral superiority of their class and their roles as the guardians
of that pure, refined, white morality. This form of feminism, antithetical to the goals of the modernists, merely reinforced and widened the Victorian range of influence in the political and social spheres. By rejecting this feminism, Dodge, and other “New Women” rejected the objectifying ideas that a woman’s power sprung from her role as the emblem of white superiority and purity.

For those artists and writers who rebelled against these power dynamics of the early twentieth century, the Victorian was considered especially dangerous due to her feminizing influence, an immense threat to the inherent masculinization of modernity. Modern conceptions of masculinity tried to subvert, replace, and redirect the concerns of the Victorian era—Christian morality, female confinement, propriety, temperance, racial purity and white superiority—towards the more masculinized preoccupations of modernity. Moderns were consumed by the influence of this modernity—“machines, speed, electricity, explosions, abstraction, autonomy of language, autonomy of paint, death of God, the divided self” as well as “the pressures of democracy and the claims of women” (Stansell 7). By the time Dodge arrived in New York, “Victorian feminine essentialism” had also become antithetical to the progression of culture and art, as it blocked access to the cross-cultural and multi-racial appropriation that would later define the 1920s (Douglas 295).

For Dodge and her contemporaries in New York City, the conception of what it meant to be “American,” to create an American art, to represent American identity abroad, was rapidly changing. Soon Americans would become obsessed with the term “American,” for its “imperial suggestion of an intoxicating and irresistible identity windswept into coherence by the momentum of destiny” (Douglas 3). At the time she
arrived in New York in 1912, moderns were becoming fully enmeshed in the process of expanding their conceptions of an American identity. Bohemians responded to and incorporated the cultural effects of immigration and African-American migration from the South. The moderns explored the notion of an inclusive identity with an integration of all these voices, under a premise of gender equality and multi-cultural incorporation. When Dodge left town, four years after she arrived, she left behind a changed city, charged with the artistic and political creations of liberated women and men.

By the time of Dodge’s departure, however, the cultural freedoms that defined the decades before World War One were soon fleeting realities. As America entered the War, the new Wilson administration began to enforce new restrictions on the free expression and social reforms of the bohemian and modern lifestyle. Fueled by rising suspicions of a country at war, political subversion, ethnic difference, and individual freedoms all were viewed as dangerous to democracy and American safety. Victorian moral censorship returned with a vengeance to crush the promising freedoms of the bohemian revitalization of cultural expression and political justice (Stansell 316-18). These new restrictions, coupled with the inadequacies and insecurities of a liberated life, compelled many moderns, including (and most dramatically) Dodge, to seek out other outlets with which to deal with the feelings of impermanence and inauthenticity that plagued the modern world.

The modernists began to look outside of New York white bohemian society for solutions to their psychological disaffections with the social consequences of the
dilemmas of a modernity they had created (Lears). T.J. Jackson Lears, in his seminal study of this cultural period, introduces the idea that Dodge and her contemporaries “began half-consciously to perceive [modern culture’s] limitations and contradictions, its failure to live up to its claim of perpetual progress and perfect autonomy.” This…no doubt precipitated a “crisis of cultural authority” which individuals…experienced as feelings of inauthenticity. (qtd. in Reed Jr. 108)

They responded to the irregularities with an overwhelming psychic crises, virtually widespread among modernist artists and intellectuals. It filled their work with the fragmentations of society in abstract paintings and abstract letters. Gertrude Stein had earlier captured these abstractions in the portraits she wrote. One of which, Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia, had catapulted her into the spotlight of American postimpressionism with, of course, the invaluable promotion by Dodge herself, who introduced the book at the Armory Show of 1913.

Dodge became a leader in the promotion of this historical art opening, which introduced groundbreaking works of European postimpressionism to an American public that lagged greatly behind Europe, in their appreciation for the modernism of the early century (Douglas 180). The caché she Dodge gained in her involvement with the show, established Dodge in the eyes of New York bohemia, and encouraging her to embrace the notion that true freedom could be found through art (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 66-70). Four years later, however, after Dodge launched herself into the modernist spotlight, the negative anxieties of her modern life had begun to fully overwhelm the liberating effects. Since she had
moved to New York, she had not only promoted a free sexual life, but had acted upon it; she had first ended her second marriage, and then become involved in a very modern and emotional affair with the young John Reed (whose life, after Dodge, was immortalized in the film *Reds*). Later she married again, this time to Russian artist Maurice Sterne. Yet, the sexual freedom of these relationships only added to her confusion.

Soon, however, Dodge and the many other artists, writers, and intellectuals suffering the negative consequences of a liberated modernity began to explore other outlets of psychological stability. Those who had money left the city, the source, they thought, of their growing disaffections. Many fled to the battlefields of Europe, as the young Ernest Hemingway did, to help in someway with the war effort. As Stein later wrote, the War “forced…everyone [to be]…contemporary in act…contemporary in thought…in self-consciousness” (qtd. in Douglas 181). As Ann Douglas explains, in her study of the effects of modernism in New York politics and culture after the war, “By accelerating experience to crisis proportions, the war abbreviated the period of cultural lag, established instant assimilation a self-protective necessity and made the avant-garde, whether in the arts or technology, the mainstream” (181). Why, would these bohemians, who prided themselves on their positions outside the conventional, be drawn to a situation that would ultimately make their views the epitome of what it meant to be American? Lears describes their motivations and resulting consequences, which I feel the need to quote in full for its comprehensive understanding:

*The revaluation of primal irrationality was closely entwined with the widespread gropings toward “real life.”* Desperate quests for authentic
experience led often to the discovery of the “pristine savage” – uncivilized, uninhibited, and aggressive. The link between the fin-de-siècle fascination with primal, aggressive impulse and the emerging search for authenticity discloses one of the most important undercurrents in twentieth-century cultural history: the desire to recombine a fragmented self and re-create a problematic reality through aggressive action... (Lears 137-38)

For many, this meant finding therapeutic benefits in the tangles of war. It also meant finding a true American identity, by locating the authentic self outside of spaces that delineated American: the most appealing of which being native cultures that existed before any national American identity. Hemingway represented an essential character of primitive modernism, as writers located their lives “outside the modern, on the side of the ‘primitive;’ for them the ‘primitive’ [embodied] a green world of wholeness and authenticity elsewhere lost to modernization” (Daly 118). For many modernists of the city, this yearning towards the setting of the primitive exemplified a “militarist obsession with authenticity,” which eventually, as Lears observes, “became a circular and self-defeating quest for intense experience—a characteristic mode of adjustment to a secular culture of consumption. Reacting against therapeutic self-absorption, the cult of marital experience proved unable to transcend it” (Lears 138).

Dodge sought out a different, more peaceful alternative to the overwhelming anxieties of modern life, as she headed not towards the war, where the fragmentations and strictures of modern society were reinforced, but towards the unregulated, unstructured, lawless wilds of the American Southwest. The impulse of this direction
was regulated by the motivations to find harmony in that environment. Unlike those moderns who sought out the fragmentations of war, others, like Willa Cather, Oliver La Forge, Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and most dramatically Dodge, sought out the abstractions of a Southwestern landscape and the harmony of indigenous cultures as spiritual alternatives to their Victorian or metropolitan pasts. They were all searching for something that could ground them in a real American identity, what O’Keeffe would later term the “Great American Thing” (Corn 288).

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*Mabel Dodge’s Journey West*

When Mabel Dodge first arrived in the Southwest, she thought she had finally found the utopia she had always imagined. Her utopian reimaginings of the native’s cultures and organic beauty of New Mexico became the essential ingredients in the foundation of artist and writers colonies in Santa Fe and Taos. Whether or not Dodge had actually discovered her own utopia, she certainly encountered a place that would offer the therapeutic benefits that she had sought out. The psychological change she experienced in New Mexico is explicit in her memoir from the beginning as she recalls upon first encounter, “How good it felt! How *good* this fresh air, this clear simplicity” (Edge 10). Even the title of her novel, *Edge of Taos Desert: An Escape to Reality* underscores her belief that she had in fact found an escape from the limits of modern society and had instead found the *real* America at the rim of American society in the lights of the desert landscape and the spirits of the desert people.
Dodge had first decided to visit New Mexico at the proposal of her husband, Maurice Sterne, who she had originally sent to the Southwest because she needed a break from him and wasn’t ready to leave New York herself ("Movers" 183). She encouraged him to go, suggesting she had heard that there were “wonderful things to paint,” meaning very clearly Indians of the New Mexican desert. After Sterne left, an apparition of an Indian head came to her in a dream. Soon after, Sterne wrote to her encouraging her to try out Santa Fe. As she recalls, he wrote of her potential to rescue Indians from the patronizing attitudes of white society. With her cultural influence, he suggested, she had the ability to introduce American society to “other forms of civilization” besides their own, by bringing Indians back to Eastern cities to perform their dances, and cultures, for white audiences ("Movers" 185). This, and the idea that no one else went to the Southwest, intrigued Dodge (Edge 3). She set out for the Southwest, intending to return in a few weeks, but New Mexico finally felt like the home she had always longed for, and she was not going to give that up for anything else. From the moment she arrived, she resolutely left her past lives behind her.

Dodge’s exit from New York society was an active attempt to relieve herself from the accumulated muddle of modernity, and the complications of her unrestricted freedoms, which had steadily built up during her time in New York. She was one of those, according to Van Wyck Brooks, who “wished to throw off a civilization that was buried under accretions of objects, invented, or collected” (qtd. in Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 144). An essential part of the transition from the complex to the simple, for Dodge, was the literal dumping of the cultural creations that she had brought with her from New York.
Once in New Mexico, anxious to be already in Santa Fe, Dodge impulsively decided to get off the train and motor the rest of the way, forgetting her literary magazines and European newspapers on her seat; she left with them the residual psychological ramifications and productions of the new modern society (Edge 9). It was a small, physical act, but it represented a life’s transition from the dustiness of a modern life to the clarity of a life defined not by words but by spiritual essence. (Later she would learn how the Pueblo Indians understood the power of silence.) At that moment, however, her unburdening represented an unconscious rejection of the bohemian life defined by “‘words, words, mountains of words,’” in a society where it was “reading, most of all, that gave bohemians their sense of themselves as artists and convictions about modernity” (Stansell 160). By leaving behind the cultural products that bound her to the New York City bohemians, by discarding the magazines of her peers, Dodge abruptly severed her most significant tie to Bohemian life.

At the depot, Dodge discarded any reminiscences of her unraveling bohemian mind. Symbolically, then, she freed herself from attachments to a depressing modernity, leaving behind the “staleness and the dull, enduring humans all dressed in browns and blacks, with their grimy handkerchiefs in pockets gritty with the deposit of their dull lives!” and introducing her mind to a new society in an unimaginably simplified space (Edge 9). Freeing herself from the machines and speed, the electricity and explosions of a modern and growing city, Dodge found in New Mexico a surprisingly open and clean landscape. Buried deep beneath the “Red Earth” described by poet Alice Corbin Henderson—herself a 1916 transplant from
Chicago—and beneath the simple adobe houses, tall piñon dotted hills, and crisp clean mountain air, lay a thriving cultural history.

It was not an Anglo history nor did it depend on conventional contemporary cultural practices. As Henderson conveys in her poem “Red Earth” about Santa Fe:

This valley is not ours, nor these mountains,
Nor the names we give them—they belong,
They, and this sweep of sun-washed air,
Desert and hill and crumbling earth,
To those who have lain here long years
And felt the soak of the sun
Through the red sand and crumbling rock… (39)

This was an alternative American history that arose, not from an industrial history, but from what they saw to be ethereal rooted organic cultures whose bones were an essential part of the beauty of the place. In the land one could trace connections to the earliest to the American Indian pueblos, which predated the Spanish conquistadors and their enterprise, with its own unique cultural past, by a thousand years.

When Dodge arrived in Santa Fe, she found an already thriving community of artists and writers, Anglo transplants from elsewhere in the country. She was not first, but became the most energetic contributor to the arts colonies in New Mexico. Henderson, in fact, had already given prominence to the area, having previously found Santa Fe as a place where she could relieve her symptoms of tuberculosis (Cline 21). With her husband William Penshallow Henderson, and the artists and writers who joined them, she found dramatic inspiration in New Mexican cultures,
eventually attracting national attention to the Santa Fe arts community. Her husband, a noted architect, became respected for his paintings of the Pueblo Indians and Mexican Penitentes. Her own volume of New Mexico poems, “a radical book for its time,” went practically unappreciated by her contemporaries, until scholars, like Lois Palken Rudnick, began to recognize her important contribution to modern poetry in the diversity of her forms, subjects, and voices, including those of native Hispanic and Indian New Mexicans (Corbin 23).

