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Landscape Imagery and Memory in
the Narrative of Trauma:
A Closer Look at
Leslie Marmon Silko's
Ceremony

Although much has been written about Leslie Marmon Silko's acclaimed novel *Ceremony* since its publication in 1977, little attention has been given to the role and representation of psychological trauma in the narrative. Silko's novel follows the life of the "mixed-blood" male protagonist, Tayo, on his journey from being a traumatized WWII veteran to a respected storyteller in his native community on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in the American Southwest. Tayo's trauma is portrayed as a result of his experiences in war, the deaths of his cousin Rocky and Uncle Josiah, ethnic tensions between Indians and whites in the American Southwest, as well as a result of larger tribal-mythic forces of Indian "witchery" or evil that have produced imbalances in contemporary American society. Until Tayo understands how his individual suffering fits within a broader cultural history of suffering caused by witchery and manifested in racial conflict, he continues to be haunted by the past. Initially, trauma alienates the protagonist, but later it provides an avenue for Tayo to occupy a privileged role in the Laguna community as a healer and "messenger" between different ethnic groups in an ailing modern America. The novel demonstrates how traumatic events disrupt the protagonist's coherent sense of self, yet also offer the opportunity for a positive reformulation of identity. Rather than suggesting that trauma is an isolated event divorced from cultural events or an event that ultimately shatters identity, Silko's novel

indicates that trauma produces new knowledge of self and world situated at the crossroads of Native and Euro-American cultures.

Working within Laguna and Euro-American worldviews of psychic imbalance and healing, Silko's novel demonstrates that individual trauma is rooted within a cultural context and tied to specific landscapes. The protagonist's individual trauma points toward and at times symbolically mirrors the cultural trauma of Native American's social and economic oppression and displacement based on racial heritage. I employ the term cultural trauma to denote the suffering experienced by a group of people caused only by their affiliation with a certain racial or ethnic group that has been targeted and systemically oppressed by the dominant group. Deborah Horvitz defines cultural trauma as "an officially sanctioned, sadomasochistic system of oppression in which a targeted group, perceived by the dominant culture as an obstacle to the goals of the existing hegemony, are tortured, imprisoned, or killed" (11). Slavery, genocide of Native Americans, and the 17th-century witch hunts are examples Horvitz provides for cultural trauma. In Silko's novel, Tayo is a figure who carries cultural significance for indigenous and mixed-raced peoples who have experienced the effects of colonization, forced assimilation, and discrimination. Tayo's suffering refracts elements of the cultural struggle created within the world of the novel of indigenous Laguna and Navajo tribes in the United States to reclaim their land and resist oppression. On one level, the protagonist's trauma arises from the war, but on another level, his trauma reflects the collective experience of suffering by indigenous and mixed-race peoples in America, specifically the struggle to overcome the aftereffects of colonization and its policies of assimilation and land seizure. For example, the correlation between individual and cultural trauma is found in Tayo's reclamation of Uncle Josiah's Mexican cattle stolen by Anglo ranchers. Tayo's individual intent to reclaim the cattle is presented, on the one hand, as a simple desire to finish what Josiah had started and take care of "family business." But, on the other hand, by the end of the novel it becomes clear that Tayo's actions evoke the collective desire expressed by other members of the Laguna nation in Silko's novel to reinhabit their native land and reassert a modern tribal identity. Thus, bringing the cattle 'home' resonates with Tayo's recovery, but also symbolizes the historical indigenous struggle to reclaim land illegally appropriated by European colonizers and their descendents.¹

On yet another level, Tayo's trauma and recovery are entwined in a relationship to the land and situated within a tribal-mythic narrative that reenacts (and rewrites) Laguna mythic creation stories, often involving Yellow Woman, that position different animal and spiritual figures in a battle for the earth's fecundity, plentiful rainfall,

and spiritual regeneration for humanity. The land is the crucial place for Tayo's recovery and reintegration of the past. Moreover, the physical environment marks the boundaries between internal and external worlds, illuminating the tension between traumatic memory and present reality.

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Ceremony is often viewed as a story of redemption and healing, but often overlooked is the function of trauma in the story.² Few scholars have addressed the meaning of mental anguish or trauma in Silko's novel, although Robert Nelson analyzes Tayo's identity and recovery in terms of the protagonist's alienation from tribal society in his influential book *Place and Vision*.³ Nelson implies that the protagonist suffers from psychological distress by writing that Tayo has a "sickness for which there is no cure," but does not address the impact or meaning of trauma (Nelson 5).⁴ Situating *Ceremony* within a critical discourse of trauma affords the opportunity to examine the formal strategies Silko employs to represent traumatic memory and adds a broader cultural dimension to the significance of trauma and recovery for the individual character and his community.

Psychological trauma refers to a person's intense emotional response to an overwhelming external event that often involves a threat to life or bodily harm. In defining trauma, psychiatrist Judith Herman argues that trauma is an event that occurs outside the realm of normal human experience and violates the social compact: "Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptation to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (33). Trauma is a word derived from Greek which means, "wound," and originally implied an injury inflicted upon the body, but today implies a wound inflicted upon the mind. In other words, trauma is the event *and* the emotional and physical response long after the event occurred. Sociologist Kai Erikson points out the curious characteristics of trauma when he writes: "The most violent wrenchings in the world ... have no clinical standing unless they harm the workings of a mind or body, so it is the *damage done* that defines and gives shape to the initial event, the *damage done* that gives it its name" (184). The "damage done" is what the individual must work to understand and integrate. Yet, it is precisely the unknown terrain of the "damage done" that marks the struggle of the individual coming to terms with the past.

