MISSIONS FOR AWAKENING: HEALING CEREMONY AND STORYTELLING

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Studiul de faţă se concentrează în jurul protagonistului Tayo al romanului american *Ceremony*, personaj principal, care, aparţinând culturii Pueblo, va trece printr-un proces al recuperării spirituale sub forma unui ceremonial de restabilire a relaţiei cu natura şi spiritul acesteia. Aşa cum se va demonstra în acest studiu, scriitoarea americană Leslie Marmon Silko în romanul său depăşeşte însă sfera limitată a existenţei umane intrând în cadrul mai amplu al problematicii culturale, unde ceremonialul prin care trece Tayo oferă conştientizarea necesităţii naraţiunii prin legătura cu natura în cadrul culturii căreia îi aparţine, autoarea punând astfel accentul pe importanţa valorilor culturale ale băştinaşilor americani, pierdute şi, în acelaşi timp, recuperate prin prisma narării propriei istorii culturale.

Introduction

Silko's *Ceremony* is about Tayo, a half-breed Laguna veteran of World War II, who leaves hospital and returns to his aunt and her family. Before he joins the war, he has been treated as an outsider and a half-breed. Having lost his uncle and cousin in the war, Tayo loses balance and unity between his personality and his native land. Tayo's illness worsens including chronic nausea and vomiting, hallucinations, and weeping. Finally Tayo starts on an intense journey of inner healing and reconnection with his painful but rich past. As a part of the healing ceremony that begins before his birth according to his native traditions and his spiritual illness caused by the war, Tayo must close the gap between the "isolate human beings and lonely landscape." This gap is brought about through old witchery that has led not only to Tayo's illness but also to a drought-plagued land. Witchery has set a loveless, fearful, mechanistic force loose in the world: war. It signifies an ideal for bravery and glory. However, the attempt to find peace through war is the central paradox placed in the novel. Therefore, a ceremony is required, for Tayo, to escape from the effects of witchery that bring violence. Silko introduces the importance of storytelling with the healing aspect of ceremony. The aim of this article is to show how Tayo's ceremony--spiritual awakening--becomes his own story that gives the message that as a member of Native American society, Tayo learns to possess the power to keep the culture and people alive through stories. It further explores the issues of losing sense of belongingness and death to point out that for Native American people, cultural identity depends on keeping the stories alive. My focus will be on the process of healing during which Tayo finds peace through nature, animals, colors and a supernatural character named T'seh. From a closer perspective, I will examine Tayo's story as ceremony in the native American storytelling tradition as a means of leading a lost individual towards the right path he seeks for.

Moreover, exploring the interaction between Tayo and nature (represented by the regenerative spirit, Ts'eh) as a ceremony that contributes greatly to Tayo's healing and survival in his culture, the ceremony thus becomes a spiritual understanding of the world. In order to gain psychological wholeness, Tayo needs to struggle in this mystic journey during which he meets and interacts different characters. Some characters created by Silko are all parts of nature, which represent the notion that love is needed to reach a spiritual balance, e.g. T'seh and Night Swan who through their love lead Tayo into finding his interior awakening. Some others are associated with evil and witchcraft, such as Rocky, Emo and Leroy who lead him into witchery.

Storytelling Tradition

Just as the creative and regenerative aspect of nature, the act of story-telling is also significant because it recreates the narrative. Hence, it shapes the culture and the universe as well. From this sense, telling stories becomes a means of survival for the collective past and for the ongoing process of culture-transmission. Austgen writes, "Storytelling is more than entertainment or even the passing on of history and religious beliefs to the next generation; it is also a ceremony that acts as a link between the mythical deities and the people themselves, whose ritual life is based on the myths" [2]. The mode of storytelling presented in *Ceremony* is in the form of poems, both framing the main narrative (at the beginning and end) and interspersed throughout. These stories are in fact traditional Pueblo stories, known outside of the context of the novel. Storytelling reflects on the significance of the ceremonies in Pueblo culture as they endow the landscape with spiritual meaning.

