

**BLURRING IDENTITY AND BOUNDARY: CASE STUDY OF JAMES WELCH'S
WINTER IN THE BLOOD**

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Abstract

This article explores identity and boundary issues in Native American works of fiction. It focusses on James Phillip Welch's *Winter in the Blood* analyzing the central character's shuffling between Native Americans' and Whites' cultures. By means of a postmodern analysis, this article highlights the notions of identity and boundary acquisition, showing on the one hand traditional or cultural identity, and on the other hand, the process of blurring lines between human beings. It comes to the conclusions that boundaries are blurred by means of physical and mental journeys, spirituality and humanism. It also concludes that identity is mutative.

Key words: boundary, identity, indigenous, migration, transversality

Résumé

Cet article explore les questions d'identité et de frontières dans les œuvres de fiction amérindiennes. Il met l'accent sur *Winter in the Blood* de James Phillip Welch analysant les va-et-vient du personnage central entre les cultures Amérindiennes et des Blanches. Au moyen d'une analyse postmoderne, cet article met en évidence les notions d'identité et des frontières, montrant d'une part l'identité traditionnelle ou culturelle, et d'autre part le processus de réconciliation des frontières entre les êtres humains. Il en arrive aux conclusions selon lesquelles les frontières s'estompent au gré des voyages physiques et mentaux, de la spiritualité et de l'humanisme. Il conclut également que l'identité est mutative.

Mots clés : frontière, identité, indigène, migration, transversalité.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the contemporary world is sometimes contrasted by serious events that compromise a long cherished ideal. Technological advancement, military achievements and space explorations have dramatically changed the world, and with it, man's

perception of the world and his surroundings. However, decades of scientific progress did not contribute to wipe out our basic needs, which are namely concerned with self-determination and our living places. These notions are at stake in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* as it highlights various kinds of boundaries and identity paradigms.

Gassim Dohal focusses on the struggles for survival of the central character in *Winter in the Blood*. He insists that the protagonist's main problem was to identify himself and he could do nothing unless he discovers his own identity. About the protagonist, he asserts.

This lost hero struggles to survive by trying to have ties with the present through going to town, drinking, and having women; a way to avoid the identity headache. Yet, he is not able to construct his present as long as he has no past to rely on. In other words, it is impossible to create something out of nothing. (Dohal, 2019, 161).

Gassim therefore insists that self-determination or identity is prior to any societal construction, as that is justified by the central character's wanderings in the novel.

Likewise, Jennifer Kay Davis (1995) in her thesis *Achieving Cultural Identity in Winter In The Blood and Ceremony*, tries to compare the central character Tayo in *Ceremony* and the unnamed character in *Winter in the Blood* as far as their identity quest is concerned. She concludes that both characters achieved their goal by distortion of traditional methods to suit their own needs. She posits:

The possibility that the characters resolve their cultural identity crises via methods devised particularly for such a crisis by their cultures. It is further suggested that what is unique about these novels is that the narrator and Tayo modify these traditional methods to suit their personal needs and situations and the changing society." (Davis, 1995, IV)

Both Jennifer and Dohal did interesting research concerning identity quest of post-war Indian American communities. Nonetheless, they voluntarily or involuntarily overlook some important factors that drove to identity problems by putting all the blame on Whites.

The present article aims at pointing out, for instance, endogenous issues that conducted to identity crises and methods used to blur the lines. In this article, those issues are referred to as boundary or frontiers as they set differences and gaps between individuals regardless of their origins. Therefore, which elements can be identified as boundary notions in *Winter in the Blood*? How far does identity refer to Native Americans? How do identity and boundary notions work or function? Which methods help reconcile people as separated races or ethnic groups?

A postmodern analysis of *Winter in the Blood* gives a different perception of identity issues and ways to blur separating lines between people. One of the prominent postmodern writers, Jean-Francois Lyotard in his "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" (Manchester University Press, 1979), identifies conservatism as the main enemy of postmodernism. Therefore,

the postmodern analysis is rather dynamic as it changes and adapts perpetually. Another postmodern thinker is the French theorist Jean Baudrillard with his book *Simulations* (1981, translated 1983). He mainly sustains that the application of postmodernism is synonymous with the “loss of the real”. Both conceptions (Lyotarian and Baudrillardian) do serve the prospect of this article since their concepts are of paramount importance in this work. According to Peter Barry, in *Beginning Theory*, postmodernism is meant to challenge general perception. He says that:

in all the arts touched by modernism what had been the most fundamental elements of practice were challenged and rejected: thus, melody and harmony were put aside in music; perspective and direct pictorial representation were abandoned in painting, in favour of degrees of abstraction; in architecture traditional forms. (Barry, 2002: 61)

The general perceptions according to which differences in culture, race, religion and lifestyles (to name just a few) are static, can easily be challenged by means of postmodern views, insofar as religion, culture, identity and lifestyles are perpetually changing.