For Tayo, the "damage done" arises from multiple traumatic events that he experiences as a soldier in active combat during WWII in the Philippines. When his unit captures several Japanese soldiers and executes them, Tayo refuses to kill the soldiers because they "looked too familiar" and claims that his Uncle Josiah is standing in the line-up. The narrator explains: "Tayo could not pull the trigger. The fever made him shiver, and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there; the face was dark from the sun, and the eyes were squinting as though he were about to smile at Tayo" (7-8). Rocky tries to reason with Tayo that Uncle Josiah is not standing with the Japanese soldiers about to be shot, but Tayo is not convinced: "[Tayo] examined the facts and logic again and again, the way Rocky had explained it to him... but he could not feel anything except a swelling in his belly, a great swollen grief that was pushing into his throat" (9). The field medic treats Tayo with medication for his "malarial fever" that has produced "hallucinations" (8). But Tayo believes he sees Uncle Josiah fall with the Japanese soldiers being shot. Tayo's vision of his uncle in the line of Japanese soldiers bespeaks the intuitive feeling, and later mythic knowledge, that all humans are connected, independent of race or nationality. The "great swollen grief" Tayo feels is a response to the "evil" of war as well as his own guilt over leaving his aging Uncle alone at home to tend the cattle. Tayo becomes even more disoriented and sick after his "brother," Rocky (who is actually his cousin), dies during the forced march led by the Japanese army to another P.O.W. camp.⁵ These are some of the remembered events of war that cause a traumatic response in Tayo, but it is important to note that Tayo's fever and hallucinations began before his capture and brother's death. This suggests that Tayo's trauma comes from sources other than war, including society, family, and culture. In Silko's novel the individual trauma is related to a cultural trauma which is rooted in the "destroyers," or the Indian witchery and "evil" that affects all races and spans ancient, mythic, and modern times.

War is not the only origin of the protagonist's trauma because the novel emphasizes the forces of childhood abandonment and racial discrimination that contribute to his suffering. Tayo is not raised by his parents, but by his aunt (because his mother abandoned him at age four) who causes Tayo feel like an outsider on the Laguna reservation due to his mixed ethnicity. In the beginning of the novel the reader is informed that "Auntie" had taken Tayo into her family to "conceal the shame of her younger sister" who was a prostitute and often homeless (29, 108). Before living with Auntie, Tayo lived with his mother (he never knew his father) in a make-shift shelter on the edge of town by the river. He would often spend nights at bars in town as a young child

looking at trash on the floor and different sets of shoes from where his mother placed him under the tables (109). When Tayo returns home to Auntie after the war, she disapproves of him even more because he is sick and “probes” him with her gaze, searching for “new shame”: “Since he could remember, he had known Auntie’s shame for what his mother had done, and Auntie’s shame for him. He remembered how the white men who were building the new highway through Laguna had pointed at him [...]. he understood what it was about white men and Indian women: the disgrace of Indian women who went with them. And during the war Tayo learned about white women and Indian men” (57). As a child Tayo is targeted by Indian boys in school, especially Emo who hates Tayo “only” because Tayo is “part white.” Emo continues to torment Tayo after the war when they both return to Laguna, eventually becoming the final adversaries in Tayo’s recovery. Because of Tayo’s own shame from internalized racism and Auntie’s glorified approval of her “full-blooded” son, Rocky, Tayo struggles to come to terms with the fact that he is alive and at home while Rocky has died in the war. Auntie and Grandma mourn the loss of Rocky at the cost of not acknowledging the suffering Tayo continues to endure. Tayo thinks: “It was him, Tayo, who had died, but somehow there had been a mistake with the corpses, and somehow his was still unburied” (28). He feels exhausted from “fighting off the dreams and voices; he was tired of guarding himself against places and things which evoked the memories” (26). Neglect from his family and society contributes to Tayo’s trauma and fuels the return of traumatic memories that continue to disrupt the protagonist’s cohesive sense of self.

Silko’s novel suggests that one possible answer to the complex power of the past to cause suffering is to retell the story of trauma to the appropriate person or community who can listen compassionately. To a certain degree, the novel’s emphasis on the healing abilities of storytelling coincides with certain psychological theories on the ability of narrative to reduce suffering. There are several Western trauma models that address the importance of narrative in the process of recovering from trauma, but one in particular has relevance here. Psychologist Pierre Janet wrote on trauma’s effects on memories and advocated the notion of the “talking cure” which asserts that in order to recover from negative symptoms of trauma, such as flashbacks or nightmares, one must retell the traumatic memories to another individual. Pierre Janet explains his view of trauma’s effects on memory and identity:

[Normal memory,] like all psychological phenomena, is an action: essentially it is the action of telling a story [...]. A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated [...] until we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction through our movements, but also an inward reaction

through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization and recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history[...]. (661-63)