The Hendersons were later joined by New York poet Witter Bynner, who like Henderson and later, Dodge, decided ultimately to stay in New Mexico for the Pueblo Indians. Bynner described this inspiration a few years after arriving in Santa Fe: “And round about the landscape, in their snug, earthen pueblos, were Indians, guarding the dignity of their race and instinctively living the beauty of their religion and their art, as they had been doing for hundreds of years” (qtd. in Cline 34). Bynner brought with him, as many did, inspirations from previous travels, in Bynner’s case, the artifacts—carvings, paintings, and jade—of time spent in China (Laughlin 117). His attempts to meld the ancient East with the ancient West, reflected the beliefs of the Santa Fe and Taos artists, who saw these ancient cultures as the most perfect examples of historical and cultural achievement. An American art and identity, taken from the reproduction of these cultures in their own art, seemed possible, and necessary, to the artists and writers who moved to Santa Fe. Though Adolph Reed criticizes this attachment, he confirms that “in that environment…[Dodge and the others] believed it was possible to shatter the wall of intellection that blocked pure, immediate experience” (Reed Jr. 111).
Dodge first spent time in Santa Fe, but after a short stay there, finding the company they kept to be too reminiscent of New York society, she persuaded Sterne to travel the winding and difficult road to Taos. It was a strange request. The people in Santa Fe could not understand why she wanted to go to Taos, as there was nothing there and the road was long and dangerous, an all-day journey by car, even in the summer. But Dodge, would not back down. She immediately fell in love with Taos and proposed that she and Sterne would stay there. Sterne, greatly opposed, could do nothing to change Dodge’s mind. She quickly established herself in Taos and became enmeshed in Pueblo culture. Sterne would soon become fed up with Dodge’s flirtations with Tony Lujan, a Taos Indian, and he quit Taos a few years later. Dodge would eventually marry Lujan, creating a bond to Pueblo culture and society. It was the connection she had so desperately longed for. Their relationship, based on more than just Dodge’s fascinations and hopes for a utopian community based on the teachings of the Pueblo, would transform Dodge and the community that followed her to Taos. Eventually, Dodge’s experiences in Taos inspired a caravan of artists and writers to eventually make the train-car journey to New Mexico.

Those artists and writers who moved to New Mexico in the early twentieth-century, with their contradictory and complex reasons, found inspirations in the New Mexican cultures and imagined for themselves a true American heritage. Though conceived as displaced and disintegrating, the Hispanic and Native American cultures, unique in many ways to New Mexico, appeared to fit perfectly into the small and untouched northern New Mexican towns. Their lives and cultures were rooted in either a Hispanic Catholic heritage or a Native connection to a sacred landscape.
Artists and writers who wanted an authentic American identity separate from a European or Bohemian language of cultural identity found what they were looking for in New Mexico. Native cultures represented an ideal example of a culture rooted dynamically in American soil.

As they left behind the disruptions and frustrations of an American identity confused by war, the artists and writers discovered that New Mexican culture and society offered a replacement for European and Victorian conventions. Willa Cather, who arrived in 1915, found within the ruins of the Anasazi, the example of a perfect American ancestry. Like Cather, the two impresarios of the Santa Fe and Taos communities, Henderson and Dodge, dug deep into a New Mexico heritage and past for their purpose and inspiration. These pueblo communities inspired in Cather, and Dodge, a utopian vision of a functioning American society. Their enchanting traditions and enchanting customs were a welcome alternative to what they considered a bankrupt American civilization. However, as I address later, Cather’s utopia was incompatible with modern American society, while Dodge believed the two to be mutually beneficial.

According to Adolph Reed the attentions that Dodge paid to the Native Americans (and Hispanics) of New Mexico amounted to a “paen of unabashed objectification” where she “romanticized their poverty and imagined them possessed of a superior, stoical essence that melded them into the local ecology” (111). In a way, this is explicit in her memoir, as she recalls how the villagers blended almost imperceptibly into the landscape. The observation continues a well-established tradition in Southwestern American Anglo literature and painting that objectified the
Indians by seeing them as a continuation of the landscape. Painters and poets said they understood their power, but they could not see them as true Americans. Dodge made the distinction in her autobiography, finding the natives to fit into the landscape much better than the Americans. “We occasionally saw them outside their homes,” Dodge remarks referring to the “Mexicans” on the drive to Taos, “and both the people and their little houses looked homogenous and connected; and their faces, although they were often haggard and worn and twisted, fitted into the landscape” (Edge 34). Frank Waters would later remark on the contradictions of this form of objectification, in his novel The Man Who Killed the Deer. Those who considered the Indians as part of the scenery, however, also believed them to have a much greater physical and spiritual connection to the land than Americans ever could. The duality found in these works, including Waters’ novel, suggests that the Indians were not quite human, more landscape than flesh—yet were still more entitled to the land than the incoming Anglos with their pens and paintbrushes.

The Pueblo peoples and the Mexican villagers were “not…deprived of their essence,” in Dodge’s opinion as she saw to be the case in lower class Americans of New York (Edge 34). In Taos, Dodge worked even more than she had in New York to promote the cause of Native New Mexicans. Perhaps Dodge saw these people as more worthy of help than the dregs of society she ultimately could not help in New York. Or perhaps, she saw the Indians and Hispanics as less capable of representing themselves in the face of the corruptions of American society, despite, or because of their special essence. Regardless, Dodge spent the rest of her life in New Mexico and Taos promoting American Indian culture in American Anglo society. She used the
cultural clout she had from her time in New York to encourage political action that would save sacred Indian land and to ensure rights for Pueblo Indians. Sterne appeared to have been right in his feeling that there was “somehow a strange relationship” between Dodge and the Indians of New Mexico (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 142).

Indeed, it seems that there was a strange relationship between all of the writers and artists who moved to New Mexico and this Indian culture. Those attracted to New Mexico saw the American Indian as an active example of an “authentic” and a culturally pure other whose long cultural history and spiritual connection to the land stood in brilliant contrast to a modernity that suggested the detachment and anonymity of the new metropolis. “Those who believed in the transformative power of art,” writes Rudnick, “found compelling the aboriginal notion that art was effective rather than affective, that is, intended to induce change in people, the land, or the climate, and to bring the listener-participant into ‘harmony with the essential essence of things’” (Utopian 34). Dodge understood the Taos Indians to be “the complete antithesis to herself and to both the world she grew up and the chaotic world of new freedoms in which she had matured” (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 149). Her complete identity seems predicated in a detachment from a New York society and a reconnection to a more established and thriving culture.

The notion of Indianness allowed several outlets for the reconstruction of identity. Phillip Deloria argues that in order for the modernists of the early twentieth century to proclaim a modern identity, they first had to understand and experience the identities that were clearly not modern. During Dodge’s time, the Indian who lived
peacefully outside of modern society represented an “authentic reality in the face of urban disorder and alienating mass society” (73). To connect to these “Indian others constructed firmly outside American society and temporality represented this break not only historically, but also racially, socially, and developmentally” (105). Moving to New Mexico was not only a metaphysical break from the overwhelming anxieties of a post-Victorian modernity. It required a physical distance and detachment from New York. The modern city sat thousands of miles from New Mexico, connected only by letters or a train ride of several days. The detachment from modernity and subsequent reattachment to American Indian traditions and the simplistic yet enchanting landscape, encouraged, or compelled, the artists and writers to create their own foundations in New Mexico upon the same lands.

The landscape itself seemed to welcome and encourage the abstractions of the modern mentality and allowed artistic creation to flourish in an environment that was considered physically and mentally healthier. For Dodge, “it was a fresh, beautiful world that surrounded [her] on all sides. [She] had a sense of renewal and a new awareness” (Edge 12). Her autobiography is ripe full with language that expresses an awakening and intensification of feeling inspired by the land:

…I had a complete realization of the fullness of Nature here and how everything was intensified for one—sight, sound, and taste—and I felt that perhaps I was more awake and more aware than I had ever been before. It was a new enchantment and I gave myself up to it without resistance. (Edge 18)
It was identification with the land, according to Rudnick in her understanding of the role of Anglo expatriates in Taos that encouraged the influx of cultural creators. In New Mexico, one could achieve the mental clarity that was impossible to develop in the psychologically blocked avenues of New York. The dissimilarity between the landscapes of New Mexico and that of the East Coast and Europe, and its cultural distance, allowed the artists and writers an unspoiled responsive space in which to reimagine themselves and their involvement in national culture (Rudnick Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds 144).

The artists who came transferred the abstraction they had begun to experiment with to the New Mexico landscape. Many of them were members of Alfred Steiglitz’s modernist circle in New York and were influenced by his quest for a true American culture. Steiglitz understood the power of European influence but he argued strongly for “a ‘native’ American culture that would establish its own viable traditions without imitating or emulating Europe.” The moderns who traveled to New Mexico came with the idea that Americans had to “create their own authentic art out of a fully realized sense of place” (Rudnick Utopian 23). Among them, Marsden Hartley, an important member of Stieglitz’s circle, arriving a year after Dodge in 1918, found relief for his artistic stagnation and failing health. Georgia O’Keeffe, “who was eager to find new subjects and new inspiration,” arrived later at Dodge’s insistence, as did other artists in the Stieglitz circle: Paul and Rebecca Strand, John Marin, Ansel Adams, and Andrew Dasburg (Utopian 133).

Accompanying these artists were writers whose works struggled to confront the modernist dilemmas of self and other that overwhelmed early twentieth century
literature and thought. The answers were often formed in a revaluation of the modern world with the possibilities for utopian reinterpretation. The search for some sort of utopia that could synthesize the connections between person, spirit, and land, and that would authenticate human existence, preoccupied many that came to Dodge’s house, including Carl Jung, D.H. Lawrence, and Jean Toomer, whose novels exemplified a new form of American literature. Jung, greatly inspired by his time with Dodge in Taos, attempted to prove that “what was best about American culture grew from its Indigenous soil” (Utopian 98). This statement is problematic in that it presupposes Indian culture is American, whereas Indians have always been a sovereign people, with a permanent sense of cultural viability. Jung’s view fails to acknowledge America’s profound influence on Native American culture, though it does imply that the influences of Native Americans have produced some of the most significant and important inspiration for American society. Jung’s belief that Pueblo architecture, with its adobe buildings rising skyward, inspired the construction of the American skyscraper, underscores this belief. Ultimately, Jung desired to shift Anglo minds towards the more spiritual minds of the American Indian, which he saw as the cure to the psychological afflictions of his society. Lawrence, as well, sought to shift Americans towards an indigenous center—the source, he believed, of his utopian existence.  

In D.H. Lawrence’s novella St. Mawr, written in 1924 during his time in New Mexico, the narrator asks a question of the main character, and a similar question can

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4 Christopher Schedler, alternatively, argues that Lawrence’s quest and his focus on the indigenous cultures of America is representative of different answer to the modernist question. This sort of “border modernism,” includes Willa Cather’s attempts to connect American culture to an Indigenous ancestry. Christopher Schedler, Border Modernism: Intercultural Readings in American Literary Modernism, Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory; (New York: Routledge, 2002).
be asked of Dodge and many of the other writers and artists of the post-war America. Of course, being the narrator, Lou Witt was American, and yet after only “fleeting trips to her America” by the time she was twenty-five, “what sort of American was she, after all?” (Lawrence 4). Lou Witt’s expatriate existence poses one fundamental question of those who settled in New Mexico: Was life in New Mexico, hundreds of miles from the east coast, an expatriate existence itself? Dodge recalls in her memoir that “Santa Fe was the strangest American town [she] had ever seen,” with people who looked like no American she was accustomed to (Edge 19). In fact, Lawrence had modeled Lou Witt’s character directly on Dodge. Her lifestyle paralleled the migrations of her contemporaries who lived abroad for years, searching for some place to be inspired and some place to feel a national identity. These important cultural figures had left New York and Europe, bound by the insecurities of a tepid modern existence. What did it mean to be modern if modernity meant depression and anxiety, war and cultural censorship? What did it mean to be American, if these things represented an American modernity? Exposed to these questions of national identity in the beginnings of the twentieth century, many bohemians, painters, poets, novelists, photographers, and philosophers, looked westward hoping to experience a more authentic American identity. Despondent and uninspired, many like Dodge found the spiritual authenticity they so desperately sought in the native identities, which had, it seemed, been sheltered from the storm of a modern life. The natives’ connection to the land inspired outsiders to gravitate to Taos and Santa Fe to achieve their own harmony with the place. The area became home to many wandering spirits.
PART II:

*The Novels of Frank Waters*
Eventually Frank Waters would end up in Taos, changing forever the way he saw the world, the connections between place and person, between native and sacred space. Unlike many of the other artists and writers who found their way to Taos, he had grown up in the West. Nevertheless, he still sought out the same desire for place and spiritual connection that the others did. Before he could reach this place, however he spent time wandering across all of the United States, traveling from border to border, learning how to see and how to put that sight into language.

