Ceremony Study Guide

Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

As if their near extinction, compulsory attendance at boarding schools, and constant violation of treaty rights by the U.S. Government were not enough, Native Americans were encouraged to leave the reservations for the big city during the 1950s and 1960s. Many did, but precious few were successful in large urban areas. In order to provide needed support and offer hope to these individuals, they formed political groups (Red Power, ARM, AIM, et al.). These organizations encouraged them to reject any sense of shame of their culture and assisted individuals as they waged battles in court, in federal parks, and in towns across America for their rights.

More importantly, these actions coincided with a return of the people to their traditions. Native American activists inspired young people to learn as many of the old ways as they could. A Laguna woman who was part of this cultural renaissance became its most celebrated author.

Already highly regarded for her poetry collection, *Laguna Woman* (1974), Leslie Marmon Silko became the first female Native American novelist with *Ceremony* (1977). The story illustrates the importance of recovering the old stories and merging them with modern reality to create a stronger culture. In the novel, a young man named Tayo, from the Laguna Reservation, returns from fighting in the Pacific. He is suffering from a battle fatigue that white medicine cannot cure. Through his struggle back to health, we learn that the way to heal the self, the land, and the people, is to rediscover the neglected traditional ceremonies and our relationship to the earth. Noted technically for her non-chronological narrative and ability to blend poetry with prose. Silko has been praised as a master novelist.

Author Biography

Silko grew up on the Laguna Reservation in New Mexico and is a Pueblo Indian of mixed ancestry-Cherokee, German. Northern Plains Indian, English. Mexican, and Pueblo. She reflects her diverse' heritage in her writing (from the biographical notes for *Laguna Woman):*

"I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed, or mixed blooded person; what it is to grow up neither white nor fully traditional Indian. It is for this reason that I hesitate to say that I am representative of Indian poets or Indian people. I am only one human being, one Laguna woman."

She was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in March of 1948. Her father, Lee H. Marmon, helped at his parents' grocery store and was a photographer for the U.S. Army. Her mother, Virginia, also worked. Left with her two sisters in the care of the village, Silko chose to spend her time with her great-grandmother, Maria Anaya. who lived next door. Other influences included Grandma Lillie Stagner, a Ford Model A mechanic, and Aunt Susie, a scholar and storyteller. The older women taught her Pueblo traditions and stories.

When she was 6, her father was elected Tribal Treasurer and he brought home the tensions of the Laguna people: violated treaty rights; questions of identity and blood quantum; and the problems of poverty. But more importantly, Silko overheard discussions about a lawsuit the Laguna people had lodged against the state of New Mexico. They alleged that the state had stolen six million acres of land. The lawyers, witnesses, and archeologists involved in the case met at the Marmon house. She also was present as the elders told their stories of the land and the people.

The lawsuit convinced Silko to seek justice as a lawyer. In pursuit of this goal, she attended the University of New Mexico where she majored in English. There, her short stories won her a discovery grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The lawsuit, started when she was six, was settled by the time of her graduation. The U.S. Court of Indian Claims found in favor of the Laguna people. However, the Claims Court never gives land back; they order compensation in nineteenth-century prices. In this case, the court ordered payment of 25 cents an acre-and the legal fees of the case amounted to $2 million.

Silko dropped out of the American Indian Law School Fellowship Program after three semesters. She decided that American law was inherently unjust after studying a 1949 Supreme Court refusal to stop the execution of a retarded black man. She left believing that storytelling could change things. After teaching on the Navajo Reservation at Chinle, she moved with her husband, John Silko, and two boys (Robert and Cazimir) to Ketchikan, Alaska, where she wrote *Ceremony.*

In 1976, Silko returned to the Southwest as a single parent. Since 1978, she has occupied a teaching position at the University of Arizona. produced another novel, several essays, and one mill. Currently she is working on a screenplay.

Plot Summary

Tayo's Alienation

After a brief introductory poem which describes the power of Native American ritual ceremonies, the novel begins revealing Tayo's troubled psyche through a series of chaotic, fragmented scenes. He has nightmares, confusing dreams in multiple languages, flashbacks to traumatic events, and a wide assortment of psychological illnesses ranging from anxiety to depression.

Initially, the novel presents these various psychological disorders as stemming primarily from Tayo's experiences during World War II. In particular, Tayo is deeply disturbed when he is ordered to kill a Japanese soldier but refuses to do it because he thinks that the soldier is actually his Uncle Josiah. Even after his cousin, Rocky, logically explains that this Japanese soldier cannot be Josiah, Tayo refuses to accept Rocky's factual logic. Instead, Tayo feels that there are deeper spiritual relationships that intimately connect all beings within a single spiritual web. This sensitivity to spiritual connections also makes Tayo feel responsible for causing a prolonged drought among his people when he cursed the jungle rains in Japan during the war, and he feels additional guilt because he could not prevent his cousin Rocky from being killed in the war.

Like many veterans, Tayo continues to re-experience these psychological traumas even after returning home, and his problems are only compounded by his friends, Harley and Leroy, who encourage him to use alcohol as a way to escape from life. Unlike his friends, however, Tayo has a deeper spiritual side. He never feels completely comfortable just getting drunk, picking up women, and bragging about his war heroics. Instead, Tayo longs to reconnect with the natural landscape and the Native American traditions that used to provide the foundation for a more harmonious lifestyle for his people. Because of this deeper spirituality, Tayo is frustrated by his friends' self-destructive behavior.

When Emo, another Native American veteran, begins bragging about how much he enjoyed killing people during the war, Tayo's uneasiness finally erupts into violent anger, and he attacks Emo. Luckily, Tayo's friends stop his violent outburst before he succeeds in killing Emo, but Tayo is arrested and sent away to an army psychiatric hospital in Los Angeles. This attempt to fight violence with violence only aggravates instead of relieves Tayo's psychological alienation.

Tayo's Visits to the Medicine Men

Eventually, a sympathetic doctor lets Tayo return to the reservation where his aunt and grandmother try to heal what the psychiatric hospital was unable to cure. When Tayo's suffering continues, however, his grandmother suggests that he see Ku'oosh, a medicine man. Ku'oosh tries to cure him with traditional healing rituals, but these rituals

are only partially effective because they were created centuries before the more complex disorders of the modern world came into existence. Consequently, the traditional healing ceremony performed by Ku'oosh eases Tayo's pain, but it does not end it altogether. A stronger magic is needed to combat the more powerful modern forms of evil-modern Ck'o'yo magic.

To make matters even worse, the novel also begins to reveal how Tayo's problems extend back further before his war experiences to his unstable childhood. Tayo's mother, Laura, got pregnant out of wedlock to a white man who did not stay with her to help raise him; she was herself a wildly irresponsible parent. She spent her nights sleeping around with various men either for money or fun, and generally drank away what little money she made. Consequently, Tayo spent much of his early childhood being neglected until his mother finally left him to be raised by her mother and sister. While this move gave Tayo a more stable home life, it created other psychological burdens because his new caretakers frequently shamed him for his mother's past.

When Ku'oosh begins to realize how deep-rooted and complex Tayo's psychological problems are, he suggests that Tayo visit another mixed blood medicine man in Gallop named Betonie who specializes in healing war veterans. Tayo's uncle takes him to visit Betonie, but Tayo is initially suspicious and nervous when he sees Betonie's eclectic modes of operation. Betonie lives in a bad section of town, and his house is filled with all kinds of clutter. There are innumerable telephone books, empty coke bottles, and old calendars mixed among prayer sticks, bags of herbs, and medicine bags. Betonie uses all of these objects to create new rituals that combine symbols from multiple cultures.

Tayo never becomes fully comfortable with Betonie's unorthodox multicultural brand of shamanism, but he stays and allows Betonie to work his magic. After performing an elaborate healing ceremony, Betonie explains to Tayo that he must complete his own healing because modern disorders are too complex. Before Tayo leaves, however, Betonie reveals to him several signs that will be part of his healing process: a constellation of stars, some spotted cattle, a mountain, and a woman.

Tayo's Recovery

When Tayo returns home this time, he is even more determined to avoid his old friends and their self-destructive behavior. He gets sick of hanging out with them in bars, so he heads into the mountains to look for his uncle Josiah's lost cattle and a new way of life. While looking for the cattle, he finds a woman named Ts' eh Montano who has sex with him and begins to teach him about the traditions he has lost. She rejuvenates his spirit, helps him find the constellation of stars that Betonie had drawn for him at the conclusion of his healing ceremony, and leads him toward Josiah's lost cattle.

However, the cattle have been stolen by a rancher named Floyd Lee who is guarding them behind a wolf-proof fence patrolled by his cowboys. Tayo cuts through the fence and eventually finds the cattle only to be caught by two of Floyd's cowboys. They start to take him back to town to arrest him, but then they lose interest in this plan when they

become preoccupied by an opportunity to hunt a mountain lion. With a little more help from Ts' eh and her husband, who seem to appear out of nowhere and suddenly disappear again like mythical beings, Tayo is able to free the cattle from Floyd Lee's land and return them back to the reservation. Ts' eh teaches him more about cattle raising and other cultural traditions and then mysteriously leaves again.

Just when it seems that Tayo has finally reestablished himself in his people's traditional way of life and reconnected himself to their cultural traditions, Emo begins spreading false rumors about Tayo having gone crazy again. Emo gets several of Tayo's friends and the local authorities involved in a manhunt to capture Tayo and send him back to the army psychiatric hospital. After a couple close calls, Tayo finally escapes Emo's vigilante posse and returns home, while his pursuers end up meeting various disastrous conclusions instead. Harley and Leroy die in a terrible auto accident, and Emo kills Pinkie, another one of his vigilantes. The novel concludes with a final ritual poem which announces the victory of good over evil but reminds the reader that such victories are always tentative, so we must remain vigilant in avoiding the continual temptations of evil Ck'o'yo magic.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Silko begins this story with a condensed version of the Laguna Indian creation myth:

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman

is sitting in her room

and whatever she thinks about

appears . . .

Thought-Woman, the spider,

named things and

as she named them

they appeared.

She is sitting in her room

thinking of a story now

I'm telling you the story

she is thinking

Tayo is a half-breed born of a Luguna Indian mother and an unidentified white man in Gallup, New Mexico. His mother is homeless, and his earliest memories are of the men who come in and out of their corrugated tin shelter in an arroyo outside of town, and of sleeping under the tables in a local tavern when his mother would go off with some man or another. At four years old, she takes him to her home in the Laguna Pueblo and leaves him with her family, a group of proud and respectable Lagunas, where he grows up under the resentful care of her sister. Auntie had not wanted to take him, but she was overruled by her mother, Old Grandma, and her brother Josiah. She continues to resent him as she cares for him and always communicates to him that he is not quite acceptable. Old Grandma is also a part of his growth, as well as his Uncle Robert and his Uncle Josiah, both of whom treat him with kindness and affection. Josiah plays a major male figure role in his life, and Tayo loves and admires him as a father. When Tayo's mother passes away, Josiah stands with him at the funeral and holds his hand. The most important member of the family is Rocky, Auntie and Robert's son, who is near Tayo's age. The two have a brotherly relationship growing up in the Laguna Pueblo.

Rocky is a star. From academics to athletics, he excels at it all, and Auntie has great hopes for his future. He intends to break tradition and leave the Pueblo when he grows up. Auntie, sent to a Catholic boarding school as a child and now a convert, has nursed a cold anger at her younger sister, Tayo's mother, because she has disgraced the family and has thrown her life away on the streets of Gallup and elsewhere. So Tayo grows up in ambivalence, without a mother in his life and with constant reminders by the woman who has taken her place that he does not measure up. Because he is in the Pueblo and is part white, he is treated as not quite acceptable, but he is not accepted in the white community either because he is part Indian.

Josiah carries on an affair with a Mexican woman, a further embarrassment to Auntie, but Night Swan is an extraordinary woman who fills an important place in his life. Auntie feels that he is also damaging the family's reputation, not just because the affair is illicit but because the woman is Mexican.

He loves Tayo and spends a lot time with him, taking him along when he is going from place to place in his pickup. He takes him to bring water from a spring one day, telling the boy about their heritage and where they came from. The boy's half-breed heritage does not matter to him. He also tells him how important the spring is because sometimes the rains don't come, and this water source keeps the animals alive.

At the recommendation of his Mexican paramour, Josiah decides to buy some cattle. He purchases not Herefords, which other ranchers own, but a tough desert breed that can tolerate the long dry spells that occur from time to time in this part of New Mexico. Tayo helps Josiah separate the good cattle from a large herd when they make their purchase. The cattle are unloaded, and Josiah finds them beautiful. They immediately take off to the south, however, with Josiah and his nephew racing after on their horses in an attempt to keep track of them. The wild desert cattle have little regard for fence and just force their way through them. Josiah assures Tayo that they will settle down after a few days. The cows wear Mexican brands, but Josiah decides that they should bear Auntie's brand. They then round them up and put new identifiers on them. He feels that he has made a good deal, and he and Tayo are going to work together to build the herd.