Janet argues that normal memory is considered a psychological activity that he describes as the "action of telling a story," either to ourselves or to others. According to Janet, the individual who maintains a "fixed" remembering of a traumatic event cannot incorporate the past into normal storytelling patterns of memory. Although controversy continues to surround Janet's late nineteenth-century theories, Silko's novel also emphasizes the importance of storytelling and remembering the past in order to recover. Janet's theory appears to illuminate the role of trauma in Silko's novel for although the protagonist's war and childhood memories are not represented as fixed in time, there is a debilitating silence that envelopes the protagonist and renders him numb, mute, and unable to incorporate the past until he can order the past into a coherent narrative. For example, Tayo is unable to talk after returning from war and is sent to a Veteran's hospital in Los Angeles where "white doctors" encourage him to talk by sitting with him in a small white room with a single barred window (31). Tayo is unable to communicate with a doctor who asks him questions in the hospital: "He reached into his mouth and felt his own tongue; it was dry and dead, the carcass of a tiny rodent" (15). Talking is difficult for Tayo because he feels invisible: "For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke has no consciousness of itself" (14). One doctor persists and Tayo finally responds and cries, though he is far from healed because Tayo's memories from the war and childhood remain in a tangled web of confusion. He wants to pull the memories apart and travel back in time to put the order of events back into place, hoping to separate the traumatic memories from the non-traumatic memories: "He could feel how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more" (7). Tayo is terrified by memories that take him back to the war, yet these traumatic memories are inextricably linked to his past before the war and relationships to Rocky and Uncle Josiah so that the two types of memories cannot be separated. But the traumatic past is not yet understood by Tayo because he cannot situate his individual experience within a cultural context.⁶

However, there are significant differences between the novel and Janet's theory regarding the significance of remembering and retelling the past in order to recover from trauma. Although the protagonist indeed works to incorporate his traumatic memories, this incorporation

can *only* come about after he understands other stories of suffering, both historic and mythic, that help him place his experiences into an internally coherent order. The protagonist retells the traumatic past only after he performs a ritual with Betonie (in which he does not narrate his war experience), sees the mountain lion, interacts with the mythic nature-figure Ts'eh, and reclaims his uncle's cattle. Moreover, the absence of a trauma narrative spoken by the traumatized protagonist until the last page of the novel suggests that recalling the traumatic past is less important than reconnecting to the land with its human, natural, and mythic histories, and reestablishing a relationship to the social community of home. Curiously, Tayo seems to reversely enact the "talking cure," because he must first outwardly perform rituals of healing and remembrance before he can consciously and individually "rewind" his memories into a clear order and "place."

Even though Tayo is able to eventually speak a few words to the doctor in the hospital, nightmares and flashbacks continue as he returns home to Auntie on the Laguna reservation and hopes to recover. Auntie calls the traditional Laguna medicine man, Ku'oosh, who comes to heal Tayo with a traditional Laguna healing ceremony that includes storytelling, making it necessary for Tayo to explain his experiences in the "white people's big war" (35). Ku'oosh prompts Tayo to tell his story, emphasizing the power of language, specifically Laguna language that values the interconnections of each word in a story. Ku'oosh speaks in Laguna to Tayo: "No word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way [...]. The story behind each word must be told so that there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said" (35-6). Tayo cannot answer Ku'oosh's questions not as a result of his lack of fluency in the language, but because he can't find the proper words in either language to describe the war. Moreover, he is unable to answer directly the question posed by Ku'oosh if he killed anyone because he cannot clearly remember nor distinguish between his actions and others. Tayo's silence bewilders Ku'oosh because in traditional ways of warfare, one always remembered what happened and retold the events to others. Internally, Tayo muses that "the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous" as Tayo's experience in WWII because even Laguna myths did not incorporate such atrocity: "Not even old time witches killed like that" (37). A cultural and linguistic context in which to place his combat experience is lacking, therefore leaving him unable to articulate the past. However, Tayo's inability to tell his story to Ku'oosh does not suggest that trauma is unspeakable. Rather this indicates that the traumatized protagonist has not found the appropriate cultural context or person to explain his experience.

The words for the story have yet to be found in any culture or myth, revealing the problem of trauma and the special demands it places on language, narrative, and cultural knowledge.

The protagonist's emotional struggle between the traumatic past and present reality, and the resulting disruption of identity, is a dominant motif in trauma novels that writers like Silko often express through formal innovations such as narrative dissociation. Narrative dissociation is rhetorical strategy that aims to evoke the experience of psychological dissociation by altering the narrative structure to create a disjunction in the protagonist's coherence of identity and perception of the external world. Psychologist Laurence Kirmayer explains further the psychological state of dissociation and the particular use of language and absence of words that can occur in a dissociative narrative: "Dissociation refers to a gap in the normal integration of memory, identity, and experience [...]. Dissociation is a rupture in narrative, but it is maintained by narrative because the shape of the narrative around the dissociation protects (reveals and conceals) the gap" (180). The texture of the story around the silence and the words used to avoid direct recollection thus provide clues to the trauma itself. Language must be used to communicate the overwhelming feelings such as terror or fear, but language is exactly what fails the individual when trying to explain the event. If language and modes of expression are largely dictated by cultural norms and social contexts as demonstrated in *Ceremony*, then it follows that the narrative forms to express trauma, and in particular the rhetoric of silence, are a reflection of cultural models, rather than an example of the inherent wordlessness of trauma.⁸ In Silko's novel the narrative frequently evokes extreme emotional states such as dissociation caused by traumatic memory in order to demonstrate the ways trauma alters the protagonist's sense of self and relation to others. The narrative shifts abruptly between past and present, and multiple locations in order to imitate the movement of the protagonist's mind as it approaches and retreats from traumatic memory.⁹ During narrative dissociation the protagonist is "taken back" to the moment of harm and relives the experience. Depending on the context and severity of psychological dissociation, it may cause a disruption in the coherence of time, memory, and identity.