In his memoir, Waters’ description of his early years in Colorado expresses similar disaffections with mainstream industrial American society like those felt by the moderns in New York. The language he uses to depict his coming-of-age is more than bleak. Illustrating his dissatisfactions with the structures of his childhood, he expresses a lack of excitement in religious and social institutions by using depressed diction. The language and brevity of the passage are evidential of time in his life that he does not want to remember, or to remember fondly if he must at all. It was life in a depressed consciousness and location, which drove him to leave Colorado. During his
third year of engineering school at Colorado College, Waters left his school and home with an understanding that life as an engineer or as a resident in his “deteriorating” neighborhood was exactly what he did not want in his life. Feeling “utterly miserable, alienated from the world,” Waters left behind his “disgruntled youth” and headed for Wyoming. (Time 8) The language is alienating. It discourages a connection to this period in Waters’ life and displaces Waters’ feeling of detachment from his childhood onto the text. The detailed detachment that Waters’ remembers is an interesting prelude to the strange uncoupling which occurs in his first novel, The Lizard Woman.

This period in Waters’ life begins his attachment to the opportunities of a new America. Like his character Lee Marston, Waters followed “from the Colorado to the Gulf…in his work…a well beaten path.” (Waters Lizard 14) He spent an interesting time traversing the essential sites of American growth in the West. His life as a laborer started in Wyoming where he first got a job as a day laborer in the Salt Creek oil fields. Historically, these oil fields were some of the most important in the country, home to a vast source of oil production. In the twenties, during the time Waters suggests he was there, this sight would have been the fourth most productive oil field in the country. This sight of a rapidly industrializing America would become nationally known as a place of federal scandal over government corruption around the time Waters worked there in the 1920s. From Wyoming, Waters was convinced by a friend to move to California where he was soon hired, “strangely enough,” as a junior engineer by a telephone company in Los Angeles (Time 9). (A surprise to him maybe, but this “strange” occurrence is an admission of a man who upholds an immense level of modesty in his writing.)
The company soon moved him to the town of El Centro in the prospering Imperial Valley. Located on the Californian-Mexican border, the “Winter Garden of America,” the “barren wasteland” of the heavily irrigated valley, produced bumper crops for the rest of the country. The company had sent him to help insure telephone service for the growing agricultural area. As he had been in Wyoming, in Southern California he was now at the forefront of American growth, helping to cultivate the land and provide the energy and fuel that would feed and power a growing nation. He was also, as it turned out, at the edge of the frontier: the only successive place for expansion being across the border into Mexico.

During these years along the border, Water traveled much around the valley, in addition to taking a long trip into the “desolate” desert of Baja California (Time 10). It was this trip that inspired Waters’ first attempts at the literary expression and emulation of the landscape before him. Writing The Lizard Woman, Waters struggled to overcome immensity of the desert and to put it down on paper:

Mountain bred, I had never seen the desert before. And here I felt the full, shattering impact of its appalling emptiness and immensity.
Tawny scorched rock mountains rearing form a sea of sand shimmering in the pitiless glare of the sun and reflected heat waves.
Fantastic skeletal shapes of spiny trees. Clumps of weird cacti. A world of mystical unreality. Was the desert the beginning of the free world we know? Or were the earthly barren sands its ends? Or was it both, completing time’s circle? (Time 10)
Like this quote, the novel is considerably lugubrious in narrative, ornate in language and slightly confused in plot. Yet, it captures a stirring sense of “mystical unreality” using Joseph Conrad’s sea as a metaphor for his own desert, it was a “sea of sand” surrounded by “tawny scorched rock mountains” (Waters Time 10). The novel became a short but ardent attempt to synthesize the role of man in relation to the immense and uncontrollable desert. It was an experiment in relating the psychological impact of the desert’s scope and expanse. As Waters explores this conflict in the novel, essential to the progression of plot and action, he reimagines it. Perhaps this was an ambitious task for a first attempt, Waters himself called the novel “an immature first attempt” and yet, Waters seems to have achieved the portrayal of strange reality despite, or more likely, due to the excessiveness of its language and discourse (Lizard 3).

Waters suggestion that he had little formal literary education, however, is compounded by the fact that he seems to have been well versed in the conventions of the Western genre that he draws from and reexamines thoroughly. In the introduction to The Lizard Woman, he explains that he built the story around his one fantastical description of the desert contriving “an adventure story somewhat like the common pulp-paper Westerns, but told through a narrator as were many of Conrad’s great novels of the sea” (Waters Lizard vii). This situates the book with roots in a “common literary-mythic tradition” of pulp-fiction books, not only the Western, but also the science-fiction/fantasy, and the hard-boiled detective stories of the early twentieth century (Slotkin 194). The Western pulp-fiction genre that Waters refers to was made famous by Edgar Rice Burroughs, who wrote through every kind of genre, and Zane
Grey and Max Brand whose fame came from their prolific quantity of Western novels (Slotkin 194-210)

Unlike Waters, who had grown up in the West, Zane Grey had little personal contact with the western landscape. Nevertheless, Grey became one of the most famous Western writers. His stories usually include

a “White woman” of wealth and “high” birth; a wealthy and powerful villain, whose conspiracies enmesh her and threaten her inheritance; and a wandering mysterious stranger bent on private vengeance, who purposes converge with the “White woman’s” needs. The problem is usually resolved through the hero’s use of some spectacular act of violence, which is morally redemptive because it rescues the “White woman” (who then accepts the hero as lover and husband.) (Slotkin 212)

These character types, became embedded in the myth of the genre, eventually making their way to film and television. At the time Waters began to write the structures of the Western were some of the most influential conventions a beginning writer could seek out. Waters’ hero resembles Grey’s hero, a wandering mysterious stranger, as it also resembles the heroes from the other pulp-fiction genres. In addition, Waters’ hero must perform a violent “morally redemptive” act in order to rescue “White” society from the corruptions of greed and desire. What is different about Waters’ work however, is that though the story resembles a pulp-fiction novel, many of the characters have been replaced, or inversed, and the central conflict, though it remains a morally redemptive act, is no longer in the sake of the “White woman” from Grey’s
novel. In addition, many of Grey’s stories were said to have some political overtone, and this does seem to have definitively transferred to The Lizard Woman, naming his chapters “The White House” and “The White Heart” and focusing his actions in a lawless town, where American mores were readily lost to the desert.

The novel transcends and inverses its pulp-novel form, however, to explore complex contemporary issues of citizenship and humanity. In formalist concerns it is not a work of high modernism, but I contend, even as popular fiction, the novel is a work of the “same moment of cultural production,” in which authors and writers were seeking to understand their own national affiliations and identities by finding appeal in the primitive as a source of inspiration or differentiation (Daly 122). “In modernist primitivism,” according to Daly, “the margins of modernity, are reconceived as places from which to express dissatisfaction with modern metropolitan culture” (118). This “modernism depends on the same imperial imaginary as the adventure romance” (118). The Lizard Woman, in its narrative, is an extension of the adventure romance. It applies the conventions of the Western genre and coerces its understood mythic connotations to produce a novel that is at once part of an enormous production of genre literature and distinctly separate from convention in its distinct understanding of the spiritually authenticating relationships between the land and the people.

Waters’ scholars have noted the redeeming qualities of this novel, his first short work. According to scholar Charles Adams, the novel encompasses the very beginnings of Waters’ concerns with the relationship between people and place (3). And, in Thomas J. Lyon’s 1973 critique of Frank Waters’ works Lyon sees The Lizard Woman as a “novel of ideas—the revelation of two racially distinct characters
who move through a refining process of great hardship as they move closer and closer
to the heart of the desert land” (Lyon 72). It is also, according to Lyon, an attempt to
reconcile the state of ordinary humanity with otherworldly spiritual forces. As…. 

* * *

*The Lizard Woman*

When we first meet Lee Marston, who occupies the same role as Waters did
as an engineer working on the California-Mexico border during the early Twenties,
he seems “strangely aloof, curiously detached, removed” (*Lizard* 3). He is the typical
Western hero, mysterious and significantly set apart from society. One evening, he
notices Arvilla, a “percentage-girl” in the cantina La Casa Blanca, where he spends
his evenings. To be a “percentage-girl,” means Arvilla would “float around and
dance” and get paid by the cantina for every drink she gets a customer to buy for her
(Milton 68). Arvilla, also is representative of a Western type. She is the mestizo, half-
Indian, half-Mexican, whose role in the story of early Westerns is to lure the hero, or
some other weaker character to their demise, although later, in Grey and Burroughs’s
novels and even later on film, the racially marked woman will have the opportunity to
play the role of the redemptive heroine (Slotkin 226). Arvilla’s role is a combination
of both redemptive racialized other and dangerous racialized other. At the cantina,
Arvilla approaches Marston alone outside. Her main goal is to return to the Mexican
desert to find gold. In time, she convinces him to travel with her through the land of
the Lizard Woman. She needs him as an assayer to determine the authenticity of the
deposits of gold there.
The desert is harsh and as they make their way they suffer immensely. During the journey, Marston becomes enraptured by both Arvilla and the desert. He begins to desire her in a way that cannot be fulfilled. When they finally reach the mountains, which are shaped like a curved Lizard Woman, they find Horne, an American who has lived like an animal guarding these mountain and waiting for Arvilla. Arvilla ultimately desires Horne over Marston, and Horne has affections only for the gold and the money that it will bring him. Marston reacts violently to the realization that Arvilla has only affections for Horne and the gold, killing Horne and leaving with the gold. Marston travels back through the desert to the city. Arvilla follows him on foot but dies before she can make it back.

*Frank Waters and The Lizard Woman*

Little attention was paid to *The Lizard Woman* at first publication, though it was briefly mentioned March 2, 1930, in the “Latest Received Books” of the *New York Times Book Review* as “the story of a Mexican desert tragedy.” It has enjoyed little fame since that time, though still in print. The simple summary of the New York Times, is inaccurate in detail and interesting in scope. In *The Lizard Woman*, action is conceived of in the no-man’s lands between Mexico and America. The borderlands belong as much to an American imagination as they do to a Mexican one. The action of the story cannot be nationally defined, and Marston’s tragic figure does not incite the reader to pity or dejection.

The novel expresses the fluidity of the border and the possibilities of limitless national identity. Waters writes a complex story with national importance. Produced outside of the New York center of modernism, the story seeks to steer an American
imagination, away from the urban landscape, and towards the Mexican desert. The implications of this new center, a foundation for spiritual and cultural renewal, tie Waters’ to his modernist contemporaries, like Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway, who looked to the Native American for an indigenous American past. Hemingway’s *In Our Time* “heralded the emergence of ‘a new tough, sever and satisfying beauty related equally to the world of machinery and the austerity of the red man’” (Daly 138). As these modernists, steered away from urban society and towards the native imagination they sought most importantly to suggest that American identity had sprung from this indigenous ancestors, even though it was technically impossible.

Comparison with Cather, Hemingway and especially with Lawrence, who shared ideas about universality and the land with Waters, shows Waters to be similar in subject but quite different in approach and ultimate resolution to the crisis of Anglo identity. Unlike his modernist contemporaries, Waters’ story works through typical conventions, like the genre of the Western, rather than experimenting with structural form to understand the relationship of the character to their setting and their self. He found as well in *The Lizard Woman*, that the past Americans sought, was located outside human control, in the wild realm of the desert. In this regard, he is in line with Hemingway’s direction toward national identity in the wilds of America. However, Waters ultimately has his character leave the desert, having achieved neither the redemption of the Western novel, nor the satisfying outputs of violence of the primitive modernism of Cather and Hemingway.

In Walter Benn Michaels article “The Vanishing American” he begins to explore the complex relationship between authors of the twenties and their primitive
subjects. Cather, Hemingway, and Lawrence were reacting, as Mabel Dodge had, to both the increasing repressions of a post-war society, reminiscent of turn-of-the-century restrictions, as well as to the psychological nightmare of modern existence, which found liberation to be rootless and inadequate. The Indians on the other hand were simultaneously ‘‘exemplary instances’ of a society having a culture and also what it means to no longer have a culture’’ (Michaels 228). They could be perfect models of culture, but they also did not threaten the racial fears of the modernist authors, because they were imagined to be vanished cultures or already in the process of vanishing: ‘‘It is because the Indian’s sun was perceived as setting that he could become…a kind of paradigm for increasingly powerful American notions of ethnic identity, for the idea of an ethnicity that could be threatened or defended, repudiated or reclaimed’’ (232). That Waters, neither saw the Indian cultures as vanished or vanishing sets him dramatically apart from the literary production of East Coast modernists. However, in The Lizard Woman, the fact the Arvilla, half-Indian and half-Mexican, cannot ultimately return back to society because she has been corrupted by the greed of an American system, exemplifies the early modernist obsession with the corruption of the native. As in Oliver La Farge’s Laughing Boy, the native woman who has slept with an American man, who has seen the ways to wealth through morally base ways, even if she tries to redeem herself, which La Farge’s character does and Arvilla does not, will never be able to return to American society, because she has become irreversibly corrupted. Ultimately, Waters novel appears similar to Cather and Hemingway, because, like them he was located in a primitive space, outside of modernity.
Waters is located outside the space of East Coast and European modernist production and yet his novel explores the fundamental modernist question of self-development in relation to the other. Phillip Schedler, in his concept of *Border Modernism*, suggests that realm of external modernist production as open to those living on the border. Waters’ study of place and self and his own “marginal” location, make *The Lizard Woman* a possible example of a border modernist novel produced without any European or Eastern influence, save the general (but important) literary conventions of Conrad’s novels and the pulp-fiction Westerns (Schedler xi). Border modernist creation places great emphasis on historical context, oral forms of expression, and simplification Waters inherent understanding of the historical importance of border life, reliance on storytelling to convey underlying themes, and experimentation with a simple plot and simple symbolic characters situates him within the range of border modernism.