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, this article is divided into two main parts. The first, IDENTIFYING FRONTIERS IN *WINTER IN THE BLOOD*, aims at boundaries between people. The second, BLURRING IDENTITY AND FRONTIERS, investigates on the strategies used by different characters to blur the lines of differences in their daily lives.

I- IDENTIFYING FRONTIERS IN *WINTER IN THE BLOOD*

Frontiers take different shapes in *Winter in the Blood*. We refer to any action or intention that sets lines or differences between people or nature as a frontier, a boundary or a gap. They encompass geography, culture, identity and culture. Those shapes stem from differences between white people and Native Americans sharing the same living place. Many Native people therefore learn to apprehend and live with these differences imposed on them. Paula Gunn Allen once said that Native Americans, regardless of the tribes, had to

Somehow, come to terms with a whole different technological universe. And that conflict means how do I keep my sense of what I am? If I am a Native American, how do I stay connected to my tradition, to my way of seeing the world? And... it's a constant fight to keep in mind for yourself who you are. (Coltelli, 1990, 13)

It is then possible to extend Paula Gunn Allen's statement to cultural, identity and social universes. There have always been frontiers and they will still exist since boundaries appear in relation with the evolution of the world.

Nature also shows a gap with the white man. It is a river, which *refuses* to obey white people because they have destroyed the land. Ecology retaliates with silence and ignorance to the sugar factory, which people believe to have caused damages to the river. Whatever they try to do to

reestablish the natural order, the river refuses to conform to their manners. This is perceptible in the following passage:

The white men of the fish department came in their green trucks and stocked the river with pike. They were enthusiastic and dumped thousands of pike of all sizes into the river. But the river ignored the fish and the fish ignored the river; they refused even to die there. They simply vanished. The white men tests; they stuck electric rods into the water; they scraped muck from the bottom; they even collected bugs from the fields next to the river; they dumped other kinds of fish in the river. Nothing worked. The fish disappeared. (Welch, 1974, 4-5)

The mystery of the river goes in the same trend with the actions of reprobation the protagonist undertook against the white community when he is in the town.

Identity issues are felt in the narrator's incapacity of self-determination. He lives an aimless life, as he does not know who he is. For a long time, he thought he was Doogie's grandson, thus a half-breed. That idea led him to believe that he is useless to both the white and Indian communities. That in-betweenness causes him a lot of trouble. The central character is a true Indian. But he ignores that reality thinking of being half-breed. That causes reality to be lost. He therefore faces what Jean Baudrillard refers to as a loss of real.

Identity issues are found in a protagonist as to emphasize the difficulty of many Indian Americans to deal with their past, present and future. Being nameless is a proof of identity crisis, since a name gives a bunch of information about an individual like the ethnic group, religion and the community he belongs to. Therefore, being nameless shows that the narrator belongs to no community. The narrator's disconnection with his past and present, his aimless life and daily torments all find echo in his nameless status; it cannot be otherwise. In building a stateless narrator, *Winter in the Blood* shows that identity should never be taken for granted.

Belonging to two or more communities may be advantageous. However, in the case of the unnamed narrator, it turned against him. The protagonist finally admits that he was a "stranger to both, and both had beaten me." (Welch, 1974, 96)

1- Indian American and White Society Split

The colonization of the New Land by Europeans was far from being a lovely partnership with local people, the Indian tribes. The notion of physical boundary is clearly expressed by White people's migration from Europe to the New Land. They fled from Europe seeking political and social freedom. But very soon, their lust for capitalism will contradict indigenous people's living modes, thus resulting in conflicts. Whites' upcoming cohabitation with indigenous people resulted in disputes and eventually armed conflicts, creating an ideological

frontier between them. Representing Indian Americans and Whites conflicts in *Winter in the Blood* emphasizes the idea that crossing boundaries often results in conflicts between the hosts and the strangers.