After borrowing books about cattle breeding from the extension agent, Josiah and the boys read them together and discuss the information. Tayo sees that Uncle Josiah's cattle are nothing like the ideal cows in the books. They are tall with long thin legs like deer, their heads are long and angular, and their eyes are big and wild. Uncle Josiah concludes that they will have to make it up as they go, maybe writing their own book about raising cattle on Indian land. Rocky is contemptuous because he says that's the problem with the Indians — they never know what they're doing. Auntie sides with Rocky, of course. It gives her a chance to make an unkind remark about the influence of the "dirty Mexican woman" that Josiah is seeing.

As the boys finish high school, World War II is raging. Rocky is enticed to enlist by an Army recruiter, and sweeps Tayo along with him. He tells the recruiter that Tayo is his brother and that they will enlist if they can stay together. The recruiter observes the difference in their appearance and is skeptical that they are brothers. Auntie does not

want Tayo to go, as Rocky is the one who is supposed to go off and do something. Tayo has promised to stay home and help out on the ranch, but now he promises to bring Rocky back safe. "You don't have to worry," he tells her.

They find themselves in the steamy jungles of the Philippines fighting the Japanese. The killing and the horrors are too much for Tayo. He keeps seeing Josiah in the faces of the Japanese and, even though Rocky forces him to look in the faces of the dead soldiers and see that they are not their uncle, Tayo cannot accept it. They are captured, then Rocky is wounded and is carried out on a makeshift stretcher by Tayo and a corporal from their battalion. Tayo keeps confusing the Japanese with people he has known back home. One of the Japanese soldiers then comes and uses the butt of his gun to crush Rocky's head as he lies in the blanket that had been improvised as a stretcher. Tayo screams and collapses, but is supported and saved by one of the other soldiers.

He survives the war physically, but not mentally. His injuries are not the typical war injuries, nor are his symptoms typical; he has not lost a limb, nor has he become impotent as happens to many veterans of this kind of military action. His mental disorientation is not unusual, but the illness is in his belly and not in his head. He vomits, as he cannot keep food down, and is kept in the military hospital for months under medical care intended to cure his illness, then is finally released to make his way home by himself. Once on the street waiting for the train to come, he finds himself very weak but just thankful that now he will be allowed to die in peace. Ironically, a Japanese/American woman with two small children helps him. The man in charge of the depot comes to his aid, and he vomits until he cannot vomit anymore. He thinks the small Japanese boy whose mother has helped him is Rocky. When he eventually gets on the train, he then makes his way back to the home where he grew up in the Laguna Pueblo.

With Auntie taking care of him, he vomits constantly until he is so weak that he can't get out of bed. He lives in the room where he and Rocky have grown up, and Rocky's bed remains there next to his own. To make matters worse, Josiah died while he was gone. He had died pursuing the cattle.Tayo feels that it is his fault because he wasn't there to help him.

Recalling Josiah's visits to Night Swan, Tayo remembers that she would watch him when he accompanied his uncle. He also recalls a time when the rains finally came and his uncle sent a note by him, telling her that he could not keep a date they had made. She had seduced Tayo that day, a special memory for him, but he never saw her again. Now he goes back to the room, now abandoned for some time, and tries to recapture some of what he has lost. He sits in the room, picks up a fragment of fallen plaster and draws dusty white stripes across his hands the way ceremonial dancers sometimes do. Now he knows why they do it -- it connects them to the earth.

He prefers his sleeping room dark, as he can avoid confronting the memories that surround him when the room is light. Old Grandma and Robert, too overwhelmed by his sickness and crying, cannot stand to come near him at first. Eventually, however, Robert

begins to tell him about the ranch and the animals. Robert has always been a very quiet man who has lived a life owned by the women, including the good family name. With both Josiah and Rocky gone, all the responsibility rests on Robert, and he is tired.

Old Grandma comes to Tayo, takes his head on her lap and croons an Indian chant. He tells her he needs to go back to the hospital to be cared for by the white doctors. She objects, wanting to send for a medicine man.

The old medicine man Ku'oosh comes and tells him about a deep lava cave, one that Tayo and Rocky had visited when they were children even though Auntie had told them they couldn't. Rattlesnakes would be there in the spring; they went there to restore life to themselves. It was said that in the old days, scalps had been thrown into this cave. Now Tayo knows why the medicine man has come. The world is fragile, the old man tells him, as fragile as a spider's web.

Tayo tells him that he didn't kill anyone in the war, but he doesn't tell him that he had cursed the rain and that he was responsible for the drought that has descended on the Pueblo since his return. Even so, he asks the old man to help him just in case he might have killed someone without knowing it. The old man then chants and says, "I'm afraid of what will happen to all of us if you and the others don't get well," And leaves Indian tea and a bag of blue cornmeal. Tayo cries, trying to get rid of the pain inside him, then sleeps.

When Auntie and Old Grandma come back — they had gone away while the medicine man was there — they make him tea from the sticks and mush from the blue cornmeal. He manages to keep the tea and mush down, knowing that if this does not work he will die. He doesn't care anymore if he vomits or if he dies. The vomiting stops after the visit of the medicine man and the ingestion of his "medicine," but recurs when he is out drinking with his friends.

His childhood friends Harley, Leroy, Pinkie and Emo have also gone off to the war and have become serious alcoholics. Tayo drinks with them and remembers that as a soldier, he was accepted by the white people. White women would sleep with him and the other soldiers would treat him as an equal, but when the war was over they were back to being the unacceptables — the Indians. The other former soldiers do not want to hear this, particularly Emo. They spend their time drinking as they begin drawing Tayo into their circle. On one of these occasions, Emo tells stories of his exploits with white American women when he was a soldier as he plays with teeth of Japanese soldiers he has brought back from the war, something very upsetting to Tayo. The more Emo talks, the more Tayo's stomach knots up until he can stand it no longer. He breaks off the base of his beer bottle and goes for Emo, plummeting the improvised weapon into the other man's stomach, yelling "Killer!" Tayo feels that, somehow, he will get well if he can kill Emo. The police arrive, and Emo lives, but Tayo is sent back to the hospital. When he gets out, he resumes his drinking, but there is enmity between him and Emo. Tayo remembers that their tension stems from their childhood when Emo hated him because he was half white.

The family keeps sheep and hires a shepherd to care for them. While Harley had done this for a time, he disappeared one day and eventually turned up in a Los Lunas jail. The family found the sheep dog dead, killed and torn apart by wild animals, and the sheep scattered while the horse stood near the highway where Harley had left him, its saddle stolen. Then Pinkie is hired for the job, but lasts only a few weeks before he goes back to the useless life the young men are living — spending his government disability checks on his drinking.

At the recommendation of Ku'oosh, Robert takes Tayo to a medicine man who lives in the foothills and leaves him there. Tayo is frightened, as he believes he has been brought here to be killed. However, he begins to trust the old medicine man, Betonie, and tells him about his stay in the hospital, where everyone was white. "In that hospital they don't bury the dead," he tells Betonie, "they keep them in rooms and talk to them." He also tells him of his experiences in the war, of how he had believed that Josiah was there the day Rocky died. "He loved me, and I didn't do anything to save him," he said. Now he wants to know whether he had, in fact, let the cattle kill his beloved uncle.

The medicine man helps him to see that his illness is not his illness alone, that it is part of a larger illness, and it is related to the changes that have been brought about by the treachery of the white people. He tells him that the ceremonies have changed because the world has changed. From the old man's Hogan, they can see the white man's world, the cars on Highway 66, but Betonie says it is not simple. You can't write off all the white people, just as you can't trust all the Indians. You should not be so quick to call something bad or good. There are transitions; the world is changing, and the transitions must be cared for closely. All evil does not reside with white people, he tells him. They are only tools that the witchery manipulates, and the white people can be dealt with. He tells the Indian myth about the white people, that it was Indian witchery that had created them in the first place. He also tells him a myth that a very long time ago, the ancestors of the Indian people had been Oriental, coming to this country from Asia, and that when he saw his uncle's face and those of the people he knew back home in the faces of the Japanese it was because of their common heritage, not because he was crazy. Later, Betonie barbecues ribs. They taste good to Tayo, and he is able to keep them down.

The next morning, they go up into the hills on horseback. He performs a ceremony that involves a minor scalp wound deliberately inflicted on Tayo's head, walking in bear tracks and prayer sticks. He sleeps after the ceremony, and wakes knowing that he must go and find his uncle's cattle. Betonie tells him to find the cattle, that a heavenly constellation will be a guide, and that there will be a woman who will help him. The ceremony over, Tayo hitchhikes home and is picked up by his drinking buddies. He joins them and a girl they have picked up and they all get drunk again, but Tayo leaves them and vomits up all the beer he has drunk, trying to vomit up everything – all the past, all of his life.

He sees the pattern of the stars in the skies that Betonie has told him to look for, so he goes on the hunt for the cattle. He takes the truck and a horse but abandons the truck when there are no longer tracks. Now riding the horse, he comes upon a woman in a yard. She feeds him and they make love. He dreams of where the cattle, are and at

dawn he sets off on the horse. He prays an Indian prayer about the sunrise. The woman feeds him breakfast, and he heads upward toward a plateau and finds the cattle.

They are behind a fence so sturdy that they cannot get through, as they had done when they had run away from Tayo and Josiah. Using his tools, he makes a hole in the fence large enough to drive the cattle through, then gets on his horse and goes to get them. A mountain lion comes when Tayo and his horse are resting, but it only comes and looks into Tayo's eyes, then turns around and leaves.

After finally finding the cattle, Tayo herds them toward the hole in the fence, knowing that if he can get them turned they will go through. Just as he sees them emerging through the hole in the fence, his mare stumbles and both fall, knocking Tayo unconscious. When he comes to, two ranch hands are standing over him and asking him where he had been going so fast. They accuse him of poaching deer or even of rustling. One goes to get a truck to take him out to the police, but when the man returns he says he has seen lion tracks. The two decide that a mountain lion is more valuable than Tayo and they leave him. He finds a shallow depression, covers himself with leaves and spends the night there. As he walks downward from the plateau the next morning, he hears a man with a buck across his shoulders singing a Laguna chant. He tells Tayo that the cattle are probably down below.

They go back to the house where Tayo had found the woman, and his mare has also returned there. The woman is there with the cattle are in her corral, a natural trap on an arroyo that runs from the rim of the mountain. All she had to do was close the gate after them. He takes them home and Robert helps him get them into their own corral.

He dreams of the woman as if she were with him, and he and Robert work together to prepare the ranch for winter. One day, he tells them that he is moving to Josiah's ranch for good. The woman, whose name is now revealed as Ts'eh, comes to him there but she warns him that he now has enemies and that they will try to capture him and take him back to the hospital, so he flees into the hills. One day he at the cave, however, his drinking buddies find him. He joins them and drinks, telling himself that they are his friends and would not be in on the conspiracy to take him back.

After drinking all night, they go away and Tayo finds his way to a crater that was made when agents of the government had mined for uranium years before and is now abandoned. He is struggling with the realization that his friends, lead by Emo, are, in fact, the enemy and had been coming to get him. They come back after dark and park below the crater. He disables the car they are driving, takes a screwdriver from it with him for a weapon, and climbs into the boulders above the crater. As he watches, Emo, Pinky and Leroy take a badly wounded Harley out of the trunk and torture him because he has refused to go along with their plan to capture Tayo. Tayo struggles with the desire to go and protect his friend as they torture and kill him, but the other three get into a fight where Leroy kills Pinkie, and Tayo accepts that there is nothing he can do. Later, Old Grandma reports on their deaths, though no one is ever blamed for them.

Tayo understands that the ceremony is not over. He must find his own peace, and it does not lie with the three Indians who have been a part of the sickness that afflicts him.

After Tayo returns to his family and is fully functioning and participating in the ranch's work, they hear that Emo has killed Leroy in an "accident" with a gun, and that he has been banished from the Pueblo forever and has gone to California.

Tayo goes back to Ku'oosh to finish the ceremony, and Old Grandma sends a pot of chili and frybread for their feast. The story ends with another Laguna chant:

Whirling darkness

started its journey

with its witchery

and

its witchery

has returned upon it.

its witchery

has returned

into its belly.