Waters fashions Lee Marston’s character to develop in direct relation to the world that surrounds him and in his relationship to Arvilla. Christopher Schedler defines this tendency to see “the external world as constitutive of the self” as a defining characteristic of border modernism (Schedler xiii). Water uses the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic other to show what Marston may not be or should not be. Before entering the desert, Marston’s character is ambivalent and ill defined. The only description given is a vague condition that addresses an unknown stimulus but no action. He was “like a man possessed by a dream for which he could find no form” (*Lizard* 14). Waters acknowledges, in this descriptor, the power of external factors outside of human domain. Marston’s ambivalence is most acutely recognized in
relation to Arvilla’s definite character. Waters clearly defines Arvilla as a mestizo and Marston’s whiteness is created in relation to her Indianness. “Indian in a sort of barbaric abandon of indifference,” Arvilla makes, Marston, in his lack of description to appear by comparison, rational and controlled (Lizard 10).

By positioning Marston’s manhood in relation to the “other,” Waters expresses manhood as the coordination of desire and success. Marston’s manhood is a consequence of his relationship to Arvilla. The very first introduction to Marston is as a man and yet his manhood does not develop until he has decided to go into the desert with Arvilla. He has expressed neither sexual desire nor ambition before the journey. His manhood is the product of his sexually desiring and having the native woman. Arvilla, and the desert, are placed within the narrative that positions the native and the land as goods to be exploited. The characters, however, are uncomfortable in their roles. Marston’s manhood is dependent on Arvilla and the desert and yet he is, in the end, unable to exert any control over either one. He finds in the end that the land and Arvilla have already been taken by the animal-like Horne, who has been guarding the mountains. Horne, in his complete separation from American society, is the antithesis to Marston. Marston sees Horne, and Arvilla, as ignorant, incapable of seeing layers of complexity as he can. He can see through the desert back to the urban landscape, where it is not the discovery of gold but the use of it that is the fundamental problem.

It is, beyond a modernist obsession with the subjectivity of self or a desire to escape the uninspiring detriments of metropolitan society, the metaphor of the landscape as female form and the female form as landscape that connects Waters to the Western imagination. It is inescapable in this text, where it is Marston’s desire for
Arvilla that drives him to desire the desert landscape, and the beauty and immensity of the desert that explicitly represents a structure of the landscape that is wholly female. The narrator speaking for Marston expresses an interrelationship between these two image systems viewing “anatomy geographically and geography anatomically” (Schedler 23). Lyon considers Waters’ difficulty in containing his physical desires as a fundamental problem in the text. However, this over-exuberance of bodily longing seems essential to the motivations of the story. In a language of desire, the narrator expresses the infinite power, but ultimate inefficacy, and lack of sustainability of the desired female, as “Her voice, Spanish and yucca-sweet, caressed his senses. It lulled to rest all doubts. Reality vanished” (Lizard 16). Perhaps it is an act of transgression to view Arvilla as the object of desire, as she is ultimately unattainable and unworthy of Marston’s affections. The “Madonna-faced” Arvilla is beyond conception and reality and as a condition of Marston’s imagination, her powers over him are dependent on his own dream-state. As long as she hints at the possibility of their union Marston will be able to retain a desire for her. It is “only when he turned away his face with that disinterested, dreaming expression was she powerless” (Lizard 16) If it is an act of transgression to view the female or the landscape in an erotic form, it is the consequence of this transgression that image or dream or desire may only be contained within the male imagination. Power is contained within this desire because even the power Arvilla holds over Marston is ineffectual when compared to the strength of fantasy and the reproduction of desire.

Marston cannot capture Arvilla nor can he contain or understand fully the power of the desert landscape he wanders into. The mountains that surround possess
the same power as Arvilla but symbolize the universality of space and time. In the shape of a lizard woman biting her tail the mountains make the *uroboros*, a symbol of timeless time. The reconnection to the native spirit and ancient landscape, explicit in other border modernist literature, is central to the Waters’ understanding of human development and growth. For Waters, as for Lawrence “the spirit of place” includes both land and its people and as in Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent*, the goal is to obtain “the center absolved from time and space” in order to experience “mythic time, absolved from past and future in an eternal present” (Schedler 23, 25). To locate this timeless time within a realistic or mythical visualization is to locate it as human conception, which is attainable once the center is found.

For those primitive modernist writers, this center was located within the indigenous other. Daly suggests, as do many others, that the modernist writers had to “position themselves outside the modern, on the side of the ‘primitive’” in order to fully understand the primitive, as the primitive embodied the antithesis to a spiritually bereft world (Daly 188). Waters expresses a similar conclusion. However, instead he locates the native and indigenous within his own self stressing that “this source in which everything is interconnected in one harmonious whole does not exist somewhere among the splendor of the midnight stars, but within ourselves” (*Time* 24). He would soon explore the possibilities that self and land could intermingle in a way essential to the protection and preservation of native culture.
Chapter Three

The Man Who Killed the Deer

More than a decade after Waters finished the Lizard Woman he found himself in Taos, several hundred miles from the border desert of California and El Centro where he got his start as a writer. The mountain landscape of New Mexico, different in form from that of Colorado, was just as inspiring and daunting as the desert that had first prompted Waters to write. A man prone to capture the essence of landscape in words, Waters found the sacred mountains surrounding Taos, the valley that stretched out from them, and the Pueblo Indians who claimed sacred heritage to them, to be ample, wondrous material. From this place, Waters produced a novel that redefined his original quest for the unification of self and land. In The Man Who Killed the Deer, Waters examines themes of American Indian cultural survival from an Indian perspective. It is an attempt both novel and unachievable, but Waters upholds a profound respect for the Pueblo while writing an account of their efforts to achieve some semblance of sovereignty, with respect to their title to ancestral lands and their right to cultural viability.
It is evident from his rapid production of novels once in Taos, that Waters’
desire and his ability to capture the landscape, after at least ten years of traveling
across the United States, had matured since his time in California. After The Lizard
Woman, Waters went on to produce several works about Colorado Springs and the
mountain setting that shaped him and his family. The Wild Earth’s Nobility, Below
Grass Roots, and The Dust Within the Rock, published between 1935 and 1940, were
a fictionalized trilogy of Waters’ family history that completed Waters’ time at
Liveright, which had become an almost defunct publisher by the late thirties. During
this time Waters also published Midas of the Rockies: The Story of Stratton and
Cripple Creek with Covici, Friede in 1937. And in 1941 Waters established a
connection with publishers Farrar & Rinehart to publish his novel The People of the
Valley, about one woman who defined, for Waters, the people and the landscape of
Northern New Mexico.

Waters had first spent time New Mexico in 1931, only a year after publishing
The Lizard Woman, but he did not return for an extended stay until several summers
later. In his earlier years in New Mexico, he lived in Mora, a tiny community about
fifty mountainous miles from Taos and Taos Pueblo. Mora appears an odd choice to a
New Mexico resident today. An isolated small agricultural community of 5,000, it
offers little of the cultural resources of communities elsewhere, like Taos and Santa
Fe. And yet from Mora, Waters first became acquainted with the Pueblo peoples of
New Mexico and the Northern New Mexican landscape. He became a frequenter of
the ceremonial dances at the nearby Pueblos. At one of these dances, Waters was
introduced to Tony Lujan, “six feet tall, massively built, with a face dark as
mahogany” (Time 45). The friendship between the two men grew into an enduring relationship, as Lujan would later become mentor and friend to Waters introducing him to an intimate layer of Taos Pueblo life, eventually leading Waters to write *The Man Who Killed the Deer* in 1942. Stephen Vicent Benet acknowledged the novel, at the time of publication, as “perhaps the best book that has yet been written about the American Indian.” (Get Citation) Maybe overstatement, but it is evident that the novel captures a profound desire to understand the Indian and it is evident that this desire owes much of its influence to the impact Tony Lujan and his wife Mabel on Waters’ writing.

At the time of their first meeting, Tony Lujan invited Waters to visit the house he shared with his wife Mabel Dodge in Taos. It wasn’t until several years later, however, that he followed up on the invitation. He had spent time in Taos the summer of 1937 and wanted to return. Waters mentioned the outstanding invitation to friend and previous landlord, newspaper editor Willard “Spud” Johnson, and so Johnson took Waters to meet Dodge with the hope she might have a place for him to stay. The meeting was very brief but a week later, Dodge and Lujan showed up in Mora, where Waters had returned, and offered him a small house to have if he agreed to fix it up. As Waters recounts later in his autobiography, he accepted the offer and made the monumental move from Mora to the Dodge/Lujan house in late 1938 (Time 72-73).

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5 Lynn Cline writes that Frank Waters rented Spud Johnson’s house in Taos in 1937; Thomas Lyons writes that Waters first visited in 1931 and did not settle there until 1938; Frank Waters, himself, says he moved to Taos in 1939, having spent time in Mora before hand. An article published in Taos’ small community newspaper *The Horse Fly* on 9 July 1938 places Frank Waters in Taos in the summer of 1937 and in Mora in the summer of 1938 Marta and Kyle Fiore Wiegle, *Santa Fe and Taos: The Writer's Era 1916-1941* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1982) 64-65. So, I’m therefore placing Waters in Taos in the summer of 1937; moving later to Taos in mid to late 1938 Thomas J. Lyon, *Frank Waters*, Twayne’s United States Authors Series, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (New York: Twayne, 1973) 19,
The move to Taos was a great catalyst for Waters. During his first years there he produced some of his most inspired fiction, though he did not permanently move to town until after the second World War. The first house he moved into in 1938 was “an adobe, and was most comfortable after a few repairs. One of its great advantages was its location outside commercial Taos and at the junction of a dirt road leading through the reservation to Taos Pueblo,” where he could watch the passing of the Taos Pueblo Indians on their way to town and tourists and others curious on their way to the Pueblo ("Forward" vii). A year after his move to Dodge’s house, Waters moved again to “the huge studio room above the garage of the Tony House on the Pueblo Reservation” (Time 72). From the house, Waters could see the buildings at the center of the Pueblo: “the ancient town stood at the foot of its Sacred Mountain and, with its setting, was…the most beautiful of all pueblos” ("Forward" vii). He found there great inspiration in the blue towering slopes of the Rockies, the straight-aways of the green and brown valley, and the adobe Pueblo village. He found even more profound muses in the Taos Pueblo Indians who rode past and those people who came to visit Dodge.

At the Dodge/Lujan house, Waters found an eccentric community of eclectic artists and unconventional characters; East Coast and European imports; guests and interlopers. Some of these neighbors became Waters’ close friends, including Leon Gaspard, Nicholai Fechin, New York author Myron Brinig and Lady Dorothy Brett, who he later memorialized in his memoir Of Time and Change (Time). As Waters remembers, he had originally moved to his apartment above the garage, the Tony House, later to be known as “Frank’s Studio,” to make way for Myron Brinig. During

the summer of 1938, Brinig would write a story barely concealing the identity of his hostess and her guests (Wiegle 66). Next door to Brinig and Waters, lived the painter Dorothy Brett, who, as a young woman, followed D.H. Lawrence to Taos in his quest for his utopian community. Brett stayed long after Lawrence and became an active member of the Taos arts scene. After a few years, Waters took the people and friends he met at the house and cast them as characters in his story about the Pueblo.

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The Man Who Killed the Deer

* The Man Who Killed the Deer, published in 1942 by Farrar & Rhinehart, is one of Waters most beloved and best-known books. The novel tells the fictional story of La Oreja Pueblo Indian Martiniano who, by killing a deer out of season, sets off a series of confrontations between the Pueblo and the American government. He has just returned from American Indian boarding school and has days out of season, on federal land, because he is poor and is provided little assistance by the Pueblo or the government. He is haunted by both his inability to follow custom and to fit into American society. His trial induces the Pueblo to question the role of the younger acculturated Indian in tribal society and to begin fight to preserve their traditional cultures in the face of American society.

For the narrator, Martiniano’s role embodies a struggle to resolve the role of the traditional Indian within American society and, inversely, to determine the place of the acculturated Indian within the traditional Pueblo community. For Waters it is

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the conflict between young Martiniano and the tribal elders that exemplifies a concern for the reconciliation of the desires of traditional Indian communities with the demands and conveniences of modern America. On a figurative level, the conflict between American Indian cultural sovereignty and the intrusion of American influence encapsulates a fundamental crisis for many tribes of the twentieth century as they try to maintain tribal identity and ensure cultural survival in the face of an increasingly “degenerate” acculturated Indian youth.7 On a national scale, the conflicts of The Man Who Killed the Deer represent a greater national conflict of American political history, where a complex American insecurity regarding citizenship and sovereignty, could not resolve the role of the Native American as a citizen in a federal context (Michaels).