Some white people refused to collaborate with Indian Americans no matter their regalia responsibilities. That is seen with a Catholic priest, who is suspected to be courting the protagonist's mother. This latter Later, "who refused to set foot on the reservation" (Welch, 1974, 5) for no apparent reason. The refusal of the Catholic priest to set foot on Indian reservations bespeaks of the depth and width of mistrust he feels to Indian communities. The Priest personifies white people's distrust, stereotypes and possible disdain of Indigenous people. Religion that is meant to be the place of tolerance, does not help the priest befriend Indians.

Consequently, that behavior explains how and why the narrator does not feel well in the white world. His experience of reservation and city lives does not help him feel comfortable. He explains: "again, I felt that helplessness of being in a world of stalking white men. But those Indians down at Gable's where no bargain were either. I was a stranger to both, and both have beaten me." (Welch, 1974, 96) Here, the reader discovers social gaps or boundaries combined to an identity loss, as the narrator does not feel any connection to either community. It also shows how identity is not only a personal choice; it also depends on a community acceptance. Reality about identity concept is somehow lost, in the sense that people were systematically labelled as Indian or White for instance. *Winter in the Blood* introduces scholars with in-betweenness or *identitilessness*.

Boundaries or frontiers are expressed through the notion of distance. At the very beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced with the notion of distance. The central character is distant from people no matter who they represent to him. He is also distant from anything that is of interest to a normal individual. He does not feel any connection with his parents. Going back home after a spell in the white man's world "was never a cinch, but it had become a torture" (Welch, 1974, 1). There is a whole gap between him and his family members, whom he does not even consider as part of his life. He explains that.

coming home to a mother and an old lady who was my grandmother. And a girl who was thought to be my wife. But she didn't really count. For that matter none of them counted; not one meant anything to me. And for no reason. I felt no hatred, no love, no guilt, no conscience, nothing but a distance that has grown through the years. (Welch, 1974, 1-2)

Distance then means more than a lack of connection; it is a lack of emotion between the narrator and human beings. Talking about distance in Welch's novel, Coltelli gives his insights about distance. He asserts:

The winter, I suppose, of *Winter in the Blood* has to do mostly with the character's feeling of distance—as he says, not only from; distance in terms of mental space, emotional space, he feels as distance from his mother, distance of his grandmother, distance from the girl he brought home. So the problem seems to lie within himself... (Coltelli, 1990, 191).

Having defeated Indian Americans, White people have created Reservations to park them in. That decision, which is both discriminatory and racist, created a frontier between whites and Indian Americans.

Winter in the Blood shows that there was a great confusion between Indians as far as their new destination was concerned. The creation of Reservations is an expression of racism as it sets differences between people. Whether they had to stay in the white man's world or return to their old living places, the Blackfeet tribe will experience racism as white people eventually decided for them. In the novel, we read:

Finally, it was the soldiers from fort Assiniboine who took the choice away from the people. They rode down one late-spring day, gathered up the survivors and drove them west to the newly created Blackfeet reservations. (Welch, 1974, 123)

That paternalistic decision-making is the sign that the white people do not care about them after the severe losses Indians endure. The government seems to regret why there are still some Indians alive, so it decides to create an open-air prison for them. The grandmother denounces the inhuman treatment they were given: "The old lady had ended her story with the image of the people driven "like cows" to their reservations." (Welch, 1974, 123)

White people found a legal justification to concentration camps in the Indian Removal Act of 1830. John Marshall, Chief Justice at that time, has characterized the relationships between Indians and the government as

resembling that of 'a ward and his guardian'. With these words, Marshall established the Federal trust doctrine, which assigns the government as the trustee of Indian affair. That trusteeship continues today, but it has not served Indians well. (Reagan, 2014, 2-3)

That conception of John Marshall about placing Indians under the responsibility of the Federal government is a serious prejudice against indigenous people and an act that exacerbates distance between Indian Americans and Whites.