Specific characteristics of narrative dissociation are demonstrated in the following passage from the novel that contains rapid transitions in time and place. The narrative disruption mirrors the psychological struggle of Tayo's mind as he unwillingly approaches and frantically retreats from a traumatic memory. This sudden, unexpected alteration of consciousness is represented through narrative rhythm and landscape imagery that creates a divide between memory and reality, between

the Bataan Death March and the present moment at a bar after Tayo's return from war. Tayo and his 'friends,' Harley and Emo, become drunk together telling "war stories" at a bar (54). Tayo enters the bathroom and feels the force of his intrusive memories as predominately physical sensations when time splits between the past and present:

He pushed down on the handle of the toilet, but it didn't flush; the lid of the toilet tank was leaning against the wall and the floor was covered with dirty water. It was soaking through his boots. The sensation was sudden and terrifying; he could not get out of the room, and he was afraid he would fall into the stinking dirty water and have to crawl through it, like before, with jungle clouds raining down filthy water that smelled ripe with death. He lunged at the door; he landed on his hands and knees in the dark outside the toilet. The dreams did not wait any more for night; they came out anytime. (56)

The prose embodies the internal movement of Tayo's thoughts in a sentence that increases in pitch and intensity, jumping from one thought to the next. The reader is quickly moved from the dirty bathroom water back to the horror of Tayo's war memories and back again to the present moment. The link between the present and the past is the water, but the reader is left to interpret the jump that covers a gap—the story that remains untold of what exactly happened to Tayo during the war in the Philippines.

Tayo's relation to the external world in this scene corresponds with his emotional disorientation. His terror is projected onto an external environment that conveys a sense of fear and coldness through closed quarters, dirty water, and dank smells.¹⁰ Tayo's internal coherence of identity is split between the past pain in the jungle and the present disgust of the bathroom. He attempts to erase the memory by moving into a different physical space outside the confining bathroom walls, only to return to the tangled confusion of Emo and his "hatred." To a certain extent, the place in which Tayo experiences the flashback reflects his inability to understand his traumatic past: the darkness of the bathroom clouds his vision, the water terrifies him, and he falls on his hands and knees in a vulnerable position. As the novel unfolds, Tayo comes to terms with his trauma through direct contact with the natural world that helps unify his memories and post-war life.

The landscape functions within these moments of remembering as a link between identity and memory, thus acting as both the place of trauma and the location of recovery. Tayo's relationship to the land signals his inner coherence and reunification of self, community, and past. As Tayo comes into closer contact with the natural environment and native community, traumatic memories become more coherent.

In the bar bathroom, he is confused, frightened, and entrapped by his memories. In contrast, when Tayo is outside in the natural environment in the following scene, he feels more peaceful and visible; aware of who he is based upon his relationship to the physical environment:

In a world of crickets and wind and cottonwood trees he was almost alive again; he was visible. The green waves of dead faces and the screams of the dying that had echoed in his head were buried. The sickness had receded into a shadow behind him, something he saw only out of the corners of his eyes, over his shoulder... The place felt good; he leaned back against the wall until its surface pushed against his backbone solidly. (104)

Through direct contact with the environment Tayo comes to better terms with his role in war and his community. He feels "visible" now when before he was "white smoke." By feeling the solid and alive world, he knows that he is actual and attached to a particular place. Tayo locates himself physically just as he begins to locate his trauma in terms of an internally coherent map that corresponds with a broader knowledge of his cultural identity. Silko writes that the terrifying memories of war become "buried" as Tayo sits listening to the cottonwood trees and crickets, though these memories are not entirely erased. The protagonist begins to understand his trauma in relation to the landscape so that these memories are not forgotten, but placed in a unifying pattern with other cultural memories of Laguna history and mythic battles against "evil" and witchery. In this moment, Tayo listens intently to the outside world rather than being consumed by inner turmoil, thus allowing him to arrive at a sense of peace with the past.

Silko's novel suggests that the "action of telling the story" for Tayo is crucial for his survival and recovery from war and other forces of witchery. Storytelling to preserve identity because it brings together the pieces of Tayo's past within cultural and historical frameworks that help him understand the traumatic events. Herein lies a striking similarity between Euro-American and Laguna worldviews on trauma in the novel due to the value both cultures place on the importance of retelling the traumatic event to others. Both cultures claim that telling the story of the past will help the "sick" individual heal. Storytelling as an "action of telling the story" provides the opportunity to sunder the silent barriers of traumatic memory in order to reconcile the experience. For example, the poem in *Ceremony's* opening pages suggests that storytelling helps preserve identity and also functions as a mode of resistance against emotional and physical "illness." The second page of the poem begins:

Ceremony
I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
they aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death (2)