All layers of this conflict, the literary and the historical, establish Martiniano as a hybrid post-colonial character who embodies a central crisis of native identity. Martiniano has been influenced in his formative years by both the American system as well as by his Pueblo heritage. His Indian identity is further divided: he is the product of Taos Indian and Apache birth. He embodies, therefore, the stereotypes of

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7 I take the term “degenerate” from author Leslie Marmon Silko. The celebrate author of Ceremony discusses the acculturation of younger generations and the perceived decline of Pueblo culture in a panel with Frank Waters: “At Laguna we were the first ones to be called “degenerate.” The BIA sent us their little goodies sooner, and so a lot of so-called modern things came to Laguna…I’ve been thinking that pueblo living is a state of mind. A lot of people were afraid that when they started building houses away from the main pueblo…this would be destructive to the lifestyle, to the ways families related to each other. But it seems pueblo living has something to do with concern with all the different relationships, in having grandma around or little auntie so-and-so…[P]eople haven’t forgotten. They still maintain a lot of close interaction every day, and people stay together. The outward change, the physical changes, in my experiences, don’t necessarily mean that the way people feel about each other changes. It isn’t so different as it might appear to be” Larry Evers, "Frank Waters: A Dialogue on Pueblo Living," ed. Deloria Jr. 236.
both the “Noble Savage” and the uncivilized monster, simultaneously filling the myth of the idealized Indian and progress-threatening warrior. Waters inverses this typing, however, by making Martiniano whole from the balance of his gentle pueblo spirit and his hardened “apache shell” (Waters Deer 17). On top of these conflicting influences, is the imposition of an American education on Martiniano.

Martiniano’s initial inability to readjust exemplifies the historical conflict of the “away school” Indian. Martiniano represents both the central cultural and political crisis of the returning graduates who can neither fit into their tribal community nor into American society. On a personal level, Martiniano is the exemplary graduate who wears American clothes and tries to use the carpentry skills learned at away school. However, by doing so, in a way he proves possible the whitening of America. Professor Joel Pfister points out in his comprehensive look at Indians and Moderns:

If Native students could be convinced that they should want to reinvent themselves as ‘modern’ White ‘individuals,’ then White people would no longer have to feel too uneasy about the theft of Native land that had under girded Native-White relations for hundreds of years—for ‘Indians,’ like an evolutionary setback that had been rectified, would no longer exist culturally or politically. (Pfister 45)

However, stories from away-school Indians repeat a story of a graduate who returns to the tribe and cannot fit into the tribe as an Americanized Indian, nor into the American community, which continues to see him only as an Indian and not as a modern White individual. For many “away school” Indians, taken from their tribes at young ages and placed in distant boarding schools, life upon return consisted of the
impossible challenge to balance the ways of the tribe with the assimilating skills taught at school. To “go back to the blanket” most often clashed considerably with the American lifestyle promoted at the schools.

_The Man Who Killed the Deer_ questions the notion that these outcomes needed to be mutually exclusive. The novel examines the possibility that the modern American life adopted at “away school” can exist in the tribal community, without destabilizing and destroying the traditional customs of the tribe. Martiniano’s own attempt to resolve the two guides the novel to a realization that perhaps a balance of the two is the most productive for the Pueblo Indian. Upon his return to La Oreja, however, Martiniano cannot reconcile the importance of tribal tradition with the realistic necessities of his life. He has been given nothing save his father’s parcel of land outside the Pueblo. His skills as a carpenter help him little in both the Pueblo and town communities and so he realizes a need to return to the agricultural ways of the tribe to survive. Still, the tribe is unhelpful in their support. He cannot attend ceremonial dances because he is working his fields; he cannot pay the fines for violating these customs because the tribe is staunch in their refusal to help him. He cannot achieve a place in the tribe nor can he assure a place in the American town as an Indian or as a man. His masculinity holds itself in an obscure limbo. He is not man by American nor tribal standards. As an Indian, he is seen as a boy by the white District Indian Superintendent. Furthermore, he has never been given a chance to develop as a man in the eyes of tribe, having missed the ceremony that marks his transition to adulthood. He finds himself without an acceptable outlet to achieve this manhood. Aware of this paradox, angry, and full of pride, Martiniano sees no reason,
at first, to find faith in the traditions of a tribe that does not accept him for influences outside his control. Nor does he find cause to give up the modern individualism of an American identity. He longs to unite the two, but his reconnection to the tribe, and subsequent manhood, can only be gained when he can see the connections between self and tradition, that the tribe sees. To achieve an authentic self, he must learn that manhood, and the congruent feelings of happiness and self-worth, can be gained only by protecting, following, respecting, and most importantly continuing the traditions and customs of the Pueblo culture.

The novel suggests, in its consideration of the importance of tribal custom that the path to Martiniano’s manhood, and faith, depends on his practice of Pueblo culture. To resolve the conflict between American mores and Indian expectations, Martiniano must prove to be his own model for the path is a difficult one to decipher with no completely balanced role models. Martiniano is torn between the anger he feels toward the American system, that wants little to do with him, and the tribal elders, who cannot understand his American clothes or individualist pride. He wrestles with himself to understand how to become a man in his own right by shedding his individualism and pride in order to reconnect to the Tribe. Martiniano begins to embody the native, described by Fanon, who sets out “to rehabilitate himself and to escape from the claws of colonialism” and in doing so realizes that he must establish that a prolific and profound Indian culture exists (Fanon 212). The existence of the native culture, depends therefore on Martiniano’s acceptance of duty to the tribe. The novel encourages the reader to understand that Martiniano’s duty to tribe transgresses his individualist concerns. His manhood must be established in the
service of the tribe. Any desire that does not serve the purpose of tribal subsistence is futile. Therefore, any desire for his wife must come through a desire to be part of the tribe and any desire to recreate must be to reproduce future generations that will protect and honor the traditions of the tribe.

The protection of tribal culture, necessary for the creation of an authentic native is bound to the preservation of the sacred lands of the Pueblo. The tribe’s strong implicit cultural connection to and willingness to fight for their native lands prove that the away-school has failed to whiten the native to the point of cultural obscurity as planned. However, some whitening of the younger generation of the Pueblo is inevitable by Waters’ estimation. The novel concludes with the idea that some synthesis of Pueblo tradition and American modernity is not restrictive but necessary and unavoidable, even if it leads to the inevitable dilution of the Pueblo culture.

One catalytic event premises actions for the entire narrative. Martiniano’s slaying of the deer leads to a story and the story of the Pueblo’s cultural struggle, Martiniano’s killing of the deer is like a stone thrown into a lake, which sets off a ripple of action far and wide within the community. As Waters tells it, he happened to be in the court house one day when he overheard the sentencing of a Taos Indian who had shot a deer a few days out of federal hunting season. Waters thought nothing of the incident, as he remembers, until one day while shaving, the images of three men appeared to him in his sink: the governor of Taos Pueblo, the head of the Forest Service, and an Indian trader ("Forward" vii-xii). Waters’ observation of the perhaps unremarkable courthouse event stirred him to recognize that he had before him a
complete and important story about the history and culture of the Pueblo. When seen in light of the relationships he witnessed between the Taos Pueblo people and the Taos community, the trial provided an important starting point to describe both the Pueblo’s fight to maintain tribal culture by winning back their sacred land and the idiosyncrasies of the mountain town he was growing to love (Time 14-16; "Forward" ix-x).

Waters remarks that the story never seemed his own, that it “didn’t need to be contrived” (Time 12-14; "Forward" viii-ix). It belongs to the real life characters and town, whose story he tells in the novel. They chose to appear to him as Win Blevins, in his tribute to The Man Who Killed the Deer suggests that “novelists do not choose their material…[They] tell the tales [they] feel compelled to tell” (151). With the knowledge Waters possessed of Taos and the Pueblo, it seems he felt compelled to tell the story of the Pueblo people he admired, to create conscious and honest narrative out of the triumvirate in the sink.

The Man Who Killed the Deer relies on this foundation of historical occurrences and people. The novel is, very explicitly, a historical novel, that traces the effort of Taos Pueblo to regain ownership of their sacred Blue Lake, which was removed from Pueblo control in the early twentieth century. It is also a roman à la clef in which thinly veiled reincarnations of real people recreate historical action. By making no pretence to conceal the identities of his characters, Waters grounds the novel in the reality and history of Taos. Dedicated to Mabel and Tony, Waters deliberately, I think, locates the setting of the novel within their realm of influence: in the sundry intertwining worlds of Taos and Taos Pueblo, where Anglos lived separate
from the Pueblo people in ways both real and imagined. From this vantage point, Waters could comment on both the situation of the Native American and, as a subtext, on their representation by Dodge’s mostly white circle of friends.

Waters simplifies the historical story but still comprehensively captures the historical and contemporary actions and motivations of the characters by writing the novel from a limited third person omniscient perspective. Waters uses self-representation on the part of the Pueblo and Martiniano to tell a fully “Indian” story. Diverse members of the Pueblo community represent a multi-faceted . He also incorporates white perspectives to frame the novel in the historical political and artistic conceptions of the American Indian. The consequence of the novel is, therefore, more than aesthetic. The purpose is as political—to reveal the implications of the cultural and historical struggle between Taos Indians and the federal government for control over the Blue Lake—as it is personal—to praise the intuitive Indian consciousness, and to describe and critique his Anglo neighbors and predecessors.

Overall, he narrates the story and representative historical struggle for Blue Lake and Taos tribal continuity from a fundamentally Indian perspective. Using the collective Pueblo voice to illustrate the history of the people and their struggle, “he moves directly into the sensibility of the people of the Taos Pueblo, sees the world as they see it” (Blevins 151). Presenting an otherwise obscure Indian consciousness, this perspective encourages the intended American Anglo audience to understand the main character, an Indian, as a real man and the main conflict, a fight for culture, as a historical conflict.
The pueblo Indians, in their feelings and actions stand as both imaginable and mythical interpretations. The basis of characters on real people encourages the reader to connect to a mystical reality, fulfilling a historical wish of American literature to be in contact with the native, to understand them, to be them, and to contain them within their place in nature. The real man who killed the deer, the “real Martiniano,” who set into motion the deliberations of Taos Pueblo and the battle for Blue Lake, was, according to Waters, Taos Indian Frank Samora ("Forward" x). It is unclear whether Samora and Waters knew each other prior to the novel but later in life they became close friends. According to Waters, Samora, “the real Martiniano, never questioned what the fictional Martiniano had done or felt” ("Forward" x). It is essential that the real catalyst agree on the actions and emotions of the fictional character, because it grounds the fiction in some semblance of emotional and historical reality.

Other adopted characters, including other members of the Pueblo and town, lend a point of reference for an outsider reading about Taos Pueblo and New Mexico life. In the novel, Waters has boiled down the perceived collaboration of culture harmony between the Native, Hispanic and Anglo cultures, into a few representative characters. Representing the political and traditional concerns of the Pueblo is the old governor, of Waters’ vision in the sink. He embodies what the novel perceives as the vanishing Indian. In his face “dark and wrinkled, at once kind and indomitable…the keen black eyes of a man who has long known all the vagaries of weather and men’s passions alike, and who has seen through them to the calm heart of all storms” (Waters Deer 7). He was of the kind “one seldom sees now” (Deer 7). He is joined by
the cacique, another ancient Indian, who represents the spiritual struggles of the tribe. The cacique, presumably based on the cacique of Taos Pueblo, Juan de Jesus Romero or Deer Bird, born in 1874, held the Tribe together in his . He was, according to a friend, “the most powerful man in [the] tribe…[he] speaks the truth” (qtd. in Gordon-McCutchan 183). As cacique, Romero acted as the spiritual leader of the tribe, responsible for completing the customs and rituals of the tribe (Crawford). Later, when Taos Pueblo was in its final years of the fight for Blue Lake, the cacique, normally only involved in intertribal politics and considered the “hidden power” behind the struggle for Blue Lake, spoke out in a national context for the sanctity of Indian religion (Gordon-McCutchan 183-89). At the time of the novel, the governor and the cacique acted as the voices of reason and spirituality for the tribe; in the novel they possess extraordinary spiritual power and they represent what must be done within the community to insure the continuation of their sacred religion and the cultural survival of the Pueblo. Their voices “speak the truth” and Waters strives to capture that.