Analysis

When Tayo desperately returns to the site where Night Swan had seduced him before the war, he draws ceremonial patterns on his hands — a foreshadowing of the ceremony that ultimately heals him and of the role of Ts'eh in the healing. Just as the experience with Night Swan was a positive, meaningful interlude in the life of a young man who was confused about his identity and was just beginning to discover his own sexuality, so is the loving sexual experience he has with Ts'eh that plays such an important role in his healing. His connection to his Uncle Josiah, the most important and most positive influence in his young life, is also reflected in his intimate experience with the woman who had also made an important difference in the life of Josiah. In the various sexual encounters in the story, we see attitudes about morality and behavior that are different from that of the white culture, underscoring the theme of the story that white people are alien, are not superior, as is commonly thought, and do not dictate cultural morés to the Native Americans. Native Americans revere the Earth as a goddess, and sex is not opposed to spirituality. The very earthiness of sex makes it sacred.

There is also a contrast drawn between Native American spirituality and Christianity, and Christianity doesn't come off very well. Auntie is the only character in the story who represents the white man's religion, and her whole existence is focused on the reputation of the family. She is unconcerned about what is happening to her little nephew, whose development she is responsible for. So focused on what the community will think that she seems oblivious to everything else, she goes on her unfeeling way through life and leaves the cleanup to others. Her religion plays no significant role in the lives of her family or her community. Her hypocrisy contrasts sharply with the Native American value systems. The medicine man's voice of reason, enlightenment and healing makes a very powerful statement. Certainly in the mind of this writer, the importance of the heritage, cultural beliefs and ethnicity of her people is superior to the white man's.

This writer, a Native American herself, is communicating a way her own people can adapt to the changes that have taken place and are taking place in their own world while hanging on to their own identity at the same time. Betonie tells Tayo that saying that the white people are to blame is too simple, but change has occurred and Tayo must learn to adapt to it. He blames the changes on witchery, and his work with Tayo that ultimately helps him find wellness and peace is to outwit the witchery. Tayo's friends are bewitched and dangerous. He must separate himself from them, and his attempts to do so almost get him killed. They cannot deal with his increasing understanding, so they must kill him. Harley is a transitional figure in this struggle between truth and understanding and witchcraft. While he has led Emo and the others to Tayo, he refuses to go along when he realizes what the "witches" intend for his friend, and it costs him his life. In them, the evil of the witchcraft is personified.

There is magic in the healing, of course. The guidance of the stars, Ts'eh's appearance in the right place at the right time, the mountain lion that looks into Tayo's eyes and goes away and then leads the ranch hands away from him, as well as the arroyo that leads the cattle into their pen. These are not happenstances—they are the results of the supernatural work of Betonie in Tayo's ceremony. The reemergence of Ts'eh and her warning that saves Tayo's life is another instance of the magic.

At the same time, there are many elements of effective psychotherapy in the counseling that Tayo receives from both Ku'oosh and Betonie. They guide him gently through a recounting, re-examination and recasting of all the demons that possess him. Beginning with the lifelong self-concept fostered by Auntie and both the Pueblo Indians and the white people that he is somehow an outcast and unfit, going to the unfitness of his personality for the horrors of war, then to the death of Rocky and Josiah for which he feels responsible, and finally to the drought afflicting the ranch and the animals that he also feels responsible for — these are the demons in his stomach that his body is trying to vomit up. He had loved and trusted his Uncle Josiah, and with him gone no one is left to help him make sense of what is happening. Now the two medicine men move into that role and establish trust so Tayo can get rid of his demons in better ways than vomiting them up. By establishing relationships with his genealogical history, they lead him to the integration of his personality that is necessary for any human being to be functional.

When Ku'oosh comes to him, he brings medicines — the Indian tea and the blue corn, but he also brings stories, another form of medicine. He tells the story of the cave where the rattlesnakes come to restore life to themselves. Tayo remembers that cave and remembers going there with Rocky, lying on his belly, and that he could never see the bottom. The two boys would throw stones into it, but no sound reverberated because it was "deeper than the sound." It goes to the very belly of the earth. He also remembers how he and Rocky soaked up the life-giving energy just as the rattlesnakes did. This is the memory that helps Tayo begin to find restoration. It is then that he sits up in bed, something he hadn't yet been able to do. He sits against the bed's headboard now, the first indication of the healing that is beginning to take place.

One medicine man also talks about the fragility of the world, something that Tayo understands intimately. He knows all too well how difficult it is to maintain balance in a hostile, chaotic world. The reminder, however, that it is the fragility of a spider web, which is, in fact, very strong — so strong that it can trap sunlight, something only seen if one stays still and looks carefully — gives him comfort and understanding. The world is fragile, but it can also be fixed once torn. Now we are reminded of the creation story at the beginning of the book. Spider Woman has spun this fragile world. Spiders spin their fragile, resilient and tough webs from their bellies. His belly has been trying to rid him of all the evil that is trying to devour him, but it can recover, it can be fixed. This is the beginning of healing. The ceremony is far from over at this juncture, but it has commenced and its life-giving effects are already being felt. Tayo no longer vomits except when he is drinking with his friends, who are a part of the evil that has been besetting him.

It is worthwhile to note that the word "belly" appears on 71 of the 262 pages of the book. Silko is deliberately focusing on the metaphor of the spider web that is woven from the belly of the creator of the earth, as in it she sees in it the potential for healing – not only for Tayo, a mixture of the Indian world and the white world, but for both of the cultures as well. The white culture, in her view, is as much in need of healing as the Native American one.

The conflicts in this story are between Tayo and a hostile world and are personified in his conflict with Emo. From the day of his birth, the world is a threat to him. He lives his early years in the tenuous care of a mother unable to be one. He barely survives in an environment where even adults are at risk in the slums of Gallup. Then, when his mother gives him up and he is physically cared for in her family, he is still in an adversarial relationship with the one person in the world who should be providing encouragement. We know that the winner in this contest would certainly have been the unfriendly world were it not for Josiah, who provided the love and nurturing that not only got him through those years but, even though he was no longer present in the flesh, provided the lifebuoy that made it possible for him to regain his health.

The world of the battlefield was the most hostile and threatening of all the experiences in his life. Some men seem to survive these horrors while moving on and making lives for themselves, while others are emotionally unable to cope, and Tayo was one of the latter. He lost his grip on reality when he continued to see Josiah and other people he

knew in the faces of the Japanese, and could not make sense of what was happening to him. While no one could survive unscathed the horror of seeing his brother, the person closest to him in the world, brutally murdered, the impact on Tayo was even greater. His tendency to feel that it was his fault is a human response. This tendency to assume guilt is the most significant reason that soldiers suffer what is called "shell shock," the disintegration of personality common to so many veterans of any war. Only after World War II, the one depicted in this story, did this phenomenon begin to be acknowledged and addressed. Many of the veterans of that war were never functional again. Homeless shelters in the United States are still filled with many of the veterans of the Vietnam War for the same reason. War destroys the warriors.

Coming home from a war that his country won did not end the battle for Tayo. He brought the demons home with him, and the world he brought them to continued to be his adversary. Auntie had lost the person she had pinned her future hopes on. Tayo was not a fit substitute, yet here is where he must fight his battle, and do so without the help and support of his Uncle Josiah. His friends join the enemy in creating an even more hostile environment — one that seemed a refuge but was, in fact, the opposite; in fact, it was the factor that was in place to end the conflict. The likelihood that Tayo was going to win the battle now over his adversary, an indifferent and hostile world, is not very great.

The plot is rising — the conflicts are introduced early and escalate with the antagonist, the hostile world personified by Emo, gaining momentum and seeming to be the most likely winner. The introduction of the medicine men begins to bring hope that the good guy, the protagonist, will win this battle, but the war is not over yet. The climax comes when Tayo acknowledges that his drinking buddies, his friends, are actually agents of the enemy and are in a position to bring about his defeat and his death. With that realization comes the necessary action for Tayo to be victorious. We know now that the last of the demons has been exorcised and that Tayo will make a satisfying and productive life for himself.

The denouément, the tying up of all the loose strands, comes when Tayo goes back to Ku'oosh for the completion of the ceremony and when word comes that all of Tayo's friends have been killed except Emo, who has been banished from the Pueblo. Ku'oosh's closing ceremony says it all.

They unraveled

the dead skin

Coyote threw

on him.

They cut it up

bundle by bundle.

Every evil

which entangled him

was cut

to pieces.

Tayo is the name of a fantasy Laguna hero, a boy who rode an eagle and went down into a mountain to meet Spider Woman, who gave him gifts to take back to the inhabitants of the Pueblo. Although *Ceremony* is told in third-person, we are able to identify with Tayo from the very beginning of the story because we can see that he is motivated and tries very hard to do what is right. He takes his responsibilities to the people in his life seriously, even though that life has not served him well. He respects the stories that have been shared by Old Grandma and Uncle Josiah, and he also abides by the rituals. He believes that he has been responsible for the drought because he cursed the rain in the Philippines, but we are told how he performed rituals of love for the earth to help bring rain.

Silko includes a story about his observation of ritual: he gets up before dawn, takes his horse and goes to a canyon spring. On the way to the pool created by the springs runoff, he gathers yellow pollen and sprinkles it on the pool because it "seemed right, as he imagined with his heart the rituals the cloud priests performed during a drought."

As he watches, the spider comes to drink at the pool, and he reflects on the stories he has heard about her powers to help break drought. We also know that her ability to weave a fragile but strong web from her belly is one of the stories that will eventually restore him. Although no connection is drawn between his ritual at the pool and the coming of rain, a drought-breaking thunderstorm does come the very next day.

Several times in *Ceremony*, the author alludes to Tayo's hazel-green eyes. They are a source of shame to him because they mark him as a half-breed. However, Night Swan tells him they are an indication that he is related to the green bottle fly and to the hummingbird, both seen forever as messengers to help communicate with the goddess and to help end the drought. This seems to suggest that his half-breed status will make it possible for him to be a messenger, since he stands between both cultures. He almost dies in his journey to develop adaptive skills, but Betonie's suggestion that the world has changed and that transition is necessary indicates the important role that this half-breed can play in reconciling the cultures and in combating the witchcraft that besets both. The white culture is suffering as much from the witchcraft as is the Indian one.

As Tayo is heroic and representative of what is good in the transition of the relationships between the two cultures, Emo, the full-blood Indian, is the personification of evil. He revels in telling tales of killing and torture. The stories coming from his belly are spews of hatred. He has not been destroyed by the war; it has simply become an excuse for his excess. He is the representative of the antagonist, an angry and hostile world. He precipitates the climax to the story when he takes his buddies on his killing rampage to end Tayo's life. Tayo barely escapes, and does so only because he is finally able to see

the difference between the way of life represented by Emo and the others versus the way to health and wholeness.

Rocky's role is to provide contrast to Tayo. Rocky, with full-blood status, does not have the needs that eventually drive Tayo to seek understanding. We believe that if Rocky had lived he would have left the Pueblo and become a part of the white culture to fulfill the wishes of his Christian mother, who had already abandoned her heritage. He is not a builder, but one who abandons. It is precisely Tayo's membership in both worlds that makes his life so difficult. At the same time, it is what equips him for his life's work of bringing peace and understanding between the two.

Leslie Marmon Silko's descriptions of scenes are lush and extravagant: "Behind them in the valley, the highway was a faint dark vein through the yellow and red rock." And again, "The plateaus and canyons spread out below him like clouds falling into each other past the horizon. The world below him was distant and small; it was dwarfed by a sky so blue and vast the clouds were lost in it."

New Mexico could reliably be described as one giant art colony. From Taos in the north to Chimayó to the south and then to Santa Fe and on to Albuquerque, artists have been working since the early 1600's in the native elements. The blend of Spanish and Indian cultures has produced some of the greatest works of art in the country in weaving, silver, turquoise and painting. In the 19th century, Taos attracted artists — writers, painters and potters from all over the world. Today, a walk through the plaza of Santa Fe or the streets of Taos or even the Santa Clara and San Ildefonso Pueblos reveals the richness of the artistic culture and heritage. The weavers of Chimayó are even more famous and popular today than they were over three centuries ago. Silko combines all of this in her art. She is working not in wool or pottery or silver, but in words that communicate to the world the extraordinary richness of the culture of this very early American settlement.

Her descriptions of feelings cut to the bone with an emotional intensity that makes her points startlingly clear: "He was smiling. He felt strong. He had to touch his own hand to remember what year it was: thick welted scars from the shattered bottle glass." She also effectively weaves in the Indian chants that carry the cultural lore used in the curing ceremonies. By doing this, she demystifies the Indian ritual, helping her Indian and non-Indian readers understand that the Native American culture is more than superstition and that it has, in fact, the substance that can save a persecuted people and also holds out hope for a sick white culture that has occupied the role of persecutor.