Moreover, persecution and harassment created a social distance that separates Indian and white communities. In *Winter in the Blood*, the airplane ticket man characterizes the distance

the government created between Indians and white people. In fact, he is hiding from the police for an unknown reason. In his running, he chooses the reservation because he knows the government and the police forces could hardly imagine him in that part of the country, so he could barely be sought there. He asserts: “I’m hiding in Montana; what better place to hide?” (Welch, 1974, 75). He justifies his choice of getting an Indian with him since “the harassed one [the Indian] is going to keep those guards so busy harassing him that they aren’t going to pay attention to the other one [the airplane ticket man].” (Welch, 1974, 76)

When the airplane ticket man tries to involve the protagonist into his tricky running away plan, he fails. Since the protagonist knows the truth about their relations with guards, he is naturally reluctant. To him, their plan won’t work. He explains: “I can’t figure out why you picked me – maybe I should tell you, those guards like to harass Indians. They can never figure out why an Indian should want to go to Canada.” (Welch, 1974, 76) The airplane ticket man then expounds the idea that some places exclude other individuals like Indian Americans. In that perspective, persecution and harassment constitute attributes of social frontiers.

2- Fragmentation of Indian communities

The contact with white people created an internal gap between Indian communities. The elderly people wanted to stay in reservations and connect to nature and the environment. As for the younger generation, it was attracted by the luxury of the town. *Winter in the Blood* presents Yellow Calf, an old character, living in a remote area from town and even the Reservation. To Yellow Calf, the Indian communities need to keep in touch with their ancestors and nature. That explains why Yellow Calf decides to live far from big cities and their luxuries and have his distances with his kinsmen of the Reservation.

That contact has also resulted in the perturbation of family’s balance, creating intra-family frontiers. That is the case with the Central character and his mother. That appears when he does not feel any connection with his mother and he recognizes that this latter “ignored me [him]...” (Welch, 1974, 3). The narrator is separated from his mother since this latter has married a white man. The separation is blatant in the way the son refers to his mother. The narrator expresses his disapprobation about his mother and Lame Bull’s marriage. To the narrator, Lame Bull is not marrying his mother; he is rather marrying his mother’s possessions, and that is unacceptable. He explains:

Lame Bull had married 360 acres of hay land, all irrigated, leveled, some of the best land in the valley, as well as 2000-acre grazing lease. And he had married a T-Y brand stamped high on the left ribs of every beef on the place. And, of course, he had married Teresa, my mother.

At forty-seven, he was eight years younger than she, and a success. A prosperous cattleman. (Welch, 1974, 10)

The narrator sees that marriage as a terrible mistake from his mother. He explains: “Teresa, you made a terrible mistake. Your husband, your friends, your son, all worthless...” (Welch, 1974, 169) Thereof, everything belong to Lame Bull and the protagonist is right when he refers to his mother as “his wife” (Welch, 1974, 23) rather than calling her “my mother”. There is thus, a lack of affection between the protagonist and his mother. He will eventually get angry with Lame Bull and his mother thus creating a gap between them.

Likewise, there is also a generation gap between younger and older generations. The advent of modernism has brought youngsters to be lured by capitalism. Yellow Calf, the old character, has decided to live not only far from town, but also from the reservation as he thinks that people in the reservations are not close enough to nature and ancestors. That disconnection may be contrasted with the close relation an animal gets with its colt. The novel describes that relation in these words: “In the tall weeds of the borrow pit, I took a look and watched the sorrel mare, her colt beside her ... It was called the Earthboy place, although no one by that name (or any other) had lived in it for twenty years.” (Welch, 1974, 1) This lovely relation is explained by Gassim Dohal as he thinks that it.

refers to the relation between the mare and her colt, a relation the narrator of the novel has lost with his mother and consequently he loses the link between his generation and the old generation (represented by his grandparents). The generation between the narrator and his grandparents, i.e., that of the narrator’s mother, seems unaware of the past. (Dohal, 2019, 2)

The cohesion of nature is then opposed to the fragmentation of people’s social lives. By raising awareness on the perfect relation between an animal and its colt, the novel highlights the idea that human beings, contrary to modernist perceptions, are not an absolute reference; they can draw lessons from nature.

II- BLURRING IDENTITY AND FRONTIERS

Blurring boundaries between people is a sine qua none condition for living in a peaceful and tolerant world. *Winter in Blood* offers some of the strategies whereby that objective can be achieved.

1- Closing Gaps through Cultural Prisms

The protagonist in *Winter in the Blood*, along with other characters, represents a desire to close the gaps between people various ways. He shows that through his will to encounter others.