At the very beginning of the novel, in the prefatory poem to *Ceremony*, the sacred connection between Thought Woman and author is expressed when Thought Woman is sitting in her room, and thinking a story: "I'm telling you the story she is thinking …" (1). Silko gives full authorial credit to Thought Woman, who stands for the "mythic prototype of the creative artist in the narrative" while she herself turns into traditional Pueblo storyteller who transmits stories [10, p.31]. Silko also argues for the fact that the transmission of traditional oral myths and stories is required for the cultural exchange between native and white American peoples.

Silko's reference to the stories in the Indian literary tradition is related with the Indian landscape. Thus, having a close relationship with nature becomes an issue that is dealt within the story-telling tradition of Pueblo culture. The story-teller's desire to perform the function of planting and growing his/her stories within the minds of his/her audience resembles the human ability to "merge with the land and thus with the regenerative spirit immanent in the land" [10, p.32].

Stories as Ceremony

American Indian literature involves ritual; ritual is ceremonial action that reaffirms people's connections with the land. For tribal people the land is "a multitude of entities who possess intelligence and personality. These entities are active participants with human beings in life processes…" [14, p.118]. Therefore, people and the land hold a balance within the structure of ritual. In this way, ritual becomes a means by which people, spirits, rocks, animals, and other beings enter into a dialogue with each other. One major part of American Indian literature is that it records echoes of that ongoing dialogue among people and the entities of land.

Furthermore, Silko at the very beginning explains the significance of stories and their relation to the ceremonies: "... in the belly of this story/ the rituals and the ceremony/ are still growing / So they try to destroy the stories / let the stories be confused or forgotten. / They would like that / They would be happy / Because we would be defenseless then (2). Silko also implies that if there are no stories, we won't survive. From this sense, the lack of stories resembles the way witchery functions. Silko depicts how witchery (referred by the pronoun 'they') tricks people into believing its magic in order to seek cure in their modern world. Betonie, the medicine man: "Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is. Otherwise we won't make it. We won't survive…" (126). In this way, witchery prevents man's survival and integration with his culture. After the white people's coming to the land of Native Americans, the traditions begin to change and finally fade away. In *Ceremony* Tayo becomes more and more conscious of the strength of the stories he has heard first from uncle Josiah and old Grandma and later from Ku'oosh and Betonie. He chooses old stories about frogs and flies, and refuses to take the interpretations the white people make of treating animals and insects. The war veterans from the World War tell their own stories about killing the enemies and their stories have nauseated Tayo. He has to confront their stories, which have been set by the witchery.

An example to how the effects of the witchery stand in contrast to the effects of stories is the tension between Tayo and Emo. In a ritual story told by Emo, an alcoholic Indian veteran, about two white women in a bar, witchery distorts this magic, which separates mankind from his natural relationship with landscape. Emo tells stories of the white women he slept with while he was in the army and accuses Tayo of thinking he is more superior than the others because he is half-white. Growing up, Tayo was used to being teased and slowly came to realize the complex interactions between white men and Indian women as well as that of Indian men and white women. (When he learns to stay non-destructive and is able to control his impulse to kill Emo, he will be able to achieve the capacity to love at the end of his ceremony).

Sense of Belongingness

The condition of mankind during the second world war reveals the fact that natives lose their identity and sense of belongingness for the sake of material and social advantages. This also means that the native American people are inclined to assimilate into the white American societry by joining the second world war. When the war broke out, many young native men saw enlisting as an opportunity to gain entrance into mainstream white society. "Here they were, trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the War" (43).

Raised on the reservation and never having known his white father, Tayo is clearly Native American by culture. Since he is partly Native American, he experiences the same racism as his friends do when he is in white society. Emo and his other childhood friends, however, have always noticed the difference. The color

of his eyes also creates the physical difference. Although Tayo in no way feels that he is white, he does feel a sense of separation from his community, which he is desperate to overcome. The metaphor for belonging to a community signifies belonging to a family. However, Tayo experiences a feeling of being lost and urgently needs the sense of belongingness to his roots. He has ambiguous feelings: "…he didn't like the way his heart pounded, because it kept him from hearing, but his head was clear and his legs were solid. Fear made him remember important things…he knew why he had felt weak and sick… and why he doubted ceremony: this was their place and he was vulnerable" (243). If Tayo cannot learn to love and rely on the love he gets from this land, he will inevitably have reactions. His negative attitude towards rain is both a symbol of losing sense of belongingness and the destruction of traditions in native American life:

Jungle rain had no beginning or end; ... When Tayo prayed on the long muddy road to the prison camp, it was for dry air, dry as a hundred years squeezed out of yellow sand, air to dry out the oozing wounds of Rocky's leg, to let the torn flesh and broken bones breathe. . Tayo hated this unending rain. ... The sound of the rain got louder, pounding on the leaves, splashing into the ruts; it splattered on his head, and the sound echoed inside his skull. …He damned the rain. (11)

Moreover, the death of his cousin Rocky and his uncle is a part of a chain of incidents that create a trauma for Tayo. This death is the symbolic basis of Tayo's connection with his past, present and future. Tayo thinks rain kills his cousin, and this finally causes the drought at Laguna. (When Tayo accepts the fact that he is not responsible of the death of his cousin, there is hope for him because his ceremony becomes the condition for personal and cultural reparation.)

Death as a Story

Death, according to Freudian theory, is central to life. All human beings share the same destiny. Freud saw it as a motive through which all desires were expressed. Death marks our separation from others and emerges as a symptom of our autonomy. Death is a common, specific and global site of trauma and can become a site of understanding, the common human thread in the struggle against violence. However death is inevitable at war during which people forget how to love their fellows, but seek for their own individual glory and gain. What is contradictory is that the step towards stopping violence means to realize cultural gaps and interaction of cultures through death. The fact that violence cannot be prevented with violence is referred by Silko who represents one aspect of death--like a story--that connects people: "for all the living things; united by the circle of death that devoured people in cities" (246). From another sense, death becomes a metaphor of story told and retold by Silko to contribute to the central idea of the novel—the healing ceremony of Tayo.

During Tayo's ceremony, Silko points out the issue of the insignificance of war through Native American poetry—that contains a story of death--as well: "They will poison the water/ they will spin the water away/ and there will be drought/ the people will starve...Corpses for us/ Blood for us/Killing killing…They will bring terrible diseases/ the people have never known./ Entire tribes will die out/covered with festered sores/ shitting blood/ vomiting blood..." (136-7).

The picture of chaos drawn here implies how both Native Americans and the Japanese were victims of World War II. It shows, ironically, in a way, the interconnectedness of people and cultures. This political criticism in the novel further demonstrates both how Native Americans are discriminated by the white Americans and are drafted by the same people to fight for them during the second world war. Moreover, the hostility of the white American society towards the natural environment is apparent in these lines. The issue of the destruction of the landscape is manifested by the atomic bomb and uranium mining built on the reservetions of the Natives. This is metaphorically the rape of the land by the white military authorities in order to produce weapons of mass destruction. Nature is described as something that retaliates for the wrongdoings of mankind. Fear is everywhere. Because of drought there will be chaos. Silko also depicts drought as a means through which nature turns its creative powers against people who produce weapons of mass destruction: "droughts happen when people forget and misbehave…" (46). Silko's criticism is also implied through the moment when Tayo realizes that his enemies *who misbehave* are not the Japanese but the ones formed as symbols of evil by his own people. This process of dehumanization is created by his own nation. Dehumanization is actually a process of developing an "enemy image" of the opponent. During the course of this conflict, feelings of anger, fear, and distrust shape the way that the parties perceive each other. This is referred by an incident during which all Japanese were "lined up in front of a cave with their hands on their heads"; (7) this is not a battle but a massacre. Tayo cannot pull the trigger and obey the order because he

thinks one of them is his uncle Josiah. The symbol of bloody mud in this scene represents the execution of the unarmed Japanese soldiers by the American soldiers.

Betonie ironically reminds Tayo the meaning of brotherhood "thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers…you saw the witchery ranging as wild as this world" (124). Tayo instinctively knows it is wrong to kill the Japanese captives because he realizes his connectedness to his so-called enemy (Japanese are of Asian origin, as Navajo, Laguna and other Indians are culturally and ethnically related to). Tayo knows death, fear and pain connect him to Japanese which become their common story. Croisy states: "Silko emphasizes the close relationship between life and death and the role of death as a site of knowledge (never a site of denial) from which to critique illusions of totality, immortality, and autonomy certain cultures or nations see as implicit to their existence" [5, p.107].