Characters

Auntie

As a Christian, Auntie represents a break with the traditional ways and beliefs. In addition, she is a martyr in her own mind. As she says in the novel: "I've spent all my life defending this family... It doesn't bother me but this hurts Grandma so much." She reminds every member of the family how she has to deal with the gossip about theme-specially the talk about Little Sister and Josiah. Due to this concern about what people think of her family, Tayo "knew she wouldn't send him away to a veteran's hospital" when she saw that he was sick.

When Tayo returns from war, "Auntie stares at him the way she always had, teaching inside him with her eyes, calling up the past as if it were his future too, as if things would always by the same for him." She considers him as just another burden in her life-and then reminds everyone about what she had done for him. At the end, Tayo's success frees him from Auntie but she still has "an edge of accusation about to surface between her words." It takes old man Ku'oosh's clear acknowledgement of Tayo's new place in society to quiet her.

Bear Boy

See Shush

Betonie

Chosen from birth to learn the traditions of medicine, Betonie is revered for his success at curing people. He stays in his Hogan-built long before the town of Gallup existed-so that he can keep an eye on the people. In particular, he looks for those of his people afflicted with alcoholism who might want to come back to the traditional ways.

Betonie mixes old and new in his medicine: "At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong... That's what the witchery is counting on; that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more."

Tayo confides to Betonie about his dreams, the war, and his concerns about the cattle. Betonie listens, then tells him what signs to look for; he also insists that he must retrieve the cattle. After a vision ceremony, he sends Tayo on his way.

Emo

Emo, "always with a GI haircut," represents the witchery of the story world He represents evil. He rejects the ways of the past, favoring manipulation and deception to have his way with the people.

Envious of white society, Emo wants his stories of scoring with white women and having white things to replace the traditional stories. He denigrates the traditional ways to keep those around him thinking Indians are no good. In doing so, he simulates the mythical Ck'o'yo gambler, "Look what is here for us Look Here's the Indians' mother earth! Old dried-up thing!" With such sayings he aims to obscure the people's relationship to the earth. Instead he encourages an easier way-a prescription of drink and violence: "What we need is what they got I'll take San Diego ... they've got *everything.* .. They took our land, they took everything! So let's get our hands on white women!"

Tayo's effort to cure himself and remember the traditions of the people is a threat to Emo's manipulative ways. Tayo disrupts Emo's ceremony at the bar by delivering a rendition of the national anthem. He then tells a story about some Indians going off to war and returning as just plain Indians.

Emo wants them to forget this story and remember the killing they did He rattles a bag of human teeth while. bragging about his exploits in the Army. Eventually, Emo kills his followers (because Tayo did not try and kill him) by manipulation. He is banished from the Laguna Reservation but, as witchery, he still exists.

Grandma

Grandma lets things happen around her until she must intervene. For instance, Tayo stays in bed for some time before she comes to comfort him in his nightmare. She cries with him saying, "Those white doctors haven't helped you at all." Ignoring Auntie, she sends for the traditional medicine man, old man Ku'oosh. This is the beginning of Tayo's journey back from being white smoke. By sending for the medicine man, Grandma has started her family on its path to healing and in a small way helped to heal the whole village. At the end, Grandma asks Tayo to replenish her heating oil. This is a sign that Tayo is an adult member of the family. '

Harley

Harley is a clownish character who represents the bacchanal spirits. He prescribes alcohol for all occasions When Rocky, Tayo, and Harley were childhood friends, they tracked an old drunk and stole his hidden alcohol for their first drink. Harley also served in the war and brags to Helen Jean about his heroism.

At the start of the novel, he arrives at the ranch to help Tayo. He also wants to revive the good days of the war when they were soldiers on leave. To this end, Harley

proposes a quixotic journey-the longest donkey ride ever for a cold beer. At the bar, Harley's intentions are good-if Tayo drinks he will be happy "Liquor was medicine for the anger that made them hurt, for the pain of the loss, medicine for tight bellies and choked-up throats."

But when the ceremony is winding down, it is Harley who finds Tayo for Emo Tayo drinks in honor of his friend and in the process almost falls prey to witchery. He realizes Harley's betrayal and eludes them. In the end, it is Harley who suffers instead of Tayo. Manipulated to betray his friend, Harley pays with his life.

Helen Jean

Helen represents the women, like Tayo's mother, who have been taught to hate their own people and to flee the reservation. She winds up like too many other women-dependant on generous war veterans and drinking themselves to death. Like many others, she started out full of good intentions. She was going to move to the city, get a job, and assimilate into white society. Instead, she is headed for the slums of Gallup.

Josiah

Josiah, the brother of Auntie and Little Sister, is the father figure for Tayo. He possesses knowledge about raising cattle and shares it with Tayo. His scheme places him among Tayo's teachers-like Old man Ku'oosh and Betonie-who are mixing new ways with the old. Along with practical life lessons like how to ride a horse, Josiah offers Tayo many insights. "Josiah said that only humans had to endure anything, because only humans resisted what they saw outside themselves."

Josiah has a mistress named Night Swan. Tayo sleeps with her and she tells him things that fit into his ceremony.

Ku'oosh

When Grandma decides that white medicine has done enough damage, she calls for the traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh. However, Ku'oosh knows that in the present day the traditional and unchanged methods no longer have the same power. He knows where to send Tayo-to Betonie. Ku'oosh, although he sticks to the old ways, is open to hearing the new stories. He ensures that Tayo is brought into the lava and accepted once and for all.

Leroy

Another war buddy, Leroy represents the veterans that return from the war with alcohol problems. Moreover, in his purchase of the truck he represents the "gypped" Indian.

Leroy thinks he fooled the white man by signing for a truck he did not have to pay for. They joke that they have to catch him for the money.

Helen and Tayo want to laugh for other reasons. Helen says the truck is worth very little. Tayo believes that "the white people sold junk pickups to Indians so they could drive around until they asphyxiated themselves." Leroy is easy prey for Emo, and eventually helps him to find Tayo.

Little Sister

Little Sister is Tayo's mother. As a young woman, she ran around with white men, Mexican men, and anyone who was not from the Laguna Reservation. She sought an escape from her heritage but wound up in Gallup. The family took Tayo and she vanished into the slums.

Night Swan

Night Swan is suspected of being a prostitute because she is single, lives above a bar, and dances for the men. When Josiah's truck is parked night after night at the bar, the women of the town are relieved that he, not their husbands, is upstairs.

A half-breed like Tayo, she reassures Tayo about their mixed race. She tells him the others blame him so that they do not have to face themselves.

Pinkie

When the Apache boy who watches their sheep leaves for California, the family is forced to hire cousin Pinkie. During a dust storm, six sheep disappear. Suspiciously, Pinkie is wearing a new shirt and wielding a new harmonica. To his credit, he stays a week longer than he was supposed to but then heads up the line towards Gallup. He is Emo's assistant in the pursuit of Tayo and helps to dispose of Harley and Leroy. Emo accidentally shoots him in the back of the head.

Robert

Auntie's husband, Robert, takes over complete control of the family's business when Josiah dies. He welcomes Tayo's offer of help but knows that Tayo must get well first. He is a quiet man who works hard. He shows he cares for Tayo when he uncharacteristically speaks out about what Emo is doing and what people are saying. He warns Tayo that he needs to come back home and face Emo.

Rocky

Rocky was a star athlete who had to win. He desired one thing, to leave the Reservation and be successful in the world. He believed what the teachers told him, "Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back." He is killed in the war but others like him, says Betonie, can be found in Gallup.

Shush

Shush is Betonie's helper and symbolizes the power of mixed elements. He is a mix of the human and the supernatural

Tayo

The main character in the novel is Tayo, a Laguna Pueblo and a veteran of World War II. At the opening, he feels like white smoke, like a ghost. He is suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome (battle fatigue) and the army doctors cannot help him.

Tayo knows that white medicine-a medicine that looks at one symptom, not the entire system will not be effective. His sickness is a result of carrying the sins of his mother physically and mentally. He is a half-breed and as a youth was psychologically abused by Auntie. Further stress comes from being a member of an oppressed people. Tayo is very hard on himself; when Rocky dies on a death march in the Pacific, Tayo blames himself. While at war, Josiah dies and again Tayo blames himself.

The most harmful stress, however, is that while he was carrying Rocky he cursed the rain, and when the flies were everywhere he cursed the flies. Because of these two acts, he feels responsible for the drought and the neglect of the Corn alter.

All these stresses become his sickness; it keeps him in the hospital and then keeps him bedridden. Finally, Grandma sends for the traditional medicine man. But the medicine man is not as powerful as he once was. A new ceremony is needed to heal the community of the destruction brought by the whites, and It is determined that the ceremony must start with the war vets, with Tayo. The new ceremonial cure is to be found in the mixed blood of the old and the new-in Old Betonie's ceremony and in Tayo's completion of it. Then the rain will return.

Through Betonie, Tayo realizes that being a mixed blood enables him to facilitate an embracing cure for his people. But he must first destroy the manipulator, the witch Emo. Like the mythical Sun Father, he allows the witch to destroy himself. Tayo succeeds because he trusts in the greater community and draws strength from the stories. As a result, witchery eats itself and Tayo is able to bring the story to the elders. "The ear for the story and the eye for the pattern were theirs; the feeling was theirs: we came out of this land we are hers."

Tayo, with Betonie, has created a new ceremony and reestablished contact with certain elements in the Pueblo tradition: the ceremonial plants he was told to gather; the rock face painting that has not been renewed since the war; and the woman of the mountains who has chosen him as a messenger. As a result, Tayo has merged his identity with his people and become well. He has entered the story reality where the people exist. He now has a place in the society's ceremony and he has brought home the cattle to replenish his family's economy. Auntie can no longer begrudge him, Grandma is proud, and the elders recognize him as a fly who carried the message which lead to the return of the rain.

Ts'eh

The personification of his ceremony is Ts'eh. She is the Montano-the Mountain woman, the earth. Her function is to help Tayo remember traditions that have been forgotten as well as add a new one-the gathering of the purple root. In a sense, as the embodiment of Com Woman, she is pleased with Tayo's efforts. Accordingly she helps him by corralling the cattle and showing him the site of the she-elk painting. These things, along with the purple root, are the elements that most interest the old men in the Kiva.

Themes

Evil

The Pueblo concept of reciprocity did not allow for evil. They believed that because all things were interconnected, they simply had to keep up their end of the bargain. For example, when a hunter takes a deer, he sprinkles cornmeal to the spirits. If the dances and ceremonies are done, the crops will be plentiful.

However, the Pueblos gradually found they needed an explanation for those evils which violated this theory of reciprocity. They did not alter their cosmology by adding a devil. Instead, they attributed evil to witchery or the manipulation of life' s elements to selfish and violent ends. Furthermore, Native American people out of touch with the stones of the people or wanting to replace those stories are the ones that use witchery and, therefore, only Native American medicine and story can undo witchery. One story about witches explains that Native Americans wear the skins of other animals in order to become that animal for a time.

In the novel, witchery is at work before the war when the young men were convinced they had to enlist in order to prove themselves patriotic Americans. Then, the uniforms-like skins-provided a taste of life as a white American. But the uniforms were taken back. Rather than return to their people and renew contact with the earth, they sit in the bar and tell stories about the witchery-about how much better it was chasing white women and killing "Japs." Thus their connection with the Com Woman remains broken. Emo embodies witchery as he encourages them in their storytelling. He manipulates his friends to hate Reservation life, to remain angry and drown in alcohol.

Tradition

The central theme of Silko's novel is the relationship of the individual to the story of the community. For Tayo to be cured of the war witchery, he must remember his people's story and renew his connection with the land and its governing deities. In one specific instance, he is shown a cliff face painting of A'moo'ooh. T'seh explains, "Nobody has come to paint it since the war. But as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together."

Religion

The three central figures in the Pueblo cosmology are Thought-Woman, Corn Mother, and Sun Father. They are interrelated and interdependent. Thought-Woman opens the novel and is considered responsible for the story. Thought-Woman created the universe by speech. She made the fifth world (the earth) and the four worlds below where the spirits of the dead go. She appears throughout Pueblo mythology and throughout the story. Tayo must make contact with her, with the people's story, in order to bring a story

to the elders inside the kiva. He tells them he has seen her. "They started crying/the old men started crying".

Corn Woman is perhaps the most important deity because corn is essential to the people's economy. Corn Woman is interchangeable with mother earth. She represents growth, life, and the feminine powers of reproduction. She is honored by prayer sticks and offerings of blue and yellow pollen (Tayo fills animal tracks with yellow pollen). Dances in her honor are done in a zigzag or lightning pattern. Large dances include everyone but only men perform small dances. The Corn dance is done to bring rain, to assure abundant crops, and to increase fertility. The female powers support and grant according to his performance. A male pr0tagonist as a sacrificial intermediary performs the small dance in the novel- Tayo is the fly. Throughout the novel, from the entrance of Harley and the weaving journey astride a donkey, Tayo performs a series of ziz-zags. He also finds zig-zags on the supportive T'seh's blanket.