In fact, he left the Reservation to work and live in town. Though that initial objective is not fulfilled, his stay in the white world still taught about white people's manners.

Cultural gap closing comes through a form of revelation from Yellow Calf. As a matter of fact, the central character regularly pays visits to the old man. The old man represents the history of the Blackfeet tribe, and he tells the protagonist some cultural stories. Those visits help him reduce the physical distance and emotional distance he felt at the very beginning of the novel; he also learned about his culture. The gap is closed between him and his history as the protagonist regularly pays visits to the old man Yellow Calf who personifies culture and tradition. More importantly, the protagonist's visits to Yellow Calf eventually help him answer a vital question: that of his identity, as he finally discovers that he is not a mixed blood. That discovery is important insofar he reconnects with his tribal history. He feels reconciled with himself and others. The narrator expresses that reconciliation as a secret he shares with yellow Calf and their ancestors. He says:

And so we shared this secret in the presence of ghosts, in wind that called forth the muttering repees, the blowing snow, the white air of the horses' nostril. The cottonwood behind us, their dead white branches angling to the threatening clouds, sheltered these ghosts as they had sheltered the camp that winter. But their others, so many others (Winter, 125).

Indian Americans found in spirituality the solution to go beyond the conception of physical presence of the land. Staying stuck to traditional ways of living, Indian communities found a parade against the dispossession of land. It goes the same for the character of Old Betonie in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* who expresses the comfort Indian people feel in the Reservations. He believes that no matter where Indian Americans are, they will feel comfortable if they keep pace with culture and tradition.

The central character catalyzes that younger generation of young Indians who show interest in learning from others as well as reconnecting with their traditional ways of life. They do not decide to despise their former hangmen but learn from them. He lived in the white world, and work in a white man's business; by the end of the novel, he is no longer against the idea of going back to the white man's town. Being far from his parents and culture, he tries to connect with friends of the same cultural affiliation as him. In so doing, the protagonist still feels his homeland and his relatives.

2- Homecoming and Humanity

A physical journey has become one of the best choices to help the narrator close gaps between him and his culture and tradition. In fact, he eventually got tired of his aimless life

because of identity loss, and decided to return home, though it is far from being perfect. He justifies his choice in these terms: “I should go home, I thought, turn the key and drive home. It wasn’t the ideal place, that was sure, but it was the best choice.” (Welch, 1974, 96) A home is supposed to be a place where one feels at ease and comfortable regardless of material possessions. He used to shuffle between the reservation and the town though these homecomings were not an easy task. At the beginning of the novel, he sees homecoming as extremely difficult since “coming home was not easy anymore.” (Welch, 1974, 1) despite those personal difficulties, he did not give up and that shows his strong will to blur lines that separate him from the community. Fortunately, by the end of the day, he succeeded in blurring boundaries insofar as he finally realized that “it was good to be home.” (Welch, 1974, 105) At last, he finds peace, connection and comfort of being home.

The narrator in *Winter in the Blood* mentally journeys back home. That mental journey expresses an evident will to stay close to his relatives. Mose, the narrator’s little brother, plays an important role in the journey, which takes the protagonist, home when he has been in the white man’s world. That urban stay has impeded him from keeping track with the family. Anyway, the mental journey gives him the opportunity to touch, see and feel like being home. He has always found a link or drawn a connection between life in the city and his reservations. For instance, in a hotel room he perceives some of his souvenirs with Mose through make-up stuffs. He recalls:

The dresser was covered with bottles of perfume and cologne, talcs and powder puffs, all delicately colored, all nestled deep in ruffles. Bubble-bath globes lay scattered among the bottles. I picked up one and felt its smoothness. It was light blue, almost transparent. (Welch, 1974, 66)

The stuffs he finds in that hotel are compared to the things he used to see and touch in the reservation. The talcs and powder stuffs teleport him into his homeland. In that seemingly meaningless stuff, he travels not only to reservations, but also, he closes the gaps of time and space. He continues:

I remembered the cold spring day Mose and I had found the bubble bath globes in Teresa’s bedroom. My father must have given them to her as a present, perhaps for Christmas or her birthday. They were packed in a clear plastic box with a ribbon around it. Not one had been removed. Now I tried to imagine Teresa in the mental tub on the bedroom floor up to her neck in bubbles. (Welch, 1974, 66)

Though in town, the narrator recalls, with a great precision, events, which occurred years ago. That attitude proves his commitment to his family even though he has difficulties to express it. The scene also gives the scholar insights into the perception of distance, which is not

only physical. The narrator was certainly far from his homeland, but he was still mentally home most of the time.