Attempt to Find Peace in Stories

There is a struggle to find a way towards balance in life. When human being are unable to solve their traumas, they need to seek for restoration–reparation. Tayo needs to reject white civilization, through his ceremony, for a deeper understanding of a world without boundaries, without private propery, without divisions in family lineages.

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 had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time (246).

Silko offers the idea that "language *is* story at Laguna," she states in "*Language and Literature from a Pueblo Perspective*," "many words have stories which make them. So when one is telling a story, and one is using words to tell the story, each word that one is speaking has a story of its own too." [6, p.56]. In addition, stories demonstrate some limitations indicating what will happen if one breaks traditions. For a people without written recordings, history means stories. Stories encode the knowledge of generations about how the world and human beings exist as they are. Stories teach what one must know in order to belong, to have health and prosperity, to survive troubles and raise one's children. Stories are knowledge and knowledge means power over language. Silko reveals this perspective in *Ceremony:* "They are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off / illness and death. / You don't have anything / if you don't have the stories "(2). Everywhere Tayo looks, "he sees a world made of stories" as old Grandma called them long time ago. It is a lively world "always changing and moving; and if you know where to look, you could see it, sometimes almost imperceptible, like the motion of the stars across the sky" (95). The pattern of stories is like the universe that binds all living things together. The stories in *Ceremony* are sacred, being part of a cultural group indicating the behaviour of that group and the self within that group; and secular/religious thus historical. They have the power to create, recreate and destroy. They tell things without limits; they explain things about humanity -- that they give birth to it again at every telling.

The Relationship with the Spirit Ts'eh

Just as the effect of stories on people, Tayo's interaction with one character who leads him towards spiritual rebirth is significant. The woman who can save Tayo from the influence of the witchery and bring him into identity with the land is Ts'eh.

Ts'eh is responsible for the successful achievement of Tayo's ceremony. Tayo's comes together with Ts'eh, a beautiful, mysterious woman in the mountains beyond the Pueblo land. Ts'eh is a nickname for Tsepi'na. She says she is a Montano, and a member of a "very close family." She explains her indentity and that lineage, clan and family name are of no importance. She is a mountain spirit whose sexuality extends far beyond the act of intercourse: she is a healer, a nurturer, a plotter, a planter and she plans for the good of people and plants and animals. In a sense, she is the mother-earth who spreads her black storm-pattern blanket when the snow falls. She teaches Tayo to respond nature and the colors in it so that he learns to plant seeds, to nurture and love the land and recognize the depth of its love. She represents the supernatural aspects of earth. She, in a way, chooses him as a messenger in this mystic journey. T'seh is also a spirit with whom Tayo makes love. "He dreamed he made love with her there. He felf the warm sand on his toes and knees; he felt her body, and it was as warm as the sand, and he couldn't feel where her body ended and where the sand began" (222). From this sense, she can be considered as an extension of the soul of the Creation according to the Native American belief. Behavior and belief among the pueblo Indians unify human with the divine, cul-

ture with nature, and thought with reality--they become a single, comprehensive, complex and closely conneceted network. This is a kind of love between man and nature, a physical union which is turning into a spiritual union. T'seh is associated with natural objects: "...a small green leapy frog wiggled out of the weeds ahead of him and splashed into the pool. He felt shaky inside: what if there were no traces of her, no lines of sand pressed by her body, no delicate track of her blue shawl trailing into the weeds?" (222). Tayo has this ambivalent feeling between dream and reality. He remembers everything he lived with this spirit of the mountains as if in a dream; later realizing her sitting on the edge of a sandy bank beside a moonflower plant.