In addition to the examples of the governor and the cacique, the diversity of the Pueblo is shown in the descriptions and actions of the tribal elders and the younger generations. The tribal elders represent the foundation of the tribe in their upholding of spiritual and ceremonial tradition. Their attachment to the land and the people is evident: these men encourage the popular images of the Vanishing Indian, in their strict adherence to cultural ceremony. What discourages this perception, however, is their desire to work with the American government to protect this custom. In their struggle and history, they speak in a united voice.
In contrast, the younger generation speaks through several varied voices and from a myriad of desires. The younger generation embodies the future of a Pueblo living in tandem with American society, with both traditional and very non-traditional ways of experiencing Pueblo life and the American outside world. Martiniano’s wife, for example, Flowers Playing, is a member of the Mountain Ute tribe. She is an outsider, as we are, and yet she still possesses some mythical Indian intuition that disconnects her from Martiniano and the audience. Soon however, her temporary detachment from Martiniano roots her in a communication with nature, which brings the reader very close to the center of the secret Pueblo spirit. This secret Pueblo spirit, an intuitive and gentle consciousness written by Waters, transgresses gender lines. It is apparent in the only other Indian man close in age and position to Martiniano.

Palemon, Martiniano’s only Indian friend, is drawn to Martiniano in the beginning of the story by some unspeakable force. By starting the novel with the perspective of Palemon, Waters induces the reader to begin to see as Palemon does. Palemon’s eyes are trustworthy. His stoicism reminds the reader of more familiar perceptions of the quiet noble Indian. In the end, however, the classic generic Indian that Palemon embodies is proven just that. He is fairly flat in the face of Martiniano’s own emotional transition. Palemon’s wife, Estefana joins her husband as a classic Indian character: a mother and protector, she gives life. It is difficult, however, for her to accept her son, Napaita’s transition to manhood. In her protective nature, she becomes antithetical to the progress of the Pueblo, even though she has initially given it sustenance through the birth of a son.
Waters incorporates another angle of Pueblo life by writing in the character of Taos Indian, Manuel Rena. Rena is responsible for bringing the Native American Church and peyote to the tribe. He is rich and educated and does not care for the traditional concerns of the Pueblo. Rena is close friends with the Indian trader and the curious Anglo woman, yet he is still an Indian who maintains a faith, separate and unique from American society, that he believes redeems him (Waters Deer 88). Rena is indispensable because he provokes an exhaustive discussion of the importance of faith and culture in the tribe. The question for the novel, and the tribe, then becomes if this road to spiritual oneness is as worthy as the traditional Pueblo road to spiritual fulfillment. 

Rena may borrow his name from a real Taos Indian Manuel Reyna, who appears active much later in the struggle for Blue Lake, but it seems possible that his interests in peyote, his friendships with the surrounding whites, and his wealth were modeled after Tony Lujan. In effect all the Pueblo Indians, even the drunk Panchilo are developed as more human than previous literary conceptions of Indians.

Waters also incorporated into the story, historical and contemporary members of the Taos circle, based on their names and lifestyles. Waters based the Indian trader Rodolfo Byers, Martiniano’s friend and equal in the novel, on Taos resident trader and friend Ralph Myers. Byers stands in for the “White man who knows Indians” (Slotkin 16). Like the frontier hero, Byers also belongs to, he believes, a vanishing past. However, Waters modifies this generic character, first seen in the James Fenimore Cooper Leatherstocking novels, by allowing him an intimate knowledge of the Indian, without assigning him the role of the hero who acts as mediator or interpreter between the white and Indian worlds. Byers does not (wouldn’t want to if

8 “For we have a faith, and faith is something the faithless will never understand.” 88 through 93
he could) bring white civilization to Indians, nor does he attempt to save the Indian from his savage inheritance. Byers knows Indians, enough to believe that as a traditional society they have a limited existence in the American future. But Byers is more a friend to the Indians, than he is to the Anglo population. He is not the narrator who introduces us to the conflict nor is he the only voice of reason. As Win Blevins points out, even the “sympathetic” Byers does not understand the people and, though he may show the deepest respect, he can ultimately explain nothing about their lives (Blevins 153).

By having no Anglo interpreter, Waters inverts a figure that is foundational in Western literature. The man who knows Indians and uses his power to understand and influence white society to respect (or to destroy the Indian,) becomes instead the man who knows Indians and who has “an essence truly Indian” in him, and yet can no more influence the Pueblo than he can influence the outside community (Waters Deer 186). Byers’ thoughts are descriptive and telling but his perspective, even though he is more in tune to the Pueblo than many non-Indians, reveals a persisting stereotyping of the Indian in his narration. He therefore, does not offer a fully understanding narrative. The difficulty on Waters’ part is just how to interpret the Pueblo people as “their way of seeing is conceptually inchoate, and needs to be so” (Blevins 153). How Byers, and the other Anglo characters, however, perceive and see the Indians in the text is explicit of Waters’ own desire to deconstruct the Anglo perceptions of the “Indian.”

The other Anglo characters, artists, writers, and tourists, with which Waters chooses to round out his story, can see no more than the Indians allow them to see. To
represent the artists circle, Waters created the well-intentioned, but objectifying painter Benson, “a little romantic, a bit sweet, old style for nowadays” (Waters Deer 183). Benson recognizes his own romantic tendencies in his earlier work, but nevertheless expresses a sadness that the Pueblo Indians have been irrevocably corrupted by white America. As he reflects on his romantic early portrayals of Indians, he muses, “But they were like that then, sweet and unspoiled” (Deer 178). Benson’s character is most likely, closely based on the later life of painter Ernest Blumenschein, but Benson’s story is similar to many others who arrived in Taos. They came west, painting their way for the railroad perhaps or maybe they had heard through friends, and once there they fell in love with the light and the landscape and stayed forever. Benson and the others are most important because they are illustrations of Waters understanding of the perceptions of Anglos in Taos, and in the United States, regarding native people and native culture. These characters are given depth most of all because of the historical situation they represent and those structures they act within.

The Taoseños and visitors provided not only character and form, but also connection and conversation with many different ideologies. The Santa Fe resident and writer Oliver La Forge, whose novel Laughing Boy, won the Pulitzer Prize for its elegant portrayal of Navajo life, was present in the Taos community around the time Waters first lived there. Thorton Wilder, as well, visited Taos in the summer of 1938 and the memory of D.H. Lawrence, though he had left New Mexico for the last time in the late twenties, still haunted the Dodge house (Wiegle 64-66). Despite the possibilities for interaction or influence, Waters did not write in cooperation with
these authors or nor did he work to continue their formal concerns or conclusions in his writing. The subjects and themes are similar but the outcomes are incredibly different as Waters could never ride the wave of romantic primitive modernist fiction, which landed a Pulitzer Prize for La Forge and worldly recognition for DH Lawrence. The difference in the novels appears as disparate as the differences in the Santa Fe and Taos communities.

Like Lawrence and La Forge, and many writers of the first half of the twentieth century, including most writers and artists in Taos and Santa Fe, Waters found great inspiration in the American Indian community, especially while living on Taos Pueblo land. Unlike his contemporaries, however, Waters espouses the native community as a living whole instead of a vanished fantasy. He does not desire to construct the pueblo community as a dead civilization in order to connect to them. Instead, The Man Who Killed the Deer understands the culture of La Oreja Pueblo, a fictionalized Taos Pueblo, to be fundamentally rooted within the traditional and contemporary actions of a living community.

In The Man Who Killed the Deer, Waters draws on the popular pairing of the well-written subject of the American Indian and the common genre of Bildungsroman with an interesting break of purpose and concern. In many contemporary novels, modernists constructed a future, or a past, for the Anglo protagonists based upon the utopian vanished world of the Indian. Or, they constructed Indian or Native heroes who could only exist within their own native culture actively separated from modern American society, a corrupting and fatal outside force. This struggle is depicted for example by La Farge in Laughing Boy (1929) and by Ernest Hemingway in The Sun
Also Rises (1926). In Laughing Boy the corrupting influence of outside American schooling is inevitably fatal for the young away-school Navajo woman, Slim Girl and incomprehensible for the naïve eponymous character of Laughing Boy. The Sun Also Rises, the expatriate American Brett Ashley fears the corruption and ultimate destruction of the young Spanish bullfighter Pedro Romero, who offers her and the other Americans an encounter with the culturally pure, morally superior, and ultimately unattainable world of the native Spaniard.⁹

Waters writes a different story working within the same conventions of the coming-of-age native novel. The manhood Waters constructs is predicated upon the balance of Native culture with American influence. Waters finds possible a balance where preceding modernists found the intertwining of Native and Western cultures to be fundamentally antagonist. In the perceptions of the modernists these cultures can never interact at the service of the native characters. In The Man Who Killed the Deer, the peaceful resolution of conflict suggests that the acceptance of custom and the continuation of Pueblo livelihood, conversely, must be received in tandem with a knowledge and fluid acceptance of American culture. For Waters, it appears that American culture is not the corrupting agent of the modernists but something to be used to the advantage of the Pueblo members when necessary.

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⁹ See Nicholas Daly, Modernism, Romance, and the Fin De Siecle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 140.
The Man Who Killed the Deer is rooted firmly in the historical struggles of the pueblo. Waters adopts historical characters in a *roman a la clef* style in order to present real characters that reverse stereotypes and reveal an unprecedented way of seeing Taos life and Pueblo history. With a similar consciousness he also constructs a historical novel to introduce the reader to an Indian perspective on Taos history. In the footsteps of his contemporaries, who began in the mid-30s to write grand historical novels about American History, Frank Waters wrote his own version of the West. Contrary to his contemporaries, including both mass market and modernist authors, Waters offers an intuitive understanding of Taos history from the point of view of the Pueblo. A decade before Waters wrote *The Man Who Killed the Deer*, authors like John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck began to write epic novels on the scale of the mythic. Waters, though he showed similar ambitions in his work to create epic stories, inversed the historical purpose of the mythic novel. Waters sought not to impress upon his audience an interest in the possibilities or consequences of progress for white Frontier Americans but in the cultural and social consequences of American Indian history.

Waters does not, therefore, tell the history of American progress to show the reader the problems confronting white society. Instead, he promotes the problems of Indian progress and what they mean for the Indian community. Progress, according to Waters, is the resolution of tribal tradition for the survival of the tribe and the inevitability of American influence upon the tribe. Waters inversed the historical frame of the Western: what is important to the hero, is not the corruption or glories of
the railroad, nor the saving of the west from anti-civilizing forces, mainly if not always embodied by the romantic “noble savage” or the very primitive and monstrous Apache Indian. Unlike progressives who, as Richard Slotkin points out, romanticized the past “as a prelude to an attempt to reproduce…the mythical order of an idealized Frontier,” Waters, though he idealizes the Indian, addresses a real, gritty past of colonization, resistance and American Indian history (Slotkin 286). By doing so, Waters confronts a problem in the recreation of pre-colonial history, that according to Fanon, has been devalued by colonialism (Fanon 210). Waters’ pre-colonial history provides the framework for the narrative of a strong Pueblo history that contests the distortion, disfiguration, and destruction of a colonial reinterpretation of that history.

Pueblo history provides a precedent for the tribe’s struggle to secure the fight for federal preservation of tribal lands. Archeological research and the Pueblo’s own story of origin prove a continuous presence on the land. Beginning as an Anasazi migration to the area as early as 900 A.D, the Pueblo preexists Spanish colonial presence by at least two hundred years. The permanent Pueblo structure proves ancient title to the land: Completed by 1450 A.D, the central pueblo structure, which builds upon itself in layers of adobe buildings to form an expansive structure, is known to be the oldest continuously inhabited structure in North America (Gordon-McCutchan 5). “All this land was ours,” according to the voice of the Pueblo, “—the

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10 Taos Pueblo acknowledges the archaeological evidence, allowing that their origin story cannot be shared with outsiders. According to their homepage, “Our people have a detailed oral history which is not divulged due to religious privacy. Archaeologists say that ancestors of the Taos Indians lived in this valley long before Columbus discovered America and hundreds of years before Europe emerged from the Dark Ages. Ancient ruins in the Taos Valley indicate our people lived here nearly 1000 years ago. The main part of the present buildings were most likely constructed between 1000 and 1450 A.D. They appeared much as they do today when the first Spanish explorers arrived in Northern New Mexico in 1540…. (Taos Pueblo, About Taos Pueblo - New Mexico Native American Indians, Available: http://www.taospueblo.com/about.php, March 18 2008.)
mountain, the valleys, the desert. Indian land. We have the papers to it from the
Spanish King. The Mexicans came, the white people—the gringos. They built
themselves a town on our land, Indian land. We got nothing for it” (Waters Deer
124). Waters stresses this ancestral connection and history referring explicitly to the
history of Taos Pueblo, although the histories of the Pueblos in New Mexico are very
similar. All had sacred land lost to centuries of colonialism and American expansion.
Taos ancestral lands used to include the town of Taos and at least 300,000
surrounding acres of now private land, townships, and public forest reserves. Most
significant in these lands are the sacred mountains and wilderness that rise as majestic
backdrop for the Pueblo to which the Pueblo claims a religious and ancestral right.