The distance that exists between the narrator and the reservation is closed by means of mental journeys. In fact, the unnamed narrator undertakes mental journeys to the reservation while in town. Although being far from the reservation, his love for his family namely his father and his brother is still intact. To close that distance, he perpetually keeps them in mind, thinking about them. To stay connected to them, he repetitively travels from town to reservation and vice versa. Concretely, while pacing up and down in the street of Havre, he comes across a familiar double featuring movie he has seen with Mose. But even a twenty years gap could not prevent him from talking once again with his brother. The sight of that film makes him think about his brother he loves so much. He daydreams: “the twenty years slipped away, and I was a kid again, Mose and I side by side.” (Welch, 1974, 82) He revives his peaceful years with his family and anything he used to do with his brother. Therefore, the narrator always relates things he sees in town to the persons he loves and who are still in the reservation.

Dreaming and Daydreaming and solidarity are also a means whereby frontiers are blurred. Indeed, a scene of drunkenness shows the way gaps are closed in *Winter in the Blood*. The narrator is found dreaming while he is drunken. The relation between his state of being drunk and dreams related to his tribal history show that he not actually drunken; he is rather revising his tribal history though he still in town and living with white people. His mind and soul are still connected to the reservation. In so doing, he does not still feel the distance or the gap between his history and himself. Geographical distance does not exist anymore. the protagonist “awoke the morning with a hangover” (Welch, 1974, 42). But curiously, during that state of drunkenness, he is “pursued by the ghosts of the night before and past nights” (Welch, 1974, 42). Those dreams reflect some of his past actions both on the Reservation and his stay in the white world. He blurs those gaps mentally by thinking about “a surgical operation, a girl asking for help, his mother helping some men in suits and a barmaid” (Welch, 1974, 42). Then, the novel shows how solidarity blurs frontiers between people. The narrator’s mother assisting people, seemingly Whites (because of their suits as Whites’ dressing codes), highlights the importance of crossing borders between Indians and white people.

The happy ending of *Winter in the Blood* suggests that the promotion of humanitarian values blurs differences. Some characters are compassionate towards others. Therefore, showing compassion denotes the acceptance of others. In fact, the narrator is more willing to take initiatives and willing to help. It is the case with Agnès, a white girl he has met during his

wanderings in town; he eventually realized that he feels something to her. That state of mind contrasts with his initial mood at the very beginning of the novel where he was hollow and felt nothing for anyone else apart from his grandma and brother, the two individuals he ever loved. Therefore, he decided to fix things with her and do things right next time he meets her, and maybe offer to marry her. He thinks: “next time I’d do it right. Buy her a couple of crèmes de menthe, maybe offer to marry her on the spot” (Welch, 1974, 138) Marriage plans shows that there is distance no more between the narrator and the Cree girl. He definitely settled things up with a discovered identity.

Frontiers are blurred as white people show more kindness towards Indian Americans. Indeed, *Winter in the Blood* shows the characters of Ferdinand Horn and his wife, both white people, stopping by to offer their condolences to the central character who just lost his grandmother and calling the protagonist “partner” (Winter, 1974, 127). Ferdinand Horn, his wife and the unnamed narrator bespeak of the new alliance between white people and Indian Americans.

CONCLUSION

To sum things up, frontiers and identity issues are perceived through the narrator’s quest of identity and distance he felt between him and other characters. The notion of frontiers is also perceptible through racism, generational gaps and the unnamed status of the narrator. He eventually solved those problems through cultural acceptance, spiritual connection and the happy ending of the novel. By pacing up and down between the Reservation and urban areas dominated by white people, the central character eventually found a junction or a bridge to cope with both cultures. Identity and boundary transversality are perceived through the protagonist’s naming or no-naming, his physical and mental stays on both sides of the novel’s plot. By emphasizing Native American cultures and by the same time the protagonists’ ability to live in the white world, Native American writers, in general, and James Welch in particular, show that identity and boundaries are not static, but they are mutative.

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