The Relationship with Nature

A spiritual understanding is gained not only with the help of T'seh but also by means of colors and animals. Colors are associated with nature and women that provide vitality and creativity. Blue color identifies women as possessing mythic powers. It is abundantly present everywhere in nature. Ts'eh's blue color is "joined by the blue of the sky, the clouds, the flowers, the stones and the rain" [9, p.140]. Yellow is another color of nature. Ts'eh wears "a yellow skirt" and has a "light brown skin." At another encountering with Ts'eh, Tayo sees her wearing a blue shawl around her shoulders. At the beginning of his ceremony, Tayo cannot endure animals in nature. The flies in the jungle makes him furious; he curses "their sticky feet and wet mouths" (102). Tayo learns to respond nature and become a part of it. When he touches the sand on which "a light yellow snake" is traveling, and establishes a kind of understanding for the motion in nature, he belongs to this lively world (221). After making love to Ts'eh, Tayo feels more akin to nature. "Deeply in love with Ts'eh and surrounded by the color yellow… the color for women, Tayo becomes conscious of the female side of his own nature and accepts and integrates feminine behavior into his life" [9, p.143]. His vision towards nature gains a different angle: "He found flowers that had no bees, and gathered yellow pollen gently… he imitated the gentleness of bees as they brushed their sticky-haired feet and bellies softly against the flowers" (220). Thus, Tayo knows how to see nature and understands that ritual means holding intercourse with the land. In other words, he learns to respect and respond the land with affection and care.

Another example is a message carried through animals and natural things that proves the existence of the soul of the Creation: "It was a yellow snake, covered with bright copper spots, like the wild flowers pulled loose and traveling... as far as he could see, in all directions, the world was alive. He could feel the motion pushing out of the damp earth into the sunshine—the yellow spotted snake the first to emerge, carrying this message on his back to the people" (221). In the novel, a typical example to this kind of message is Tayo's prayer. At first, he does not know the proper Laguna way to pray for rain. He, then, learns to form a dialogue with the land, imagining with his heart the right rituals and simply asks for rain. This is another expression that stands in contrast with Tayo's former curse for rain. Four days after he makes this spiritual expression, heavy rains pour down upon the earth. Then, he just sits and watches the pool; what he sees suggests the keenness of his sight and insight, the receptivity of his eye: "…the spider came out at first. She drank from the edge of the pool, careful to keep the delicate eggs sacs on her abdomen out of the water" (94). Tayo's ambiguous feeling about rain make him also realize that the land is alive and beautiful.

Ts'eh also awakens his knowledge that the land is not merely alive but endowed with personality and intelligence. In a sense, the land is capable of evoking and giving back a love that is infinitely personal. Thus, when he also perceives that nature represents a process of nurturing, creativity and vitality for the people of tribes, he is nearing towards the spiritual awakening-- his healing ceremony. At this moment of his awakening, Tayo observes the healing power of many plants and traditional ceremonies of ritual offering. Ts'eh bundles up her blue silk shawl with her damp laundry and seedlings and balances it atop her head. Her function is to help Tayo remember traditions that have been forgotten. She collects, and transplants wild flowers and herbs, teaching Tayo some of her works. When she leaves Tayo, she charges him to help carry on her work. After he resists his temptation to perpetuate witchery, Tayo turns his thoughts to her work: "He would go back there now, where she had shown him the plant. He would gather the seeds for her and plant them with care…" (254). The positive effect of plants on human soul is a well-known belief. Souls live in their bodies, like we do inside ours. It is easy to communicate with trees on the emotional and even on the mental level. They get strongly "attached" to people, who are capable of understanding them. When someone comes to see them – these plants meet them with joy. Tayo has planted some seeds into the land; with his own effort he grows something from himself which will be temporary. Then he dreams about being with his Grandma

and cousin Rocky and going home. It has never been easy for him to accept the realities of war. In the depths of his soul, he is aware that he can keep his personal integrity by means of growing plants.

The Metaphor of Web

Ceremony describes the dismantling of a culture through the portrayal of the protagonist who is searching for his personal integrity. The stories are like the strands of a spider web that is sewn by the Native American people. Silko takes us along on Tayo's journey to find himself. The responsilibity of being human is sometimes unbearable for Tayo because of the big hollow inside him. Tayo learns that everything, including his identity, is found in the telling and receiving of stories; thus the geometric beauty of the web is complete. Tayo's spiritual awakening and healing experience reveals a positive result—Tayo's fitting into the mosaic of American history. Ruiz elaborates on this notion in her essay: "After facing years of the destruction of their family, identity, group and ultimatley their self, the Native Americans, and especially Tayo, attempt to take control of their identity by claiming what is theirs through their traditional stories" (qtd. in Reck 10).