A twenty mile reach from the Pueblo sits the sacred, contested alpine Blue
Lake and the watershed that is the life of the Pueblo. The lake is the source from
which the Taos Pueblo people arose, and

as the principal source of the Rio Pueblo is symbolically the source of
all life; it is the retreat also of souls after death, the home of the
ancestors who likewise gave life to the people of today…. (qtd in
Gordon-McCutchan 9)

The area symbolizes, therefore, “cultural continuity for the tribe and is the source of
all their health and spiritual well-being” (Gulliford 955). In the preservation of Blue
Lake lies the preservation of “the unity and continuity of the Pueblo.” It is as central
to the Indian religion “as the cross is in Christianity” (qtd in Gordon-McCutchan 9).
Sitting twenty-five miles from Taos Pueblo, the Blue Lake has continuously been the
source of the waters and the tradition that have trickled down from its alpine enclave
to the Pueblo to provide life and sustenance to the tribe since its conception. From its shores springs the foundations for all Pueblo history, ritual, and custom.

Taos Pueblo has stood for centuries against opposing forces. As a settled village, it was the target of raids by eastern nomadic tribes long before the Spanish wandered up the river looking for gold. The imposition of the Spanish crown in 1598, brought with it disease, war, and Christianity, and distinctly altered the Pueblo way of life. The tribes lost land, population, and sovereignty at the hands of the Spanish conquistadors. Taos took advantage of its remote location to become active not only in smaller local revolts against the priest and government, but also in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, which forced the Spanish out of the area for fourteen years. The Spanish returned in the 1690s to put an indefinite ending to Pueblo resistance (Spicer 158-63). By the late eighteenth century, the effects of Spanish colonialism on the Pueblo peoples showed dramatically. Most tribes had accepted some form of Christianity, but many, like Taos, had kept their cultures somewhat protected. At this time, Pueblo population had been reduced more than by half, and the number of villages had been reduced to less than a third of what had been. Taos was one of only four other pueblos that had stayed on their ancestral lands (Spicer 169). The Mexican Revolution, in 1821, marked the end of the involvement of the Spanish Crown in the Mexican territory. Twenty years later, General Kearny entered, and following the Mexican-American War, America acquired the new territory and the Pueblos settled there.

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American Influence

As long as artists and authors had tried to understand the Indian Other, the United States government had tried to understand, just what exactly to do with them. Artists’ conceptions of the Vanishing Indian mimicked a long history of Federal Policy concerning the Native Americans across the United States. In the case of the Indian Problem, however, the answer was not to understand the self through the dying civilization of the Indian, but until the thirties, to help that process along in order to encourage assimilation into American society.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs was established in 1824: “The goal, until the administration of John Collier in 1933, was consistent and unrelenting: ‘to impress American civilization upon the Indian, to whiten the red man,’ whether by political, religious, or military might” (Michael A. Goldman qtd in Vickers 18).11 The bureau stood through different administrations, which expressed different conditions under which this was acted out. The bureau’s response to the imposition of Anglos onto Pueblo land prior to the twenties, perhaps exemplifies BIA policy during around World War I (Vickers 23).

Since the Dawes Act of 1887, known also as the Indian Allotment Act, which provided some semblance of protection of Indian lands had run out, the bureau faced a difficult dilemma, trying to accommodate both the Indians and the steady stream of Anglos moving onto Indian land. Trying to forgo the total appropriation of Indian lands by Anglos, to fix what had previously been a policy of aggressive forced assimilation, the BIA had, therefore, in the 1880s divided millions of acreage of

11 Michael A. Goldman “Roland E. Trowbridge,” in Kvasnicka and Viola, the Commissioners, p 234
reservation land to become private parcels for individual American Indian families. The hope was at this time “that private ownership would break down tribal relations and thus accelerate the assimilation of Indians into the greater capitalist society of private landholders and entrepreneurs” (23). The “‘good intentions,’” of the BIA in the 1880s worked to establish Indian “‘self-sufficiency, personal independence, and material thrift’” (qtd. in Vickers 23). The goal of the BIA was, therefore, to encourage the development of an agrarian society, upon which the Indians could work towards progress and sustain themselves apart from the government, encouraging private property among the Indians even as they understood Indian society to value communal ownership of ancestral lands.

Scott Vickers, in his discussion of the perceptions of Native Americans in art and literature, points out several “reoccurring imperatives” of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (19). One of these imperatives was to either exterminate the Indians or, barring that, to find a way to civilize them. A second was the “crucial distinction,” which according to George M. Frederickson “allowed Europeans of the Renaissance and Reformation period [and afterwards] to divide the human race into superior and inferior categories. One was between Christian and heathen and the other between ‘civil’ and ‘savage’” (qtd. in Vickers 19). The first and the second imperatives conditioned the bureau, most especially into the twenties, to continue federal policy that insisted on the end to the practice of sacred Indian religions, encouraging Christianity instead. The third reoccurring imperative of the BIA was to act in the “best interests” of their Indian wards with regard to lands and land protection (23). As the bureau acted in the “best interests” of the Tribe it assumed the position that the
Indians could not decide on their own what was best for them. The history of Taos Pueblo and its battle to secure its ancestral sacred lands greatly disproved this theory.

Taos Pueblo land had been gradually diminished by the Spanish and Mexican appropriation of land by land grants by the Spanish crown and Mexican governments, for centuries before the American government took control. Nevertheless, Blue Lake remained the heart of Taos Pueblo. For hundreds of years the Pueblo had resisted any encroachment into the area surrounding Blue Lake and so it remained the source of all water for drinking and irrigation as well as the source of spiritual life (Gordon-McCutchan 9). By the turn of the century, however, Taos Pueblo actively recognized the intrusions of squatters and others who threatened to misuse and destroy Pueblo lands. Rumors had spread that described gold mines in the area around Blue Lake. The story told that the Indians had thrown gold and silver into one of the lakes to protect it from outside discovery (9). Blue Lake, in the same area as the existing mines, allegedly contained the legendary and alluring stash. This intrusion into Pueblo land worried the tribe as the land was the source of some of most important and culturally sustaining rituals of the Pueblo. The potential for miners and non-Pueblo members to access the sacred watershed threatened not only the health of the water supply but also the sanctity and secrecy of the Pueblo rituals. For centuries Taos Pueblo had protected their religious rituals even in the face of harsh Spanish rule; and so, they prepared for a fight against the squatters and the federal government that supported them.

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The Battle for Blue Lake

In the late 1890s, two surveyors were sent out by a federal bureau to report on the Taos area, including the Pueblo and surrounding forests. During their time in Taos, the surveyors became sympathetic to the cause of the pueblo’s plight and sought out what they could do to secure the land for the Tribe. A local friend of the Pueblo (and original co-founder of the Taos Artists Colony) Bert Phillips, suggested the creation of Forest Reserves to protect the land from private use (Gordon-McCutchan 9). The surveyors promised to personally bring the issue to the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt. Taos Pueblo did not hold title to thousands of acres of their ancestral land, and so even though they had exclusive use at the time, the land was technically considered “vacant public land” (11). It was therefore eligible to be incorporated as Federal land under the new Forest Reserve Act, that in 1891, gave the power to the president to designate lands in the public domain as ineligible for further private sale: granting recreational access and the use of natural resources to anyone (7). The land was temporarily restricted for all use, including the Pueblo’s.

On November 7, 1906, the Taos Forest Reserve, as part of Carson National Forest, was created by the Bureau of the Interior to protect the lands surrounding Blue Lake. The reserve would protect the land from encroaching mining that had threatened the water supply. However, under the conditions of the Forest Reserve Act, the lands did not belong to the Pueblo, which only maintained a Spanish land grant to 17,000 acres, not including the Blue Lake area. Unbeknownst to the Tribe at the time, “the proclamation stripped the Tribe of aboriginal title, gave their sacred land to the federal government, and made it subject to the policies of the Forest
Service.” (Gordon-McCutchan 10-12). The tribe, therefore, appealed for exclusive use to the land. Any outside interference into Pueblo ceremony could forever ruin the sanctity of the tribe.

Unfortunately, an Indian view of living one with the land and maintaining a sacred bond with the earth through preservation, prayer, and ritual greatly contrasted the Forest Service’s idea of forest reserve land for public recreational, grazing, and water use. In 1909, at the request of the Tribe that they be granted exclusive use of the reserve, the Forest Service supervisor answered that the request was “’immaterial’ since the Forest Service [would] protect their interests” (Gordon-McCutchan 14). The Forest Service would not listen to repeated protestations concerning land and, acting under the legality of the Forest Reserve Act, they allowed grazing on the lands and fishing in the sacred lake. The denial of exclusive rights to the land was the only the beginning of attacks on the sanctity of Pueblo culture. The take-over of Pueblo lands would become apparent over the next decade; the fight was not unique to the tribe. All across the state, Pueblo sovereignty was threatened by the misuse of Indian land and a growing attack on Indian religion.

In 1921, the “practice of Indian religious ceremonies” became a punishable offense under the Religious Crimes Act, while at the same moment, native religion came under the attack of Indian Affairs (Gordon-McCutchan 16). The government degraded native religion by spreading reports of its immoral and debase nature and it blamed this religion for the inability of the Indian to assimilate into American society. In the view of Indian Affairs, it was necessary to destroy this unchristian religion in order to help them to civilize (16). In response to the campaign to renounce their
religion and end the practice of taking kids out of “school for religious instruction”
the tribes united and resisted the pressure of the government, composing a united
manifesto of 1924:

Our religion to us is sacred and is more important to us than anything
else in our life….Our happiness, our moral behavior, our unity as a
people and the peace and joyfulness of our homes, are all a part of our
religion and are dependent on its continuation. To pass this religion,
with its hidden sacred knowledge and its many forms of prayer, on to
our children, it our supreme duty to our ancestors and to our hearts and
to the God whom we know. (17)

Despite these protestations, or perhaps because of them, a bill was introduced for the
second time into congress that would severely restrict the rights and the powers of the
tribe to claim full ancestral title to their lands.

*The Bursum Bill*

In order to quiet title to various lots…of land in…New Mexico for
which claim shall be made by or on behalf of the Pueblo Indians
as…the United States, in its sovereign capacity as guardian of said
Pueblo Indians shall, by its Attorney General, file…bills of complaint
with a prayer for discovery of the nature of any claim or claims of any
kind whatsoever adverse to the claim of said Pueblo Indians…(United
States Senate and Bursum 9).
The Bursum Bill first introduced to the United States Senate in 1923, fought for the rights of squatters and others to appropriate Indian land. The ability of non-Indians to take Pueblo land without title had been greatly diminished since 1913 when the courts passed jurisdiction that established that the Pueblo peoples as Indians, thereby granting them the same protections to their land as other Reservation Indians. To those non-Indians who viewed Indian land as open land, however, the protestations of the Taos Indians to regain their ancestral land and the enhanced protections provided them were seen as an unfortunate occurrence. Following the concerns of the non-Indian squatters, Sen. Holm O. Bursum introduced a bill in 1924 into Congress that aimed to put “the burden of proof on the government rather than the squatters,” in proving rightful ownership or title (Gordon-McCutchan 17). The bill sought, therefore, to establish a Pueblo Lands Board, nominated by the president that would determine the legality of the squatters’ claims. It was the duty of the board, as “guardians” of the Pueblo Indians to investigate claims and to determine what land was granted to Indians by the American government and what had been sold to them by the Pueblo people. However, by putting the responsibility on the government, the bill turned out to be “nothing more than a quick and easy way for squatters to obtain clear title to their stolen Indian land” assuming that the government would do little to investigate the claims of those vying for title on the land (Gordon-McCutchan 17).

There was a national campaign to defeat the bill. A group of nationally prominent artists and writers latched onto the cause and brought prominence to the struggle of the Pueblo Indians. The Bursum Bill was resolved with the signing of the Pueblo Lands Act, which established a Lands Board, responsible for investigating
both Indian and non-Indian claims to the land. The Land Board had the authority to suggest to Congress if Blue Lake should be returned to the Pueblo. But the return would “depend upon an act by Congress” (Gordon-McCutchan 23) The effects of the Bursum Bill were devastating for the Pueblo Indians. If brought to court, it was quite possible that the judge could forced the Pueblo to reveal their secret practices and religious customs (23). John Collier Jr., a friend of Mabel Dodge’s from New York, soon moved out to New Mexico to help to defeat the bill and its negative lasting consequences (25). With the threat to Native cultures imminent, the Tribe fought adamantly against the decision. Not until the late seventies, under the Termination decisions of the Nixon administration, would Blue Lake be returned to the Pueblo people, after a sixty year struggle.