The poem asserts that stories are viewed as tools, even weapons, that not only aid in survival, but are the key component to survive. The novel indicates that a certain amount of agency resides in language, which is necessarily connected to a culture that provides social models for responding to and retelling the experience of suffering. The ability to tell a story, perform a ceremony, and remember the past can save Silko's protagonist from psychic and physical illness, and even death. Clearly, illness and death in the novel are part of the witchery or evil that any group or race of people can participate in, as exemplified by the gruesome torture and killing of Harley by his "friends" Emo, Pinkie, and Leroy at the uranium pit mine on the Laguna reservation (250). However, Silko implies that racial discrimination and WWII are products of witchery by "the destroyers" that work to sicken and kill all humans (249). The novel reminds us that witchery began without white people, when "there was nothing European," and the witches created white people and new forms of evil (133). The ability of stories to "fight off illness and death" mirrors a similar claim by Euro-American psychologists that "[t]he psychoneurosis induced by terror can apparently be reversed through the use of words" (Herman 183). Western psychology accords with the novel in that telling stories and sharing memories can prevent illness, both physical and mental, and reverse negative effects of the past for the individual and community. Both "texts," written within Laguna and Western worldviews, suggest that acts of remembering and reciting stories to ourselves and others are necessary for health and survival, especially for the survival of indigenous and mixed-blood identity. Silko's novel demonstrates that Tayo understands his traumatic past only through an integration and recollection of personal, cultural, and mythic histories.

By the end of the novel it becomes clear that the protagonist's recovery is connected to the reassertion of a relationship to a specific Laguna landscape, including its human, nonhuman, and mythic inhabitants. Tayo's comprehension of his traumatic memories is linked to the recovery of Josiah's Mexican cattle, the return of the rain, and re-connection to Laguna community. This multi-layered recovery is demonstrated in a passage where landscape imagery reflects Tayo's

psychological terrain. Tayo has just brought the cattle back home and lies in the snow recovering from a hard fall from his horse. He knows now that things are moving toward greater balance as he comes to understand his traumatic past and the purpose of his life. He starts walking home in the snow and wind, knowing that his cattle will be safe: "He smiled. Inside, his belly was smooth and soft, following the contours of the hills and holding the silence of the snow" (205). Tayo's calmness is reflected in a landscape that is "smooth and soft" with a silence that does not mute him but opens him to an outward listening and view of the natural world. His understanding of traumatic memories parallels Tayo's return to the Laguna land of the Southwest, interactions with Ts'eh, and messenger role in the Laguna community. Cultivating a relationship to the land that harbors a cultural and mythic history is shown as essential to the process of recovery, as is the need to remember and retell the traumatic past to others. Just as the "shape of the narrative" around the silence of dissociation describes the relationship the individual maintains with a traumatic experience, so too the quality of the interaction between Tayo and the land with its mythic figures reveals the protagonist's ability to incorporate trauma into his "ongoing life story."

In *Ceremony*, storytelling functions as a healing ceremony that unifies multiple histories into a restorative wholeness. It is the story *in motion* and connected to a particular landscape that heals the individual in the novel. Tayo is able to tell his story of trauma and recovery to the Laguna elders in the kiva only after he participates in a Navajo sand-painting ceremony led by the "mixed-blood" Navajo medicine man, Betonie. However, rather than suggesting that Tayo heals because of the "talking cure" as understood in Euro-American society as occurring between an individual and professional (only a recent twentieth-century urban phenomenon), Tayo recovers due to conversations between community members, mixed-race tribal healers, and mythic figures like Ts'eh. The novel encourages a reading of Tayo's trauma as an event created by "Indian" or non-European witches as part of a larger universal battle between good and evil. Although Tayo is a small part of this larger mythic drama, his modern day actions influence the ultimate outcome. Thus, the mythic paradigm provided by the Laguna and Navajo worldviews allows Tayo to recover because it situates his individual trauma within larger cultural and mythic frameworks. This recovery process underscores the sociocultural dimensions of individual trauma. The novel indicates that just as the protagonist's trauma is a compendium of individual and cultural events, the healing from traumatic events occurs at the intersection of personal and community existence. In other words, *Ceremony* presents individual trauma

and memory within a social context tied to an ethnic community that directs the comprehension and narration of the protagonist's past.

Tayo's recovery process is catalyzed by the Navajo sandpainting ceremony led by Betonie and his helper, which is narrated in fluid transitions between mythic poetry and modern prose. This movement between modern and mythic time periods is a method employed throughout the novel. With the commencement of the ceremony, the different narrative forms transition in unison with Tayo's new understanding of the past and his current life. Silko's employment of two narrative forms demonstrates Tayo's stages of recovery, specifically the reconciliation of traumatic memory. One narrative locates itself within "ritual-mythic" time in poetic stanzas that imitate Laguna storytelling patterns (Silko 272). The ritual-mythic world is defined by Silko as the "spiritual or mythic dimension of the Pueblo world" in relation to the "actual, everyday world" (Silko 272). The other narrative voice locates itself within the present, "everyday" time in modern prose lines. Betonie sings the words first seen in the excerpted passage below. At this point, Betonie and his helper, Shush, have already guided Tayo's feet in the bear footprints. As Betonie prays, Tayo walks through each of the five hoops and Betonie sings:

e-hey-yah-ah-na!
 At the Dark Mountain
 born from the mountain
 moves his hand along the mountain
 I have left the zigzag lightning behind
 I have left the straight lightning behind... .

