

## Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: Tayo's Healing Quest

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**Abstract**

Leslie Marmon Silko is one of the most prodigious Native American writers of the 1970s. She is distinguished for her engagement with folklore traditions, religious inspirations, and quest narratives. In her novel, *Ceremony* (1977), Silko introduces a man on a journey that is full of hardships and frustrations. Accordingly, the present paper explores Tayo's journey through which he quests for healing his psychological distress and physical illness caused by the atrocities of World War II. The paper also investigates different kinds of journeys the protagonist, as a war veteran, takes up and the various motives behind them. Finally, the paper tries to answer questions such as "What is the significance of the people the protagonist meets during his healing quest? Is he healed physically and psychologically at the end of the novel? How? Why? How do all healing processes contribute to affirming his identity and restoring his humanity?"

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The title of *Ceremony* is so significant that Silko herself clarifies it in her "Preface" to the novel, stating that it "refers to the healing ceremonies based on the ancient stories of the Diné and Pueblo people" (Silko, 2006, p. 14). Silko further explains the term, showing that "ceremony" refers "to certain religious activities [...] which Navajos [Native American people of Southwestern America] participate to cure, healing, medicinal sorts of activities." The role of ceremonies based on traditions in healing ill people is emphasized because they are treated as medicine rather than mere words (Seyersted, 1978, p.34). Being a part of Laguna Pueblo—a tribe of Native Americans in New Mexico, America—Silko highly appreciates the role of ceremonies in healing people. Talking about writing her novel, Silko recalls memories of living there and states how important storytelling as a healing means for her and others is. She says in an interview:

The two years I lived and taught for Diné College were important to understanding the healing ceremony's relationship to storytelling. I was conscious of constructing the novel [...] to celebrate storytelling with the spoken as well as the written word. I indulged myself with the old-time stories because they evoked a feeling of comfort I remembered from my childhood at Laguna (Silko, 2006, p.14).

Silko focuses on the motives behind celebrating old stories especially those of her native people. Besides, she shows that the result of listening to these stories is nothing but a feeling of comfort and healing. This is exactly what Tayo should do to be healed.

In an interview with Dexter Fisher, Silko mentions that the writing of *Ceremony* is one of the reasons behind her healing from "margarine headaches" and "horrible nausea" she has

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been suffering constantly. Like Tayo, Silko “was very sick.” So, she affirms that “[w]riting a novel was a ceremony for me to stay sane.” She then adds, “one thing that was keeping me going at all was writing. And as Tayo got better, I felt better” (24). Writing the novel makes Silko feel comfortable, nostalgic, and sane. *Ceremony* is about Tayo, a war veteran, who returns from the Pacific war suffering from “battle fatigue,” a post-traumatic stress disorder, that affects soldiers who continue experiencing it for a long time. Tayo, who was shocked by the horrible sight of a war, stays in a veterans’ hospital in Los Angeles, then journeys back to New Mexico, their hometown. Like soldiers who return home, he finds that going home is hard for neither Tayo nor his home is the same:

In Tayo’s homeland a mine has been dug in a sacred area, a violation of nature that disturbs him deeply, evils have been unleashed, witches have increased in power, and the indigenous people are more vulnerable than ever to spiritual and physical defilement (McMurtry, 2006, 19).

Tayo, like the wisest of his people, turns for protection to the tribe’s saving stories. Such stories, full of beauty, help people not only recover their balance and order but also add accuracy and depth to the whole plot.

The novel begins with a ceremony that sets the general framework of its journey in which Tayo is looking for healing: stories that compromise much of the healing process are meant for entertainment and for defying death and illness. In this respect, the opening ceremony says:

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.

You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories (C 20)<sup>1</sup>.

In this ceremony, Silko accentuates how goodness is incarnated in stories in opposition to evil which is represented by alcoholism. Through alcoholism, these healing stories will be confused or even forgotten.

The indication to belly and rubbing it, in the rest of the ceremony, proves that these stories are similar to food or medicine which should have been taken to be healed. Rubbing one’s belly stands for enjoying after digestion. However, the ceremony continues:

Their evil is mighty but it can’t stand up to our stories. 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.

He rubbed his belly.  
I keep them here  
[he said]

Here, put your hand on it (C 20).

This ceremony is a reminder of having a baby that a mother feels by touching the belly to check whether it is alive or not. It is an indication that if one wants to be alive again then s/he has stories as ceremonies done and performed:

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<sup>1</sup>Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. Penguin, 2006. All subsequent quotations cited in the paper are from this edition and referred to as (C) and the page number(s).