The story about Corn Woman involves an evil Ck'o'yo magician. The moral of this story is that if the Corn Alter is neglected and offerings are not given, the life processes supporting the people will not function. This story brings us to the last deity-Sun Father. He is a creative force unleashed by Thought-Woman to interact with Corn Woman. He represents masculine powers and light and it is his job to awaken the rain clouds. The offering to Sun Father is corn meal-a product of Com Woman. Tayo's link with the Sun Father occurs when Old Ku'oosh brings him blue cornmeal. Auntie feeds him, and he is able to keep it in his stomach. Tayo's ceremony mimics the story of the Sun Father but rather than bring back the rain clouds he must bring back the cattle, thereby bringing prosperity back to the family.

Racism

One of the most divisive questions facing Native Americans today is: who is Native American? This question might seem odd, but because there is so much at stake-Native American Tribes are explicitly mentioned in the U.S. Constitution as sovereign nations, and the U.S. Congress must negotiate treaties as they do with any sovereign nation-the United States government has kept the question confused.

By recognizing only those persons with a certain quantum of a specific Nation's blood as tribal members, the notion of ancestry became a significant issue in the Native American community. In the late 19605 ancestry almost replaced the notion of race as the determining factor for census purposes. This would have greatly diminished the racial wrangling that has perplexed America. Doing so would also have allowed Native Americans to realize they were not a handful but a group of some 30 million-an incredible electoral force.

Be that as it may, because blood quantum notions are so strict, the U S. government counts very few Native Americans. So, a person who is one quarter Irish, one quarter Mohawk, one quarter lbo, and one quarter Lakota-but raised as 100% Pueblo-is not a Native American. Furthermore, the U.S. government has only recently recognized some

tribes. For example, though Tucson was built around the Yaqui village of Pasqua, it was only in 1973 that Congress recognized the Yaqui as Native Americans.

This tension is everywhere in the novel. Tayo is a half-breed (his biological father was white) who was given up by his mother to be raised by his Auntie. Emo constantly reminds him of this because Emo wanted to be white (so did Rocky). But Tayo reminds him of the truth, "Don't lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted." But even though they all know it, even though Tayo is a Native American despite what the government might say, there is too much self-hatred. This is the result of the boarding schools that taught them that Native Americans were savage people. "They never thought to blame white people for any of it; they wanted white people for their friends. They never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away again when the war was over."

Night Swan adds to this complexity when she tells Tayo that mixed breeds are scapegoats. People always blame the ones who look different. "That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves." Emo and Auntie's dislike of miscegenation runs counter to the custom of the Pueblo who judge by actions not appearance. As the end of the novel suggests, the people's survival depends on these mixed breeds like Tayo and Betonie who are able, by force of circumstance, to blend the old and new to tell a more relevant story.

Style

Narrative

Silko once explained the Pueblo linguistic theory to an audience (found in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit)* and that theory explains the narrative technique of her novel.

"For those of you accustomed to being taken from point A to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow. Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web-with many little threads radiating from the center, crisscrossing one another. As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made."

Not knowing the above theory, critics have lauded *Ceremony's* non-chronological narrative. Silko's purpose in using this technique for her story is to mimic, once again, the zig-zag pattern of the corn dance as well as to stay true to Thought-Woman. That is, the whole of the novel is a ceremony that the reader performs with every new reading. It is intended to blur the distinction between real time and story time in such a way that the reader is better able to empathize with the perspective of a traditional Pueblo like Grandma: "It seems like I already heard these stories before... only thing is, the names sound different."

Additionally, the narrative is told in third person mixed with traditional narrative. The stories of Thought-Woman, the Gambler, and the witches provide context for the saga of Tayo within the larger context of the Pueblo story. The Pueblos see themselves as their language, as a story. "I will tell you something about stories/ ... / They aren't just entertainment.! Don't be fooled./ They are all we have... / all we have to fight off/ illness and death. As such, there are no boundaries between the present ceremony Tayo performs and the whole ceremony the people perform to stay in balance with their belief system. "You don't have anything/if you don't have the stones."

Realism

Along with praise for her narrative technique, Silko is applauded for her close observation of human behavior. She remains true to life without idealizing her characters or setting. Her story is set in the depressed Laguna Reservation where, she says in passing, the orchards have been ruined by uranium runoff, drought is ruining crops, the Herefords are dying, and the young men are drunk. She pulls no punches in describing Gallup and she makes no effort to idealize her characters.

So a realistic picture is painted of society on the reservation after World Warn. However, in doing so, she does not make the people out to be pathetic-Robert, Ku'oosh, Auntie, and Josiah are all respectable people. Nor does she make them into incredible heroes

Silko's characters are struggling to negotiate the best route of survival in a world that they perceive as being dominated by destructive forces. Finally, as a result of their trials and tribulations, these people have a wisdom they would like to share with the white world if the white world would just pause to listen.

Style

An apocryphal story has it that when an Indian was praised for his poetry, he said, "In my tribe we have no poets. Everyone talks in poetry." There is no clear distinction between prose and poetry among people who have an oral tradition and a pictographic literature called codices (none but a handful of the codices remain). Silko took advantage of this and of her English language education to invent a written Pueblo style. By using the page itself, she mimics a pictograph in her opening quatrains. The blend of prose and poetry throughout the novel enable her to weave new events with old stories.

Silko's style also allows her to save the old stories by spreading them. The affinity she creates between herself and Thought-Woman, as well as Tayo and various story figures, allows her to tell many stories in one novel. The result is that many readers who know nothing about the Laguna Reservation feel like an old friend to the characters in the novel.

Stereotype

Stereotypes are employed throughout the novel, such as the archetype of the drunken Indian. But the novel uses these stereotypes about Native Americans to tell a powerful and potentially subversive story. The figure of the drunken Indian is used to illustrate how negative images of Native American have become ingrained in the American consciousness. In another instance, by making use of the clownish vets, she can warn America that not only are the Native Americans not defeated but they are making a comeback. All of this is done within the Pueblo style because, in fact, clowns are a big part of Pueblo ceremonies.

Part of the Pueblo technique of storytelling is the belief that the story exists in the listeners. This cuts both ways; part of the reason the novel succeeds is that white society expects Native Americans to include myth and ceremony in their explanations for the world. So while Silko can offer a solution for veterans, for example, she can also speak to mainstream whites because she is telling a Native American story. Even her accusations of white America are done in a Native American way-by a story about witches. Lastly, in an almost harmless way, Silko is telling Americans be forehand that Native Americans will get justice-all in good time.

Historical Context

Pueblo Indians

The people of the Anasazi tradition inhabit the area of what is now the Southwestern United States (from Taos, New Mexico, to the Hopi mesas in Arizona). They are named Pueblo, meaning "village Indians" in Spanish. They live in concentrated villages of buildings constructed from adobe local clay, and stone. These buildings are entered from the top floor. The buildings, often reaching to five stories, surround a plaza, with a central kiva-a ceremonial place dug into the ground.

Of these people, the western Keres Tribe inhabits Acoma and Laguna. Acoma, perched atop a 400-foot mesa, has been continuously inhabited since at least 1075 AD. Laguna was established more recently. The Pueblo economy centered on a sophisticated system of dry farming and seed cultivation. The matrilineal culture had its labor division: men farmed and performed the ceremonial dances; women made intricate basketry, exquisite pottery, and built the houses. Government was carried on by consensus; warfare was avoided; and trade took place with the Plains tribes to the north and the empires to the south.

Around the time the novel was written, two tragedies struck the Laguna-Acoma communities in the 1970s. First, a teenage suicide pact led to funerals for a number of boys and girls in 1973. Second, a man murdered and dismembered two friends. The murderer then bullied another friend to borrow a car from which he scattered the parts. He later said that he found the ax irresistible.

Colonialism

Spanish rule began with Don Francisco Vasquez de Cornado in 1540. Soon thereafter, the tribes and their lands were recognized as subject to the King of Spain. This recognition is important to this day as it supersedes, by international law, the claims of Mexico and then the United States. It was this charter that Silko heard discussed when Tribal officials charged New Mexico with land theft. The Spanish conquest brought Christianity, missionaries, and death to the Pueblos. To survive, they accepted baptism and Christianity as an extension to their religion.

The Mexican authorities came in the early 1800s. They demanded that the people speak Spanish, live in rectangular houses, adopt a representational government, enroll their children in Mexican schools, and, more drastically, accept individual land holdings owned by the male head of household. On the positive side, Catholicism was not as rigorously imposed and so indigenous religion regained some of its popularity.

The United States took over in 1848 when the Treaty of Guadeloupe-Hidalgo ended the Mexican American War. The Americans substituted English for Spanish and added the choice of Protestantism as a religion for the Pueblo people. The Americans also

demanded that the people farm like Americans-who farmed like Europeans. This style of agriculture, however, depends on European or Eastern seaboard rainfall. The Pueblo crescent receives an annual rainfall of 13 inches (a proper amount for a desert). It was not long before the region was mined economically. Since then, the Pueblo cities have been declared reservations and surrounded by white society.

World War II

By the start of World War II, every Native American group had been relegated to reservations for at least 40 years. That was enough time for the boarding schools and missionaries to have broken many spirits and fostered a sense, among some, of patriotism for the United States. When war broke out, many young men saw enlisting as an opportunity to gain entrance into mainstream white society. The United States also saw a need for Native Americans. They became invaluable, cheap, and immediate code talkers. From the Pacific Theater to the European Theater the Native American languages of the Lakota, Comanche, Navajo, Kiowa, and many others were heard over the airwaves. Strangely, It is difficult to know how many Native Americans fought in World War II because only the code talkers were 'racially' identified.

In addition to their language, the Native Americans possessed other resources. Vast amounts of plutonium, uranium, gold, oil, and other valuable deposits lie beneath the barren reservations of South Dakota, Oklahoma, and the Pueblo Crescent. On the Laguna reservation they dug up the materials needed for the research being done at Los Alamos, a mere 70 miles away. Trinity-test site for the A-bomb-was also close to the Pueblo reservation.

The Indigenous Revival

From N. Scott Momaday' s Pulitzer Prize to the seizure of Alcatraz Island, Native Americans were on the move in 1969 and showed no signs of slowing. In 1970, the Cherokee nation formed a new constitution and took the first steps toward rejecting the American notion of race. Their constitution allowed membership in the tribal roles by virtue of ancestry. In 1970, they reclaimed the lands illegally stolen from them after they were removed to Oklahoma. Activists from the Cherokee nation were joined by hundreds of other Native Americans in their walk retracing the Trail of Tears. In 1975, the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot tribes filed a claim for nearly the entire state of Maine.

The most notorious, feared, and militant group came from Minneapolis in the 1960s. AIM (American Indian Movement) led a caravan to DC in 1972. When the Nixon administration refused to meet with them, they took over the Bureau of Indian Affairs building. Yielding to the threat of force, they absconded with tons of records. These records were given to their lawyers and used in lawsuits against the FBI.

The tension that resulted led to the showdown at Wounded Knee. There the United States military surrounded AIM activists for 71 days. AIM won. The media presence kept

fatalities to one. AIM also brought its one concern-the Laramie Treaty of 1858-to public awareness. The tie-ups in court, unfortunately, slowed down the Native American activists by the late 1970s. By then the whole world was aware of the civil rights violations committed against Native Americans. This awareness was all the greater because of a march on the UN Conference on Indigenous Peoples held in Geneva in 1977. Prominent leaders from Canada, the Iroquois nation, Mexico, South America, and the Hopi nation were joined by AIM and paraded in under drum and song. There they made their speeches and met with world leaders. The American press corps boycotted the event.

Critical Overview

Silko's reputation was established immediately when critical reception of *Ceremony* in 1977 was not only positive but appeared in big magazine-no small accomplishment for the first female Native American novelist in the late 1970s. Critical acclaim has been even more laudatory as the novel has become required reading across the nation. One facet of the novel particularly applauded was the success with which the novel challenges the reader to merge cultural frameworks.

However, the criticism also revealed cultural gaps. Critics tried to lump Silko's novel into prefabricated genres of American literature. There seemed to be great discomfort with viewing the novel as challenging and good on its own merits. Instead, the story is often patronizingly viewed as an effort to preserve Native American legend. Surprisingly, not one reviewer commented on the fact that the novel was set in the period of World War II when the problem of 1977 was the phenomenon of the Native American Vietnam Vets (there were more than 43,000 nationwide).

In his review for *The Washington Post,* Charles Larson makes an unqualified statement that "the war becomes an incredibly enlightening experience for Tayo-as it did for so many American Indians." He later comments that Tayo's story might fit in with fiction about World War II except that the novel is "strongly rooted within the author's own tribal background." That rootedness, for Larson, is the novel's value.