When he passed through the last hoop
 it wasn't finished
 They spun him around sunwise
 and he recovered
 he stood up
 The rainbows returned him to his
 home, but it wasn't over.
 All kinds of evil were still on him.

From the last hoop they led him through the doorway. It was dark and the sky was bright with stars. The chill touched the blood on his head; his arms and legs were shaking [...]. (144)

The excerpted lines describe Tayo's healing ceremony orchestrated by Betonie and based loosely on Navajo sandpainting ceremonial rituals. The narrative begins in modern-time prose where the reader finds Tayo in front of Betonie's fire the night before the ceremony. Af-

ter a few paragraphs, the narrative moves into mythic time in poetic stanzas in order to describe the creation of witchery and evil in the world. Several pages later, the narrative shifts back to modern time in prose form in order to create a parallel narrative between Tayo's story of trauma and recovery, and the Indian witchery and creation stories. The mythic story is told in-between the modern story so that ancient healing chants become intertwined with modern events. Betonie's song is written in stanza form, imitating the poetic form of the witchery story previously told, even though his chants are taking place in the modern time frame. The stanza structure of Betonie's chants places Tayo's modern healing within a traditional Navajo sandpainting ritual, collapsing the boundary between the two time frames and stylistic forms (Harvey 293). Consequently, the healing ceremony takes place within a continuous present. The temporal overlap blurs the two worlds of the mythic and modern so that Tayo is both an actor and witness in the story/ceremony, therefore presenting his trauma and recovery as both an individual and cultural process.

Betonie's chants are spoken in first person as he sings healing prayers and describes a story of returning home and recovering. Then, the narrative shifts suddenly in the last stanza into third person, incorporating Tayo as an actor into the healing chants of the ceremony. Betonie sings as Tayo walks through the five hoops (rainbows) of the white corn sandpainting with blood running through his hair from the cut inflicted by Betonie with a flint stone—the "scalp ceremony." He marks Tayo with pain in order to locate Tayo's unnamed suffering and "return to long life and happiness" (143). It is the return to wholeness, a return home to the "Dark Mountain" which is a geographic and mythic location that Betonie identifies in this ceremony.¹¹ As the creation myth suggests throughout the novel, Laguna people have been born from the earth and their stories of self are inextricably linked with the land so that when Betonie speaks of returning to the mountain, he is calling for Tayo to return "home" to self and family.

The ceremony simultaneously connects Tayo to the land as well as to his traumatic memories. Nature acts as a symbolic metaphor as well as a real landscape that the individual walks in and through during recovery. In recovery from trauma, Tayo attempts to order the experiences into an internal narrative landscape.¹² Betonie sings that "he" is leaving the lightning behind, he is walking out of the storm and returning home through the doorways of light—rainbows of life made of different colored wooden hoops. The narrative continues to demonstrate the protagonist's a psychological struggle in physical and symbolic terms, for example when Tayo later re-connects to the land of the Southwest and finds the cattle, he also becomes more reconciled

with his traumatic memories and observes the link between mythic and modern narratives of trauma (war) and recovery (peace).

The walk back to “belonging” in the ceremony is a process of locating one’s self in relation to others as part of the process of recovery and renewal. Betonie and Tayo walk forward to a rebirth of self, described by nature imagery of rebirth and fecundity. The transition from death to life is described in terms of renewal brought about by rain, and this renewal is contrasted to the strike of lightning that anticipates rain. The rebirth of the self is contained within the rebirth of the day as we see the speaker embodied as dew in the early morning light, as well as light itself: “I have the dew/ a sunray falls from me... I leave a path of wildflowers/ A raindrop falls from me” (144). This line and the lines that follow shows that the speaker/listener walks in nature as part of nature, or as nature itself, and walks back toward belonging, happiness, and long life that is described in terms of “home.” These stanzas suggest that home and nature are the same idea so that a return home must contain a reconnection with the geographical setting. On a symbolic-mythic level, the speaker/listener embodies the mountain, wildflower, rain, and sun. In Silko’s essay, “Landscape, History, and Pueblo Imagination,” she reminds us that for Laguna Pueblo culture, an intimate relationship between human and nonhuman is a necessary process of identity formation:

The human beings depended upon the aid and charity of the animals. Only through interdependence could the human beings survive [...]. Life on the high arid plateau became viable when the human beings were able to imagine themselves as sisters and brothers to the badger, antelope, clay, yucca, sun. Not until they could find a viable relationship to the terrain, the landscape they found themselves in, could they emerge. (273)

This “viable relationship with the land” is a process Tayo performs during the sandpainting ceremony to encourage his journey back to health and happiness. Betonie’s chants allow Tayo to cultivate a relationship with a specific Southwestern geographical location that contains a cultural history that will help him understand the purpose and meaning of his traumatic past. Direct contact with the land aids the protagonist’s process of remembering and recovery due to the cultural histories that are imbedded in the land of resistance and survival that help define Laguna identity.