Waters captures with brevity and emotion the Indian response to their history and this set of events:

Yet there was this to consider. All this land was ours—the mountain, the valleys, the desert. Indian land. We have the papers to it from the Spanish King. The Mexicans came, the white people—the gringos. They built themselves a town on our land, Indian land. We got nothing for it. Now when the Spanish King opened his hand, Our Father at Washington closed his own hand upon the land. He told us, “You will be paid for it. The day will come with compensation.” What did we want with money? We wanted land, our land, Indian land. But mostly we wanted the mountains. We wanted the mountains, our mother, between whose breasts lies the blue eye of faith. The deep turquoise
lake of life. Our lake, our church. Where we make our pilgrimages, hold our ceremonials…Now what is this? We have waited. The day of compensation has not come. The mountains are Government forests. Not ours. The Mexicans pasture their sheep and goats upon the slopes. Turistas scatter paper bags unseemly upon the ground. They throw old fish bait into our sacred lake, Government men, these rangers, ride through it at will. Is any man safe? Look at this one’s broken head. Will our ceremonials be inviolate from foreign eyes? No then, is it we who are injured and must seek reparation, demand our rights, our mountains? This is what I say. God knows, will help us, will give us strength. (Waters Deer 18)

The quote above exemplifies Waters understanding of the necessity of the nature of the return of sacred lands to the Pueblo people. The Man Who Killed the Deer encompasses this struggle. Made explicit by the real-life and the fictional histories, the novel underlines the idea that the Pueblo’s sacred lands and Blue Lake, or Dawn Lake, are essential to the continuation of the Pueblo religion and tradition and concurrently Pueblo culture. Implicit in the text, however, is the idea that it is the essential spiritual connection to the land through custom that produces an authentic self. Therefore, it is only those who understand and posses a knowledge of secret tribal ritual who can achieve that sacred connection. In the case of the Pueblo, this relegates knowledge to Indians alone. It limits also the possibilities for authentication to men who in their initiation ceremony become the ones who fulfill the ritual act.
Women also fulfill ritual acts, but most often in the novel they are objects of some desire to achieve tribal sustenance. It is through their sons and husbands that women maintain that sacred connection. Flowers Playing, as an outsider, finds her connection to the Pueblo in the birth of a son who will continue Pueblo tradition. The healthiness of the child is dependent on following tribal custom. Estefana, the wife of Palemon, finds her essential characterization in the novel as reluctant to allow her son Napaita to reach manhood. But Napaita must reach manhood for the sanctity of the tribe. Therefore, continuing traditional practices, birthing children and witnessing their sons’ initiation into manhood grant women authenticity. This authenticity remains dependent on the man even as the female is most active in the community.

Allowing only Indians an authentic spiritual connection to the landscape, as Waters does, inverts the notion of the Indian as a passive part of the landscape. The desire for the land is openly expressed in a desire for the female body. To act, upon that desire, as Martiniano finally is able to, with Flowers Playing, is to illustrate the intertwining of the desire:

He lay beside Flowers Playing at night, already gently feeling her body to see if it had grown, and he wondered sleepily, Is it my wife’s thighs I feel, or the long rounded thighs of the pine slope outflung upon this sage desert? Is this her breast, now flattened at the crest, really in-curved above? Whose heart do I hear beating faintly but steadily like a muffled drum? And he thought of the little blue lake of life hidden deep within them both. We are all images of one great shape, obeying its same laws (Deer 135).
Waters makes this—the connection between sexual desire and desire for the land; between the creation of life and the continuation of culture; between an intimate connection with the land and with the female—almost explicitly clear in this section. Little is left to the imagination. Perhaps he could have been less explicit, comparing rather her thighs to the soft rolling hills leading up to the great mountains or making more explicit the connection between breast and volcano, or as Fitzgerald does by connecting the island to the breast and therefore to both desire and to a literary canon. Perhaps making no mention of this literary allusion however, if Waters was aware of it, is a choice to situate the Indian as the discoverer of this earth. Even so, this imagery understands Martiniano to be rediscovering this sacred landscape, of the Pueblo lands and the pregnant female (both essential to the continuation of the Pueblo) and finding himself the creator and inhabitant. By alluding to the sound of the “muffled drum” he concurrently alludes to the heartbeats of the sacred land, his wife and most importantly to their child. Of course, a muffled drumbeat may seem an unoriginal simile. But, the sound of the drum is inherent in pueblo custom, and is the driving force of Pueblo religion expressed through the dances. Whosever heartbeat it is, is the connection to the Tribe. Therefore, the child’s heartbeat is Martiniano’s connection to Pueblo custom. Perhaps it is all their hearts, the land’s, his wife’s, his child’s, and his own beating together.

This is, however, one of the weakest parts of the novel. It is essential to understand whose heart beat connects him to the Pueblo. If it is the land’s heartbeat, then Martiniano has triumphed by making the arid desert flower. If it is his wife’s heartbeat then he has triumphed by becoming part of her and she has part of him, and
by having his seed inside her, she is one with him and with the tribe. She therefore is no longer a threat and can no longer keep him from being part of the tribe. She accepts that he is going “back-to-the-blanket” and her complicity as a mother is both her duty and her triumph.

The situation, however, is inevitably uncomfortable for Martiniano. He feels compelled to leave his wife’s arms and go sleep outside. By needing to sleep alone outside is he holding on to some part of that individualist American tendency? Is he unsure how to balance his desires: the land and his wife. At this point in the novel, they are made in the same image though the description of his time alone outside is expressed in much more sensual language then the time with his wife. It is easier to have an intimate encounter with the outside landscape, with “the yellow moon low over the desert, the stars twinkling above the tips of the high ridge pines, the fireflies, the far-off throb of a drum, the silence, the tragic, soundless rushing of the great world through time—it caught at his breath, his heart” (Waters Deer 135) (135). Lying with the earth is an intimate experience expressed in warm tones, deep lowing o’s, long sounds that lull the reader to feel the excitement as the tips of the trees point to some ethereal spirit located within the uncatchable firefly, to underline that throb of desire and the aftermath of that experience leaves him breathless and silent and in love.

There is yet an uncertainty in the passage that is expressed in the inconsistency of the imagery. Switching between metaphor and simile, Martiniano seems to be unsure of his own imagery and his own positioning. The inability to decide if they are the land or intimately connected but only like the landscape belies
his insecurities with his recent reconnection to the Tribe. Is his wife (and consequently their child) one with the sacred landscape or is she merely like it, but forever separate? Is his child’s drumbeat his tie to the Pueblo? The blue lake, the source of Pueblo life and Pueblo culture, is hidden within them, but will they ever be able to find it? The imagery is stirring and despite the confusing writing, the reader can still understand the essential connection Martiniano feels to the land, to his wife, and to the tribe. Also apparent is the connection between Waters and the subject. He is ever conscious of keeping his ideas of unified wholeness patiently (and not so subtly) woven throughout the text.

This is contextually tied to a deep fear that the Pueblo will never again be able to claim the sacred lake as their own, leading to a dissolution of important custom and therefore to the disintegration of tradition. Of course the blue lake will remain forever in the Pueblo people but it will no longer provide the current for culture. If the area surrounding Blue Lake is taken away from the Pueblo people, then, as I’ve established, their source of life is as well. By situating the blue lake at the deeply imbedded core of Martiniano (and Flowers Playing), Martiniano situates the lake as essentially tied to the existence of their beating hearts and consequently to the existence of the beating drums of the Pueblo. The theme is continued on in the story as Martiniano cautions his wife to follow Pueblo custom in order that they may produce a healthy child. He cautions her not to scorn the “haillip” or the “twisted feet” of an old woman nor the lazy eye of an old man nor the physical abnormalities of any person “lest…their own child be born that way.” He cautions her not to use a knife in water “lest her own child be cut in its prenatal lake.” Martiniano’s warnings
become commandments, similar in structure to biblical admonitions that will help him and Flowers Playing. And though still viewing the situation from an American filter he is beginning to restructure a faith and a belief system in the style of the Pueblo. He is full of the zealous earnestness to do good by his word. By cautioning Flowers Playing to act within the customs of the Pueblo, and believing in their superstitions, Martiniano is accepting their potential power. If not whole-heartedly believing in their veracity, he is still acknowledging that the way to reenter the Pueblo is through custom. These small acts are essential to his reconnection. They assert that connecting to the beliefs of the Pueblo is the entrance way to custom. The concern for his soon-to-be child’s health and welfare is also an acknowledgement of the power of that child. The child is to be Martiniano’s connection to the Pueblo tradition and history. It is especially important therefore that it be a perfect specimen.

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In The Man Who Killed the Deer, Waters expresses a special affinity for the native people that transcends coexisting objectifying and romantic pathos in concurrent contemporary novels. In relation to production of master works in the twenties and thirties, Waters does adopt many of the affections and sympathies for Indians as pristine others. Modern authors situated, at best, the Indian as the perfect vanished Other who could offer, in its uninhibited and intuitive ways, the redemption of an authentic selfhood, in response to the worries of a Victorian feminizing and genteel repression.
Waters, in great contrast, does not speak of the American Indian as a member of a disappeared race as other modern authors did, as they nourished an attachment to the Indian other that was predicated on the notion that the Indians were a dying or dead civilization. “It is because the Indian’s sun was perceived as setting” by the American authors of the twenties, “that he could become…a kind of paradigm for increasingly powerful American notions of ethnic identity, for the idea of an ethnicity that could be threatened or defended, repudiated or reclaimed” (Michaels 232). The Indian other was, in this sense, a cultural ideal that existed outside the realm of true personhood. The Indian that had roamed the Americas, not American in the modern sense but very American in a historical and ideological Romantic understanding, presented the modernist authors with an attainable authentic conception of self. Authors could adopt the expression of pathos on behalf of this vanished other with little repercussion that they would loose their own civility by adopting this sympathy. Instead, they gained, at the expense of the existing American Indians, a new conception of authenticated American selfhood in the face of the destabilizing forces of the much earlier break from Victorian convention, increased industrialization, and the onset and aftermath of World War I.

The novel breaks from the romanticism of Waters’ earliest novel and the primitive modernism of his contemporaries, by offering a view of the Pueblo crises that grants the Pueblo people both a historical and mythical past and a foreseeable living future. Waters imagines for the Pueblo people a complex space within the American system that is irresolvable. The future, however, that Waters creates for the Pueblo people is at least a future that is realizable instead of the fantasy segregated
future imagined by the modernists. As Franz Fanon, argues, “the colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope” (232). Waters is not a fully colonized man, but he does represent in an abstract way the future of Martiniano and by telling the story of Taos Pueblo, Waters can assure the reader of the power of native action. The novel understands that ultimately the progression of Indian culture is fated for a diluted future existence due to the inevitable influence of American culture. Waters does not imagine a separate culturally pure existence apart from the corrupting American system. Instead he presents characters that work within the structures of the Federal government to secure their cultural existence and thereby achieve some semblance of sovereignty. Waters’ novel accepts the colonial position of the Pueblo Indians and creates a hero that must work within a colonial context. Waters does not, and perhaps cannot imagine a world where the Pueblo people live separate from American society with full sovereignty for the Pueblo people. His novel is especially unique in the face of preceding American modernists who imagined Indians to exist in an unattainable world.
Mom and I are driving down to Albuquerque. She has offered to join me in this drive and she is a good companion with her artistic eyes and patience. We are driving to the archives, so I can look through mountains of hand-written letters and typed manuscripts to find something, anything, about Frank Waters. I feel like, since starting my research, I am beginning to see like him, and sometimes, even, to my discontent, to write like him. But there is still that essential inescapable quality to the land that makes it so tempting to fall in love with and so impossible to express.

On this particular drive down the interstate, I am always overwhelmed by the masses of landscape that we see and by the very reality of the place. I look to the right and can see the humps and heaves of the hilly shrub landscape. In the distance to the west are the snow-covered slopes of the Jemez Mountains and to the southeast are the Sandia Mountains, which rise like a humpbacked whale half out of the ocean of the dry-brush and desert. It’s a normal and easy drive for us, that’s taken when we need to go to the airport, Mom needs to buy clay, or Dad has to go to a lawyer’s meeting. We recognize the common within the beauty of the landscape. On the way, we will
pass through several Indian reservations. We all know that San Felipe Reservation is just the place where you can get cheap gas halfway to Albuquerque.

Today, I am seeing this familiar land with clearer eyes. I see the houses of the reservation, the school buses parked outside the school, the road that leads back to the lake. The clumps of brush lead straight into the expanding city and the Bosque, where a green small mass of trees grows up thicker by the mud-brown Rio Grande. The sun is out on this dry cold winter day, leaking into the car, and the heat feels like warm leaden hands pressing and melting my ribs as I hold my breath once again amazed by the beauty of this scene.

We drive down winding La Bajada pass, with the cliffs red and the deep blues and dusty browns stretching back behind the layers of the landscape. I know that I’m in love with this place, but it would do no good say that to the drops and descents and brown grass and green shrubs and faint green mountains, purple and red at sunset. I’ll don’t think I’ll ever be able to speak about the land or to capture its modest beauty in words and paint, but I am beginning to understand that which must have compelled the artists and writers who moved here to stay and try.

I spend the afternoon fingering through Waters’ personal papers. It is the closest, perhaps, I will ever come to understanding him. After flipping through piles of indecipherable letters from Mabel Dodge Luhan, reading intimate letters from admirers, like author Henry Miller and scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., I am reassured that there is a diamond in the rough to be found in Frank Waters.
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