Hayden Carruth is not any more helpful in Harper's Magazine. She attempts to link Tayo with Taoist philosophy because Tayo is seeking his "way." Unfortunately, Carruth continues her review to say that the narrative repeats the old tale of the man returning rain and bounty to the people.

This is done, she says, with the novelty of "native [sic] American songs, legends, parables, a religio-cultural mythology in the fullest sense "

Carruth also has two negative criticisms of the novel. First, the story might bother some whites because they might feel blamed, and some Native Americans because it does "not soften either the disagreements in the Indian community." Second, the novel "is flawed," she says, "by narrative devices that seem too contrived and by occasional stylistic inconsistencies."

Writing a review called, "Ghost Stories," Ruth Mathewson was less forgiving and more confused-but she liked the story. She described Silko as a "saver" whose "determination to preserve so much ... makes great demands on the reader, who must exercise a selectivity the author has not provided." That is, Silko has not succeeded in blending the roles of curator and scribe.

Mathewson also brings her understanding of ceremony to bear on the novel when she says that the hero's effort to heal the people "calls for a slow, meditative response." However, Silko also "exploits popular fictional elements, raising expectations of speed

and suspense that she does not satisfy." Mathewson admits many of the "interrupting" poems "fell flat for me." Finally, she says Silko's prose style is "reminiscent of long-forgotten novels of the '20s" and achieves a "gratuitous realism."

Frank MacShane, in *The New York Times Book Review,* asserts: 'the literature of the American Indian is ritualistic." Furthermore, he views the purpose of this literary tradition as the establishment of "a sense of unity between the individual and his surroundings ... [and] ... Silko's first novel, aptly titled 'Ceremony,' fits into this tradition." Although offering a favorable assessment of the novel, his comments often sound like he is talking about a work of nonfiction instead of the first novel by a Native American woman who is trying to bind her oral traditions with the demands of print culture.

Peter G. Beidler, in *American Indian Quarterly,* places Silko with other distinguished Native American authors such as N. Scott Momaday and James Welch. Here the developing similarities of Native American literature are explored-the male Native American begins confused but reorients himself to his tribal identity. He also discusses the Historical consciousness evident in the stories. He does offer some negative criticism, however, when he faults Silko for not developing her women characters.

Elaine Jahner offered considerate insight into the novel in the *Prairie Schooner* by acknowledging Silko as a novelist. She said,

"It is Silko's profound and efficient understanding of the relationship between the tribal sense of order that is perpetuated through oral storytelling and those other models of narrative order-the novel and the short story that makes her a writer whose works enable Indian and non-Indian alike to understand that the traditional written genres can perpetuates some of the creative impulses that were formerly limited to the oral mode of transmission."

More recent criticism has followed Jahner. James Ruppert, for example, wrote in 1988 that Silko fuses "contemporary American Fiction with Native American storytelling." By the time of Ruppert's review, however, *Ceremony* had almost reached the status of canonical work in college syllabi across the nation. It remains a favorite book for people of all backgrounds who are slightly disillusioned with America and who want to understand how to construct a new identity. With that motivation, there are many people actively identifying with Tayo as a new American hero.

Unfortunately, as Silko recently told Thomas Inner during an *Alt-X* interview, her critical reputation as a writer has been influenced by her more political and very anti-capitalist 1991 novel, *Almanac of the Dead.*

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Bennett is *a graduate student in English at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In the following essay, he analyzes how Leslie Marmon Silko's novel,* Ceremony, *uses Native American cultural traditions and an environmentalist land ethic to create a revisionist critique of American politics and history.*

The central conflict of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* is Tayo's struggle to gain psychological wholeness in the face of various traumatic experiences, ranging from a troubled childhood to cultural marginalization and combat experiences during World War II. Throughout the novel, the key to Tayo's psychological recovery is his rediscovery of Native American cultural practices.

Most of the crucial turning points in the novel occur when Tayo listens to, takes part in, or learns more about Native American cultural traditions. He progresses towards recovery when he visits medicine men, returns to traditional customs and practices, or develops an intimate relationship with someone like Ts'eh who lives according to traditional ways. As he develops an increased understanding of native cultural practices and ritual ceremonies he finds psychological peace, which he quickly loses whenever he seeks other sources of healing-whether he seeks them in the glories of war, the pleasures of alcohol, or the medical practices of the army psychiatric hospital.

The novel's opening poem describes the Incredible powers that language, stories, and rituals have in Native American cultures: ceremonies are the only cure for human and cultural ailments, and stories and language have the power to create worlds As the novel progresses, it demonstrates this power by showing how rituals are more effective than anything else in helping Tayo heal.

Moreover, Tayo's struggle to return to indigenous cultural traditions parallels Silko's own struggle as a writer who wants to integrate Native American traditions into the structure of her novel. Instead of simply following the literary conventions used by other American and European writers, Silko develops new literary conventions that draw upon Native American cultural traditions. For example, her narrative plot follows a cyclical sense of time, like that found in Native American myths and legends, instead of a western linear sense of time. It is also open to non-rational spiritual experiences instead of limiting itself to scientific logic and reason. In addition, her general focus is more on the community as a whole and Tayo's relationship to that community than it is on Tayo's personal individuality.

Even more importantly, she structures the entire novel itself as a sacred ritual or ceremony. Throughout the novel, she repeatedly switches back and forth between the main plot and a series of interconnected poems based on various Native American legends.

These interspersed poems create a second mythic narrative that runs parallel to the realistic narrative about Tayo. Even though these mythical poems take up less space

than the realistic narrative, they are equally, if not more, important than the realistic narrative. They provide additional insight into Tayo's various struggles, they outline the pattern for his recovery, and they are placed at both the beginning and the end of the novel. In addition, Betonie's healing ceremony encapsulates the central themes and struggles developed throughout the novel, and It marks the central turning point in Tayo's recovery.

By making these mythic poems and ritual ceremonies such a significant part of the novel, Silko extends her authorial voice beyond first-person and third-person narration to include the ritualistic voice of a shaman or storyteller. Thus, Silko expresses the Native American belief that ritual healing and art are intimately connected because stories and rituals have the power to heal.

Nevertheless, both Silko's description of Native American healing ceremonies and her own artistic use of Native American narrative forms are unorthodox. For example, Ku'oosh's traditional rituals partially cure Tayo, but Betonie's new complex, hybrid ceremonies are even more effective. By making Betonie's rituals more potent than Ku'oosh's, Silko suggests that recovering one's cultural roots does not always mean being stuck in the past and endlessly repeating only what has been done before. Instead, Silko argues that even traditional cultures need to evolve and change, modifying to meet new circumstances and enlarging to create a broader dialogue with other cultural traditions. In this sense, Silko's sense of ritual is not narrowly Native American but broadly multicultural.

Native American traditions make up an essential part of that multicultural mosaic, but they are not the whole of it. This multicultural sensibility is further demonstrated by Silko's frequent attempts to develop connections between different cultures within her novel. In particular, Silko develops several relationships between Native American and Japanese cultures. Tayo believes that the Japanese soldier is his Native American uncle because he has a spiritual sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all peoples and cultures. Tayo cannot stand Emo's hatred toward the Japanese because he realizes that violence toward any part of this multicultural mosaic inevitably hurts everyone. In fact, Tayo eventually realizes that even his own anger toward Emo must be overcome because violence cannot be prevented with more violence.

The novel's conclusion makes this connection between Native Americans and the Japanese even clearer because both Native Americans and the Japanese were victims of World War II. Native American lands were destroyed through uranium mining in order to destroy the Japanese with bombs built from the mines on native reservations. Thus, Silko demonstrates that there are more connections between cultures than one might recognize at first glance. While this multicultural vision derives from traditional Native American beliefs about the interconnectedness of all beings, it extends beyond Native American cultures to include all of the world's many cultures.

In addition, *Ceremony* also links Native American cultural traditions to the land and people's relationship to it. The novel is full of beautiful descriptions of the natural

landscape, philosophical discussions about the essential nature of land, and ritual ceremonies connected to the landscape.

In particular, Silko's sense of the land functions in two ways. First, the ceremonies heal Tayo by reconnecting him to the land. They orient him according to sacred geographies, they teach him the importance and meaning of particular places, and they endow the earth with spiritual significance. Throughout the novel, Silko repeatedly reminds the reader that Native American cultures see the land and ceremonial rituals as inseparably connected and mutually reinforcing sources of spiritual well being. Drawing closer to the land helps Tayo better understand Native American ritual ceremonies, just as participating in these ceremonies helps Tayo reconnect himself to the land. These are two sides of the same coin.

In addition, Silko also uses Native American beliefs about the land to address a wide variety of contemporary political and cultural issues such as environmentalism, colonialism, and the sovereignty of Native American peoples. In this sense, Silko's sense of the land involves not only a native spiritual worldview but also a comprehensive political critique.

By drawing attention to the relationships between colonialism and economic inequality, between private property and racial divisions, and between mining and nuclear destruction, Silko calls into question western civilization's economic and legal interpretations of the land. America's claim to the land of America is revealed as a hypocritical mask for colonial conquest, just as raping the environment through mining is revealed as part of a larger industrial-military complex whose ultimate goal is to produce weapons of mass destruction.

An excellent example of these kinds of connections can be seen when Silko exposes that the real purpose behind Floyd Lee's wolf-proof fence is to keep Indians and Mexicans out. With this image of the wolf-Indian-Mexican fence, Silko shows the relationship between western civilization's hostility toward the natural environment (wolves), Its economic ideology of private property (fences), and racial divisions between the dominant Anglo-American culture and other minority cultures (Native American and Mexican).

The irony that Mr. Lee's fence enables him to steal Tayo's cattle in addition to protecting his own cattle only further emphasizes how Silko politicizes this image. Legal and political boundaries not only divide mine from yours, but they also enable me to steal what is yours, like they enabled the stealing of native lands.

Throughout the novel, Silko combines images like Mr. Lee's wolf-Indian-Mexican fence with images of international wars and mining and nuclear testing on Native American lands. In the end, it is the Trinity test site that prompts Tayo's climactic epiphany of how the divisions between cultures are created by western civilization's war against nature in the name of private property. This war against nature ends up turning the creative powers of nature against themselves to produce weapons of mass destruction. This, in turn, escalates into a war against us as neighbors turn against neighbors and nations

turn against nations justified by the boundaries legitimized by the ideology of land ownership.

Land ownership becomes the central issue, however, not only because it negates a sacred understanding of the land as a living being shared by all but also because the test site is specifically land taken from Native American peoples. Like Mr. Lee's fence, the test site simultaneously represents both the destructiveness of western economic development and the hypocrisy of what whites have done to the American continent in the name of building and defending the nation. Ultimately, Tayo rejects white civilization for a deeper spiritual understanding of a world without boundaries, without divisions, and without private property.

In this sense, Silko's novel is not Just a story about one Native American veteran trying to piece Ins life back together after returning from World War II. In a much deeper sense, it is an allegory about America as a whole and about how Tayo and other Native Americans fit into the broader mosaic of American history. In particular, Silko' s novel rewrites American history so that Native Americans like Tayo are no longer pushed into the margins and ignored. She shows that they have contributed to and continue to contribute to American history by providing the land on which it happens, by fighting for America in international conflicts, and by contributing to America's economic development.

Even more importantly, however, she shows that Native American cultural traditions also provide an alternative, and in Silko's opinion, superior view of what America's future could look like if it will chose to be more spiritually sensitive, multi-culturally respectful, and environmentally responsible. In this sense, *Ceremony* adds an important and potentially healing voice to the on-going debate of what it means to be an American.

Source: Robert Bennett, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In Evasdaughter's analysis of Silko's use of humor in Ceremony, *the critic points out the jokes, gentle teasing, and irony that lighten the tale and confirm Silko as a "true comic novelist.* "

In *Ceremony,* Leslie Silko brilliantly crosses racial styles of humor in order to cure the foolish delusions readers may have, if we think we are superior to Indians or inferior to whites, or perhaps superior to whites or inferior to Indians. Silko plays off affectionate Pueblo humor against the black humor so prominent in 20th-century white culture. This comic strategy has the end-result of opening our eyes to our general foolishness, and also to the possibility of combining the merits of all races. Joseph Campbell wrote in *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* of the change in mythologies away from the local and tribal toward a mythology that will arise from "this unified earth as of one harmonious being." *Ceremony* is a work that changes local mythologies in that more inclusive spirit.

Silko is the right person to have written this book. She herself is a mixed-blood, and her experience has evidently given her access not only to a variety of problems, but also to a variety of styles of clowning and joking.. .. Although *Ceremony* is serious, offering a number of valuable propositions for our consideration, the narrative also spins a web of jokes in the morning sun....