The relation between images within the ceremonial story, as well as the story’s relation to Tayo’s actions, is a crucial component to the performance of the ceremony. Human identity in this ceremony is imagined and enacted in relation to others, specifically nonhuman

animals and the land. The awareness of relationships between different objects in the sandpainting ceremony encourages Tayo to imagine and cultivate a relationship with his own emotional "landscape." As Valerie Harvey's research shows, the dry painting of the sands and placement of objects in the Navajo sandpainting ceremony depends on the specific placement and location of symbols in relation to one another (Harvey 237). The relationship between symbols unifies the whole picture and determines the healing power of the sandpainting ceremony, just as the contextualization of trauma through recital (storytelling) in the individual's ongoing life history characterizes the recovery process in Western psychology.

Moreover, motion and movement in the ceremony connotes health and recovery, in contrast to the immobile state of body and mind Tayo experiences after the war. The actor in the beginning of the stanzas is walking home, passing through hoops/rainbows, turning around, and walking through a doorway: "They spun him around sunwise/ and he recovered/ he stood up." In contrast to his passivity and silence in the veteran's hospital, the action of the sandpainting ceremony features Tayo as the actor who stands, walks, and "recovers." In a similar way that Western psychologists argue that recovery from trauma involves, in part, integrating traumatic memory into one's ongoing life history, so too the purpose of Betonie's healing ceremony is for Tayo to integrate the past, recover, and return "home." In discussing American Indian ceremonies, Paula Gunn Allen explains that integration is a central, general feature of ceremonies, even though specific purposes of ceremonies vary between tribes according to culturally specific contexts: "The purpose of a ceremony is to integrate: to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one" (Allen 62).¹³ The sandpainting ceremony orients Tayo in relation to cultural history, land, memory, and ritual-mythic time in order to reintegrate Tayo into the Laguna community and landscape. Tayo moves through hoops and across "doorways" that contain mythic symbolism of his relation to his memories in order to unite the disparate parts of the past. The action of memory and its integrative fluidity between time periods locates Tayo in the mythic story of healing at the end of the ceremony. Tayo's participation ceremonies, including hunting rituals for the mountain lion, and prayers with Ts'eh when gathering flowers and re-painting the pregnant she-elk at the base of the sandstone cliff, help Tayo access war memories, move across rigid boundaries of traumatic experiences, and move toward connecting disparate parts of his past.

After the sandpainting ceremony, Tayo looks at the landscape and realizes that “there were no boundaries; the world below and the sandpaintings inside became the same that night” (145). The boundaries or “doorways” between modern and mythic, past and present, blend into a unifying whole as Tayo sees the connections between his individual anguish and the larger cultural legacies of colonization, racial conflict, and WWII. As Tayo recovers he understands better the links between his childhood, the war, and his present life: “He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy” (246). Initially Tayo cannot find the words to describe his war experience because the words do not exist separately in either Laguna or Anglo communities. However, the language to represent his past is eventually found in the crossing between multiple cultures, as well as between multiple narratives and realities of the modern and mythic. The novel suggests that recovering an integrated sense of identity is possible after a traumatic event, thus refuting the popular notion today that trauma shatters identity. Betonie reminds Tayo that his recovery depends on a ceremony that incorporates medicine/stories from different cultures and worlds because healing rituals need to adjust to the modern world with its multiple and interdependent racial groups. Tayo’s recovery depends on a cross-cultural perspective of suffering and health: “His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything” (125-6). Betonie’s ceremony transcends specific cultural traditions by combining knowledge from different tribes and stories to attain the curative power to heal Tayo. The language to tell Tayo’s story is rooted in the interconnections between cultures and narrative modes, which embrace plurality and hybridity, rather than singularity and racial purity.

Perhaps most importantly, the protagonist’s process of recovery depends upon incorporating traumatic memories through a physical reconnection to ethnically specific landscapes and later retelling his war experience to community members. Cultivating a relationship to the land plays an essential role in Tayo’s healing because the sky, rain, mountain, and desert represent parts of the mythic reality and cultural landscape in which he must situate himself in order to tell his story. The external landscape helps bridge the gap of dissociation by allowing Tayo to incorporate traumatic memories through a relation to place, thus creating a meaningful internal “landscape” that promotes recovery. The coherence of identity and memory is achieved through a collaboration of cross-cultural worldviews that create new ways of comprehending and representing traumatic events. Reconnecting the

disparate parts of the past involves “unwinding” the “twisted tangle roots” of the traumatic story to the “source” of pain (69). In traveling to the “source,” Tayo reconnects to the Laguna land and community in order to resolve and integrate traumatic war memories, as well as cultural and tribal-mythic histories of evil. When Tayo tells his story to the Laguna elders in the kiva at sunrise at the end of the novel, he has linked the troubling parts of the past and placed himself into the tribal community’s “ongoing life history,” a history which acknowledges Native displacement, discrimination, resistance, and survival. In this regard, the novel’s trope of trauma and recovery repudiates colonization’s project of indigenous land seizure and attempted erasure of Native history because the novel demands remembrance and integration of the indigenous past within an articulation of modern Laguna identity.

NOTES

1. This is not to suggest that trauma is a transhistorical experience or that anyone who shares a similar cultural marker of race, gender, or class with the protagonist can claim an experience of trauma. Rather, trauma in fiction illuminates the specificity of suffering for the protagonist according to culturally contingent models and traditions created within the novel. The ‘traumatized’ protagonist here also performs as a representative cultural figure whose actions are frequently choreographed to evoke a historical conflict of a certain ethnic or sexual group.