From another perspective, Silko's using the entangled web metaphor represents the disordered nature of the world. The spider web, which is fragile, reflects the vulnerability of human beings in the face of war and violence. The Thought woman (spider) is one of the most important figures in Native American mythology. The Thought Woman, as the storyteller (weaving her web in perfect design) in *Ceremony*, also contributes to a process that makes Native American people survive by telling the stories of their lives and their collective past. Idei asserts: "The spider web is a symbol of interrelatedness of all the things in Mother Earth's creation for its spiral structure with a center where everything converges" [5, p.67].

Like the universal creative aspects of oral stories, Ts'eh (the regenerative spirit) also provides a sort of creativity and life-restoring power. What Silko suggests at the end of the novel is that the stories—like the story of Tayo and Ts'eh—are necessary for the continuation of tribal mythology. "As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together" Ts'eh tells to Tayo, as the mouthpiece of Silko. Therefore, the storytelling becomes once more important since it recreates the traditions in a culture and gives them vitality as well.

Conclusion

The terror of dreaming on Tayo's bed is gone now; the trauma is away. Through the spiritual awakening with the help of T'seh and nature, Tayo experiences a sort of mystic union. This is a kind of experience during which he realizes the essence of life, the relationship between dreams and reality. Tayo disregards his post-war trauma and gains a new world view which shows him the fact that the essence of life is based on love. Through his love of nature he achieves a sort of rebirth.

A ceremony is required for Tayo's endurance and survival in culture as much as oral stories are needed for the survival of a culture. The close link between storytelling and ceremony of Tayo demonstrates the significance of his sense of belongingness to his culture. In other words, the healing ceremony of Tayo in nature reflects the changes in Pueblo traditions and become means for affirming these changes whereas the oral stories are necessary for the changes and the transmission of these changes in that culture. Because he learns to love the beauties of nature and comprehend the vitality of the pattern of storytelling, Tayo becomes a part of the tradition of storytelling. "All that remains is for Tayo to make his way back to the Pueblo and report his story to the people, thus completing the process of transforming the life he has recovered from the landscape into renewed cultural energy" [10, p.37]. Tayo realizes his love of nature in the similarity between plants and stories: "The plants would grow there like the story, strong and translucent as the stars… he dreamed with his eyes open…the ear for the story and the eye for the pattern were theirs; the feeling was theirs: we came out of this land and we are hers" (255). In *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing*, Silko emphasizes the importance of stories to the Laguna Pueblo culture. She writes that "the stories are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together. 'Don't go away don't isolate yourself because we've all had these kinds of experiences'. This separation not only endangers the group but the individual as well-one does not recover by oneself" [8, p.86].

Consequently, the weak and fragile Tayo, unable to prevent the flood of memories that rush into his mind with every turn, at the beginning, comes to understand by the close of the novel that it is his memory that will heal him by helping him gain access to the knowledge and understanding that resides in his memory. Tayo must retain those memories in which his history and the history of his people are placed. It is the function of human memory that has the ability to heal–to gain power to have a say and a place in the white

American history. From this sense, Tayo's spiritual awakening becomes his own story that gives the message: Each member of the culture is a storyteller and possesses the power to keep the culture and people alive through his/her stories. Silko comments on this power in her essay *A Pueblo Indian Perspective*: "...the storytelling always included the audience and the listeners, and, in fact, is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners. This kind of shared experience grows out of a strong community base. The storytelling goes on and continues from generation to generation" [6, p.57].

Through his relationship with nature and the spitirt T'seh, Tayo attains strength for integration with his culture–a kind of cultural energy. Tayo reaches his "reintegration back to identity on the personal, cultural, and mythic level" and is aware of the restoration of the stories [9, p.149]. Thu, cultural identity depends on keeping the stories alive, as Silko relates, "the stories grow out of this land as much as we see ourselves as having emerged from the land…" [13, p.24].

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