The ceremony Silko narrates is that of a Navajo sing, but one not sung exactly as it would have been done before whites arrived in New Mexico, nor sung by a pure-blood Indian, nor sung on behalf of a pure-blood Indian. As is traditional, the ceremony is to be completed after the sing by the sick man, a Laguna named Tayo. His efforts to finish the ceremony by correct action form the last half of the novel, just as the first half was composed of the events which made him sick. These two series of events, taken together, make It clear that what the Veterans' Administration doctors have labeled *battle fatigue* is, in Tayo's case at least, really a struggle to make a decision about death. He tries two ways of responding to its invasion of his life that do not work-self-erasure and killing an agent of death. Finally he is able to find a way of opposing destruction which will not lead to his erasure as a force on the reservation, not allow anyone to kill him, and most important, not change him too into an agent of death.

Tayo's difficulty is grave, yet Silko jokes about it frequently. The belief among whites that Indians never laugh is contradicted continually by the sounds of Indians responding to subtle in-jokes or to a corrective kind of teasing crystallized in the work of ritual clowns. Black Elk [in *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux]* speaks of clowns appearing when people needed a good laugh. At that time, he says, the clowns based their performance on the minor frustrations of life or on our minor flaws as human beings, such as our tendency to exaggerate our plight I believe that Leslie Marmon Silko is in effect a sacred clown, turning the light of laughter against evils which might otherwise weaken us all....

Human clowning of a farcical type, exposing our human flaws in a manifestly physical way, builds up Silko's philosophy. The drunk Indian veterans who had attempted to fight over Helen Jean "started pushing at each other, in a staggering circle on the dance floor. The other guys were cheering for a fight. They forgot about her." Their lack of real love for women goes with their general ineffectuality. The whole scene parodies the war, all Its supposedly ardent love for motherland, all its proclaimed desire to protect wife and home forgotten in the blundering, futile rituals of fighting.

These clowning scenes become more elaborate as the novel continues. An example of this is the size and complexity of the expedition organized to capture Tayo at his most harmless. He is carefully surrounded at night by V.A. doctors in dark green government cars, Bureau of Indian Affairs police, and some of the old men of the pueblo, Just as if he were insane, hostile, and armed, when we as readers know he has spent the summer outdoors looking after his skinny cattle and rediscovering the old religion, or if you like, dreaming of a beautiful Indian woman. The absurdity of this great stakeout does not cancel, but accompanies and points up the danger to Tayo. As readers, we both fear for him and half-expect the ambush will be 100% in effectual.. . .

[Silko] teases her readers in a gentle manner that can enlighten. When Tayo is ordered to shoot a Japanese soldier and suddenly sees him as his Uncle Josiah, everyone around him tells him that Josiah couldn't be in two places at the same time or that hallucinations are natural with malaria or battle fatigue... Actually the vision, which I would call a projection of Tayo's or Josiah's mind, illustrates for Tayo the universality of human goodness and the evil of killing. When, reading along, we finally realize this, it's natural to smile at our earlier foolish Europeanized faith in our ideas of mental illness.. ..

Silko turns her teasing also toward younger Indians like Helen Jean, who evaluates Tayo as the least friendly male at the Y Bar, when in fact he is the only one who cares, even briefly, what is going to happen to her. As for half-breeds like Tayo, Silko repeatedly exposes his gullibility toward erroneous white beliefs. His difficulty in believing that someone other than an Indian will steal, much less that a white man will steal, is typical of Indian jokes about oppression [as Joseph Bruchac said in *Parabola,* Winter, 1987.]

Silko does not exclude herself from being teased either. At the end of her innovative portrayal of evil, she allows Tayo's grandmother, the archetypal storyteller, to indicate her boredom at the story of Emo's downfall:

Old Grandma shook her head slowly, and closed her cloudy eyes again. 'I guess I must be getting old,' she said, 'because these goings-on around Laguna don't get me excited any more.' She sighed, and laid her head back on the chair 'It seems like I already heard these stones before only thing is, the names sound different.

This narrative irony is a little joke at all of us -Silko for feeling she had written an original work about evil, any Indians who might have been worrying about her modernization of the stories, any whites who might have believed the test of art is originality, or maybe entertainment, rather than spiritual power. The serious effectiveness of Silko's tale is

indicated by the passage which follows: "Whirling darkness/has come back on itself...It is dead for now."

All the instances of Indian humor in *Ceremony* have been overlooked by some of the white readers I have talked with, possibly because of lack of contact with non-European communities or culture. Indian irony can be "either so subtle or so keyed to an understanding from within of what is funny to a people that an outsider would fail to recognize it *[Parabola,* Winter, 1987.]" Such outsiders tend to take many light passages in *Ceremony* as solemn or tense, and wear themselves out before the real crisis comes. Yet Silko has given non-Indian readers enough clues to enjoy her inside jokes.. . .

Tayo at times carries irony as far as black humor. When other barflies buzz about their equality with whites, Tayo tells a more truthful, and by contrast, more ironic narrative about their status. When Emo repeatedly brings up how whites have taken everything the Indians had, Tayo wisecracks to himself, "Maybe Emo was wrong; maybe white people didn't have everything. Only Indians had droughts." This private shot of wry acknowledges both white injustice and Emo's dishonesty, thus mentally challenging blackness, not just learning to endure it....

Emo mocks traditional Indian values, despises everything living, and spends his time spreading contempt, resentment, idleness, pleasure in the humiliation and suffering of other people-in short, hatred. His first diatribe in *Ceremony* is against reservation ranchlands: "Look what is here for us. Look. Here's the Indians' mother earth! Old dried-up thing!" By breaking the law of reverence, his sarcasms raise loud laughter. By speaking only of white women, he gets his fellow veterans, except Tayo, to laugh and cheer at stones about bringing women down. By referring to Japanese soldiers always and only as Japs, as officers, as enemies, he tricks the others into rejoicing at the smashing of fellow people of color. They are fooled because Emo's jokes resemble jokes made "not to take our minds off our troubles, but to point out ways to survive and even laugh" [as Bruchac noted]. Unfortunately, Emo's references to troubles do not carry hints about survival or corrections of faults. Not noticing the difference, Emo's bar buddies, most of them, commit themselves by every laugh to discard a little more of Indian tradition, their only possible road to a satisfying life....

Silko sees through Emo's descriptions and can see where his black philosophy must end. To acknowledge evil and study it, has not made a convert of her, however. She plays a worse trick on Emo than he wanted to play on Tayo; as a true comic novelist always does, she thwarts evil and establishes the good in a new and more complete harmony. Hers is the laughter that rises in the spirit, when the preachers of inferiority and inevitable doom have been disproved and defeated. What is finest in her, I believe, is the wisdom of her method of bringing the good out of its trials safely. Her wisdom is that of choosing love....

Although the last scenes of *Ceremony* have a number of surprises, they have been prepared for. Tayo's refusal to be caught up in the dynamics of mutual destruction is comical because it seems cowardly, as whites judge bravery, even disloyal, by Army

standards. In truth, his hiding behind the rock is his least white, least hateful action, even, perhaps, a sort of yellow humor, to go with his Asian connection.

Not only does Silko as novelist arrange for the defeat of Emo's plan either to sacrifice or to corrupt Tayo. She also plots a punishment for the villain which is more appropriate and funnier than the one he has planned for Tayo. In the outcome, Silko, and readers who side With her, laugh, perhaps silently, but also happily at Emo's final defeat, hearts lifting because "he got his." In this way, as a comic novelist, Silko has brought in a third type of black humorist, the one who steals the tricks of the blackest jokers and uses them against their owners. I have found that Anglo or anglicized readers easily miss Silko's punishment of Emo, thinking he has gotten away scot-free. That's because she outfoxes him as Tayo did, aikido style, without violence. He might have died, but the old men of the pueblo only exile him, and he chooses to go to California, the epitome of all that he admires. The joke of it is seen by the now gentle Tayo: "'California,' Tayo repeated softly, 'that's a good place for him'." This brief and quiet comment scores off evil more aptly than Emo ever scored off good. Emo will be in harmony with California; the apex of his desires is as bad as he is. This joke mocks the White Lie, the delusion that whites are superior, for in it Silko is using the most prosperous part of her region, a proud achievement of white culture in this country, as the most severe punishment she can assign, far worse than mutilation, an early death, or life in Gallup. Emo's exile is a joke, too, about the self-proclaimed superiority of white institutions. If the old men were to bring charges against Emo, government courts would probably either discredit Tayo's testimony or execute Emo. None of their methods would stop Emo's impact on the pueblo. The Laguna answer to capital punishment is more intelligent, avoids imitating murderers, and punishes them less mercifully.

Whites with some appreciation for Indian culture sometimes express a surprising certitude that "this once great culture is being lost or replaced by an Anglo culture that does not have the same respect for nature. .. and is in some ways morally inferior to it" [according to Edith Blicksilver in *Southwest Review,* 1979]. The celestial laughter Silko calls forth by her *Ceremony* shows that Indian civilization is living and has the potential to transform Anglo culture. As she said in a 1978 interview [in *American Studies in Scandinavian,* 1981], "These things will only die if we neglect to tell the stories. So I am telling the stories." Moreover she has turned the quietest laugh against the loudest. With the help of Indian humor, even if we do not entirely get her jokes, she purifies us of our illusions about white culture, and those about Indian culture as well. Ultimately she demonstrates that combining our cultures, as her narrative does, has the power to civilize both.

Source: Elizabeth N Evasdaugher, "Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: Healing Ethnic Haired by Mixed-Breed Laughter" in *MELUS,* Vol. 15, No.1, Spring, 1988, pp. 83-95.

Critical Essay #3

Herzog focuses on Silko's depiction of two aspects of gender portrayal in *a Native American novel that transcends Western stereotypes-that of a male protagonist as a "feeling man" and that of a female divinity as a "thinking woman.* "

Feminist literary criticism of the past decades has often pointed to powerful women figures in American literature. From Hawthorne's Hester Prynne to Alice Walker's Meridian one can find many images which counter the stereotype of the clinging, submissive, and self-sacrificing woman. By contrast, these powerful women are courageous, independent of judgment, and as intelligent as any man, without becoming egocentric or losing their sense of interpersonal relationships. Little attention has been paid, however, to male figures who are sensitive instead of ruthless, gentle instead of heroic, community-conscious instead of individualistic. It is especially important to find such images in Native American literature because in the popular imagination the American Indian male is still either a savage killer, a degenerate drunkard, or nature's stoic, noble man.

I would like to concentrate here on two aspects of gender portrayal in a Native American novel: the holistic depiction of a male protagonist, a "feeling man," and the mythological background of such a character portrayal, a female divinity who is a "thinking woman." Both are transcending Western stereotypes of gender portrayal.

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* centers on Tayo, a young man of the Southwestern Laguna tribe, who fought in the Pacific islands during World Warn. His cousin, with whom he grew up like a brother, is killed by the Japanese. Tayo is driven insane by this loss as well as by seeing the image of his beloved uncle and stepfather, Josiah, in the face of one of the Japanese he is supposed to shoot.

When Tayo returns to the United States, he is placed in a mental hospital in Los Angeles and drugged into senselessness by doctors who are unable to understand his inner turmoil. On his release and return to the Laguna reservation he suffers from horrible nightmares, nausea, and a feeling of total failure. He accuses himself of having cursed the jungle rain which contributed to the death of his cousin and thereby having caused the drought which is mining the Laguna people. Only after undergoing an ancient healing ritual (a bear cure involving sand-painting) is Tayo able to find sanity, to understand the complexities of individual, social, and "cosmic" sin-here called "witchery" and to rediscover his strong ties to the land and his people.

The style of the novel superbly expresses the essence of the story. It is often as fragmentary as Tayo's mental condition and as disjointed as the tribe's position between cultural persistence and assimilation. Past and future are telescoped into the present. Flashbacks and dream visions contribute to the reader's feeling of disruption as well as of a continual challenge to do what Tayo instinctively tries to do, that is, weave together the fragments, struggle to find a pattern of meaning. What differentiates Silko's style from that of most Anglo-American novelists is her use of oral traditions which are

intricately woven into the narrative in the form of poems, ritual prayers, stories, and tribal rumors....

The point of the novel is that Tayo finds his identity by rediscovering in himself and in all of creation what traditionally has been called the "feminine." His true manhood had been violated when he was supposed to kill people, especially since they looked like his kin. Being forced as a soldier to suppress his *anima,* he was driven insane. But the memory of childhood experiences and tribal stories reawakens his sensitivity and his nurturing instincts which, in the end, make him more, not less, of a man.