2. For example, Paula Gunn Allen praises *Ceremony* as an enduring narrative that affirms the holistic pattern of Laguna life and the relationship with the (feminine) landscape through storytelling, but does not place the text within a critical discourse of trauma. See Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering The Feminine in American Indian Tradition*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). See also Edith Swann, “Laguna Symbolic Geography and Silko’s *Ceremony*,” *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1988): 229-49. Swann writes extensively on healing ceremonies and symbolic geography in terms of recovery rather than trauma.

3. See Robert Nelson, *Place and Vision*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). Nelson uses the term “disease of alienation” to describe what Tayo suffers from at the beginning of the novel: “the cure for the disease of alienation ... depends on [his] willingness and ability to enter (or re-enter) into identity with the landscape ...” (7). Nelson addresses the centrality of disease in *Ceremony* and extensively treats the relation between identity, landscape, and vision; however, he does not examine “disease” in terms of a trauma discourse that might place disease/alienation within a trauma-recovery paradigm.

4. Susan Scarberry alludes to *Ceremony*’s place in the “literature of illness,” (a term coined by Richard Ohmann regarding contemporary American novels by Bellow, Kesey, and Updike) by examining the healing qualities of a properly functioning memory. See Susan Scarberry, “Memory as Medicine,” *American*

Indian Quarterly 5, no. 1 (February 1979): 63-70. Perhaps G. Thomas Couser's article "Oppression and Repression," situates *Ceremony* closer to a discourse of trauma by addressing the role of collective memory in the process of repressing the painful past in *Ceremony*. Couser examines how memory functions as a mode of storytelling to connect Tayo to the land and community so that his healing depends on an "active re-creation" and recognition of his past (114). Couser's insightful contribution provides a general sense of psychological perspectives on memory; however, his analysis seems to rest on the edge of fully addressing formal and thematic characteristics of trauma and traumatic memory in the narrative. See Thomas G. Couser, "Oppression and Repression: Personal and Collective Memory in Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literature*, Eds. Amritjit Singh and Joseph Skerrett (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1996): 106-121.

5. This forced march evokes the Bataan Death March in 1942 in the Philippines led by the Japanese military during which a reported 10,000 American and 65,000 Filipino soldiers died along a 100 km. forced march to a prisoner of war camp.

6. Janet's theories on trauma and memory are often used today by literary critics who argue that silence in narrative representations of trauma or traumatic memory attests to the pre-linguistic imprint of trauma that makes it impossible to ever narrate traumatic experience since trauma is intrinsically a wordless event. Silko's novel refutes this popular claim because it shows that language and different narrative forms are attached to the experience of trauma. However, silence is employed to evoke the dissociation or numbness that sometimes accompanies the traumatized protagonist in moments of remembering. Therefore the novel indicates that silence in the narrative is not a sign of the epistemological void in traumatic experience. Instead, the protagonist's silence and inability to narrate his traumatic past is the author's rhetorical strategy to show emotional suffering, confusion, and, at times, dissociation, brought about by traumatic memories.

7. Silko's novel does not create a negative distinction between "fixed" or "fluid" memories as defined by Janet, because tribal and mythic stories are a type of "fixed" rememberings of a historical or mythical event that is retold throughout generations with multiple purposes, such as maintaining a native language or instilling a sense of cultural pride in ethnic heritage.

8. Kirmayer argues that "[r]egistration, rehearsal, and recall are governed by social contexts and cultural models for memories, narratives and life stories. Such cultural models influence what is viewed as salient, how it is interpreted and encoded at the time of registration and, most important for long-term memories that serve autobiographical functions, what is socially possible to speak of and what must remain hidden and unacknowledged" (191).

9. The novel contains a seemingly fragmented narrative with multi-genres and multiple plot lines concerning humans, mythic figures, and ecosystems. Halfway through the novel these fragments are interconnected in subtle ways that reflect Laguna-Navajo cosmology and the interpenetration of contemporary and mythic realities. The underlying interconnections between

the disparate parts of the novel can only be viewed once Tayo has achieved a sense of self-realization and begun the healing journey.

10. This scene also recalls Tayo's childhood of being brought up by a single mother in poverty. Tayo was often hungry as a child and spent many nights on the floors of bars searching for food and money (109).

11. For the Navajo, according to native scholar Valerie Harvey, mountains are associated with the traditional Navajo home, the Hogan. See Valerie Harvey, "Navajo Sandpainting in *Ceremony*," *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, Ed. Richard Fleck. (Philadelphia: Three Continents Press, 1993), 238.

12. Kirmayer describes the process of recovery in terms similar to Tayo's healing ceremony when he writes: "Reconstructions of traumatic memory involve the building up of a landscape of local coherence to better manage or contain it, to present it convincingly to others and, finally, to have done with it. But, as the metaphor of landscape suggests, the narrative reconstructions of memory are not so much managed as lived in—offering vistas that reveal and conceal" (182). Kirmayer argues that the relation between self and traumatic memory in terms of the relation to self and landscape because traumatic memory functions as a type of internal landscape that must be ordered and lived in for recovery to occur.

13. Allen argues that American Indian healing ceremonies encourage restoration and wholeness: "The natural state of existence is whole. Thus, healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration and wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole" (247).

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