From earliest infancy, Tayo has learned to live by instinct and sensuous perception. His Laguna mother is driven from her tribe because Tayo is an illegitimate child, fathered by a Mexican. She survives for only a few years, living with other outcasts in a slum area. The neglected child Orients himself by smells, sounds, and sights, whether sensing the arrival of his perfumed mother and her beer-smelling lovers or detecting morsels of food in refuse piles. When at the age of four he is taken by his aunt and uncle into their ranch home, he learns the smells of animals and the sights and sounds of mountains, winds, and rivers. It is the memory of these sensations which helps him to recover from his war trauma and to feel deep joy when he is alone with nature:

He breathed deeply, and each breath had a distinct smell of snow from the north, of ponderosa pine on the rimrock above; finally he smelled horses from the direction of the corral, and he smiled Being alive was all right then He squatted down by the pool

and watched the dawn spreading across the sky like yellow Wings The mare jingled the steel shanks of the bit With her grazing, and he remembered the sound of the bells in late November.

Tayo has been shown by his uncle Josiah-another male figure who is gentle and caring-that violence is senseless. When, as a young boy, he kills many flies because his white teacher has taught the children that flies carry disease, Josiah lovingly reprimands him and explains that in immemorial times when the people were starving because they had behaved badly, it was a fly which went to Mother Earth to ask forgiveness for the people. Since then the grateful people do not kill flies.

When Tayo shoots his first deer, he carefully observes the ritual of the conscientious hunter who would never kill for sport. After he has undergone the healing ceremony, he is responsive to nature in its smallest manifestations, imitating the gentleness of the bees in pollinating flowers with a small feather or saving a tree from an early winter storm by carefully shaking the snow from its branches.

Tayo lives out of dreams-whether nightmares or beautiful visions. Compared to the other war veterans who are noisy, bragging drunkards, he is shy and often silent. But he is no coward or weakling. When one of the young men, Emo, speaks insultingly of his own people as well as of Tayo's mixed ancestry, Tayo is so enraged that, like Billy Budd, he becomes violent in his inability to express his feelings. On this occasion he comes close to killing Emo.

An important part of Tayo's story is his encounter with Ts'eh, the mysterious woman who is also-on the mythological level-a goddess or mountain spirit. He learns how to use herbs and to gather plant seeds With great care. "Ts' eh Montano, or 'Water Mountain,' seems a coded and composite reference to the spirit-woman who returns vitality to the arid desert for Indians, Mexicans, and whites alike, all embodied in Tayo, all sharing in the sickness and health of one another, many as one With the land" [Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance,* 1983].

There are other male figures in the novel who are "feeling" men: old Ku'oosh, a wise Laguna medicine man; Robert, the kind uncle and stepfather; and especially Betonie, the Navaho-Mexican medicine man who patiently counsels Tayo and brings about his healing by guiding him through the ceremony....

Non-Indian readers are likely to find the role of Ts'eh in Tayo's recovery ambiguous. A superficial reader might simply consider the relationship between her and Tayo a sexual-romantic interlude to be expected in any contemporary novel. Moreover, feminist readers might see in Ts' eh the stereotype of a woman who offers her body to the hero. The basic problem involved here is the bi-cultural perspective. Images, concepts, and patterns of belief are difficult to merge in a novel on American Indian life to be read by a predominantly white, Western audience....

Ts'eh reawakens Tayo's belief in a balanced world which he dimly remembers from tribal stories. She is representative of earth, rain, wind, and sky, but also of the thought power that controls the elements. Her "storm-pattern blanket" indicates her ordered strength. At times Tayo feels that Ts'eh is just an apparition or superstition, that she "meant nothing at all; it was all in his own head." Her lineage or family seem to be unknown. Her voice can be as unreal as an echo. On another level, however, she is very real: "He had not dreamed her; she was there as certainly as the sparrows had been there, leaving spindly scratches in the mud."

This double vision on a physical and a metaphysical level is alien to Western readers. They find it difficult to comprehend that a real crawling spider coming up after the rain is, seen from another aspect, Spider-Woman, the divine creatrix; that Tayo's mother, the long-dead prostitute, can mythologically and poetically merge into Mother Earth or Mother Com; that Ts' eh, the woman that Tayo makes love to, is a manifestation of ThoughtWoman, the balance of the universe. Silko may not have fully succeeded in portraying Ts'eh in terms of this double vision, but her intention is certainly to visualize Tayo's ability to overcome the split between body and mind, which Westerners had trained into him, by having him experience Spiderwoman's wholeness through Ts'eh. The Laguna people are "woman-dominant; they're a woman centered people." Their images of gender can help us overcome Western stereotypes of excessively rational, power-wielding men as well as of women who are mindless child bearers. Each gender attains wholeness and Vitality only if it includes traits usually ascribed to its opposite....

Silko's novel is in keeping with recent anthropological findings about the social complexity of gender identification. Tayo's self-understanding as a male is not just biologically determined; it changes with the influence of his environment. His story and

that of his comrades show that gender identity has to be nurtured. The assumption that in all "primary" cultures of the world males basically dominate while females are the submissive sex, that men always represent culture and women nature, is an untenable Western assumption....

For American Indians, spirit ties all human beings to each other and to the whole cosmos; therefore it also unifies the genders. Spirit does not dissolve gender distinctions, but it renders certain gender traits interchangeable. When Tayo and his comrades have to fight in the Pacific jungles, spirit is trained and drained out of them, making them fit to kill blindly. Being cut off from their physical and spiritual roots, some of them, like Emo, become perverted. But Tayo is able to keep Spiderwoman's love for all of creation alive in his manhood, because some gentle men, like Josiah, Robert, Ku'oosh, and Betonie, had nurtured him in this love. After the trauma of the war, he had to experience a reenactment of Spider-Woman's spirit to recover his wholeness. A dearth of spirit hardens gender roles.

Source. Kristin Herzog, "Thinking Woman and Feeling Man: Gender in Silko's Ceremony" *in MELUS,* Vol.12, No. 1, Spring, 1985, pp. 25-36.

Topics for Further Study

Silko refers to some of the environmental problems facing the Laguna Reservation after World War II. How do these problems affect the people's culture? How do they affect Tayo's ceremony? How does Silko illuminate these problems without documenting them and, then, how are they resolved, if at all?

Write an essay about the Pueblo theory of witchery. What types of behavior both in the story and in reality could be considered witchery? How does this theory help to spread responsibility while suggesting a solution to problems of greed, pollution, and hunger?

Silko suggests that the neglected Pueblo ceremonial traditions are not only useful but also essential to future survival. Think of some other religious traditions that are either out of use or corrupted. What value might they have, if any, once rejuvenated?

Without exception, the Native American people prophesied that the white man was coming. Those same prophecies also say that all things European will disappear. What do you think that means? Is it coming to pass?

Some cultures have definite patterns of recognition and 'rites of passage.' For example, the Plains Indians have a Vision Quest wherein a young person is 'put out' on a hilltop, or laid in a shallow grave, With 4 days of water. This allows the adolescent to have a vision or receive a message about his future role in the community. Jews, on the other hand, acknowledge their adolescents with a Bar Mitzvah celebration. Modern secular culture has no such thing. In *Ceremony,* the young men saw enlistment in the Army as a rite of passage into white society. Research the cultural function of 'rites of passage.'

Axe they needed? If so, what sort of ceremony could you envisage for celebrating the attainment of maturity in America?

While the rest of the nation has seen a drop in violent crime (by 22%), Native American reservations are experiencing a crime wave (up by 87%). The baby boom on the reservation of the 1980s has translated into a large number of youths, and these lads and young adults are just beginning to imitate urban gangs in terms of culture, violence, and drugs. The United States Congress and President Clinton are proposing to spend additional millions on new prisons and law enforcement on the Native American land.

Thinking about *Ceremony,* argue for an alternative solution to the infant gang problem. Then, do some research into alternative programs for Native American offenders: why are they under funded and ignored?

Gather a number of brief accounts (cultural, historical, and archaeological) of the Pueblo Indians. Placing them next to each other, compare the ways in which the Native Americans of the Southwest are presented. Oftentimes these descriptions will include suggestions on when to visit reservations to see them dance. Given what you now know

about Gallup, consider the ethics of this tourism. Is It ethical to encourage recreational gawking at Native Americans? What does this say about our culture in the 1990s?

The Mayans were one of three civilizations to invent the mathematical concept of zero. The Pueblo People developed several strains of corn. What other knowledge and resources did the Native Americans possess that were either stolen Dr buried (hint: research calendars, the material used for tires, and medical procedures)?

What Do I Read Next?

St. Andrew's "Healing The Witchery: Medicine in Silko's *Ceremony,"* printed in Arizona Quarterly, Vol. 44, No 1, discusses the Pueblo cos mology in greater detail. This is a good article for further investigating the underlying religious and cultural themes of the novel.

After ten years of work, Silko published her second novel, *Almanac of the Dead* This novel is more overtly political and reflects the hysteria surrounding illegal immigration, drug running, the CIA, and other phenomena of the 1980s. Like *Ceremony,* legends are interwoven with the present day as an ancient book is pieced back together after being smuggled out of the clutches of the book burning Spanish.

Silko corrects some mistakes about her own biography and gives insights into her work in a book of essays, *Yello Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996). In this collection, she tells of her fascination with photography, the ancient codices, and some of the historical events which influenced her novels.

N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* was published in 1968 and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1969. It was published at the start of a Native American cultural renaissance and in the midst of a new assertion of political rights, the novel tells the story of a man returning to his Kiowa Pueblo from World War II.

A decade before Dee Brown and the general reconsideration of Native Americans that occurred in the early 1970s, William Brandon presented a general survey of Native American history for The American Heritage Library. The book was appropriately titled, *Indians,* and was published in 1961. The work, though brief, is quite remarkable for its scope and objectivity.

Ward Churchill's *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas* 1492 *to the Present* published in 1998, is his latest work documenting the history of his people. A Cherokee himself, Churchill has been an avid chronicler of the attempt to eradicate the Native Americans from the planet. In this work, he focuses on the attempt to cover up the story of genocide.

A record of Native American political activism in the 1970s has been compiled by Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne, entitled, *American Indian Activism. Alcatraz to the Longest Walk.*

A Lumbee Indian named David E. Wilkins charted the way in which the US Supreme Court has curtailed the rights of Native Americans. The result was his 1977 work, *American Indian Sovereignty and the U.S. Supreme Court: The Masking of Justice,* where he examines fifteen landmark cases for their implications on Indians as well as all minority groups.

Further Study

Thomas Berger, *Little Big Man,* Fawcett, 1964.

Written by a man known for his probing same about America, the novel is the life story of Jack Crab-the only living survivor of Custer's Last Stand. The novel and the film (With Dustin Hoffman, 1970), were part of a general redress of the Image of the Indian Custer, in this version, is not the Hollywood hero but the more historically accurate eccentric who lost all his men and himself in a battle with the Lakota lead by Crazy Horse.

Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. an Indian History of the American West,* Holt, 1970.

History books were being rewritten both as a reaction to the rise in minority consciousness caused by the era of Civil Rights and as a further catalyst to political activism. This volume tells a story very different from the more patriotic story 'how the West was won.' For example, such battles as the 1890 Wounded Knee event, is revealed to be the massacre of Big Foot's band of300 old men, women, and children.

Arthur S. Flemming, *Indian Tribes: A Continuing Quest for Survival,* a Report by the US Commission on Civil Rights, 1981.

Eight years after the siege at Wounded Knee, a long overdue report was Issued by the US Commission on Civil Rights It found that most violations of Native American rights are the direct result of public ignorance and misinformation (e.g. though "an entire volume of the US Code is devoted to Indian Law" it is a rare Law School that notices even the oversight). Furthermore, the report found that greed-not racism-accounts for the backlash which erupts whenever treaty rights are asserted or upheld in court.

Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls. Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War,* University of Texas Press, 1996.

Some 43,000 Native Americans served in the Vietnam War but their contributions went undocumented until Tom Holm began his interviews. He reflects on those interviews to explore the role of war and warrior, how their tribal customs sustained them in war, and what happened to them when they returned. Fortunately, many Native American Vietnam Vets had different experiences from their white counterparts because many Tribes were ready with ceremonies to heal the trauma of the "white path of peace."

Gertrude Simmons Bonin, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature,* Vol. II, 1989.

The woman who could arguably have been the first Native American novelist, had not circumstances prevented her, was Gertrude Simmons BOnin (a.k.a Zitkala-Sa, 1876-1938) Those circumstances were, quite simply, the needs of her people She was a violinist, short story writer, progressive reformer, labor rights advocate, and secretary of

the Society of American Indians (the first all-Indian run organization agitating for Indian rights) Her autobiographical pieces are a fascinating read.

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James Ruppert, "The Reader's Lessons in *'Ceremony',"* in *Arizona Quarterly,* Vol 44, No.1, Spring, 1988, pp 78-85.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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