See, it is moving.  
There is life here  
for the people.  
And in the belly of this story the rituals and the ceremony are still  
growing.  
What She Said:  
The only cure  
I know  
is a good ceremony,  
that's what she said (C 20).

Accordingly, for people like Tayo, psychologically stressed, physically fatigued, and culturally divided, "the only cure is a good ceremony" (C 20). Silko shows that Tayo's mind is preoccupied with memories of war, his uncle, Josiah, and his grandmother's wicker sewing basket. They all lead to his current tension:

[T]he tension of little threads being pulled and 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 (C 23).

Symbolically speaking, Tayo's association with the past is just like someone who is running behind falling rolling threads to collect them. They move down quickly in all directions.

To collect these threads, Tayo should work hard and sweat. Sweating stands for either the impact of medicine after healing or the hard work of achieving the goal of collecting memories together. Being in the past, in the tradition of his people, "Tayo had to sweat through those nights when thoughts became entangled; he had to sweat to think of something that wasn't unravelled or tied in knots to the past" (C 23). Silko sets her protagonist, Tayo, on a three-stage journey that represents his healing quest. He moves from home to war because of the alienation he feels. He then goes back from war to home because of his dis-ease and disease. Tayo's healing is represented by his moving from home to humanity, identity, and sublimity. Intentionally, Silko does not follow the regular pattern of her protagonist's journey. She begins her novel with the second stage, went back to the first, and then moves to the last one. However, what follows is a regular pattern.

## 2. TAYO'S ALIENATION

Tayo is motivated by multiple social and psychological reasons to leave home and to be enlisted in the war. At the age of four, Tayo was abandoned and alienated by his mother so he was deprived of her affection, love, and care. In this sense, the narrator in *Ceremony* describes the whole situation meticulously:

He [Tayo] was four years old the night his mother left him there [...] He clung to her because when she left him, he knew she would be gone for a long time. She kissed him on the forehead with whiskey breath, and then pushed him gently into Josiah's arms as she backed out the door (C 69).

This description reveals how Tayo is attached to his mother as any other four-year-old boy. But she was so indifferent to his inclinations and left him with a cold-blooded demeanor. The reasons behind that were so clear that she kissed him with an alcohol smell that covered his forehead. This is a foreshadowing incident of his later addiction to alcohol.

Dhyani Ywahoo, a medicine woman and a Cherokee healer, reinforces the idea of being left alone. It "causes one to be ill [...] One person can become lonely, feeling emotionally deprived." If that person is neglected, "then the anxiety, through the pulsing of the earth and the break in the continuity of family, nation, and clan consciousness, can bring about a famine

or a drought [...] In the Indian mind, everything is related (Perrone, 2012, 61-62). Losing one's mother means missing everything: the sense of family, land, and country. Mythologically, it is related to famine and drought.

What makes things worse is Auntie's insulting attitude to Tayo. His auntie always humiliates him as a "half-breed" and as the cause of family scandal because of his mother's history. She also distinguishes between him and her son, Rocky: "Auntie had always been careful that Rocky didn't call Tayo "brother," and when other people mistakenly called them brothers, she was quick to correct the error" (C 69). Full of racial prejudice, Auntie even says an aching statement: "They're not brothers" "that's Laura's boy. You know the one." In this sense, the narrator comments on the psychological breach made by Tayo's Auntie:

She had a way of saying it, a tone of voice which bitterly told the story, and the disgrace she and the family had suffered. The things Laura had done weren't easily forgotten by the people, but she could maintain a distance between Rocky, who was her pride, and this other, unwanted child. If nobody else ever knew about this distance, she and Tayo did (C 69).

Such discrimination hurts Tayo deeply that he is obliged to think about his origin, identity, and social status. Had Auntie not treated him that way, Tayo would not question his identity and would be living happily.

Moreover, Tayo's alienation and desperation seeds have been watered by Emo, one of his school friends. Like Auntie, Emo also mistreats Tayo at school by focusing on his mixed heritage: "Emo had hated him since the time they had been in grade school together, and the only reason for this hate was that Tayo was part white" (C 62). Whether at home or school, Tayo is humiliated because of his shaken cultural position and lost identity. Tayo's problem is that he does not have fixed belongingness; he cannot associate himself culturally with any group. This lack of belonging gives him a sense of alienation, estrangement, and loss. Relieved from the haunting sense of estrangement, Tayo leaves home for his salvation.

### **3. TAYO'S DIS-EASE AND DISEASE**

Tayo achieves nothing but lack and trauma throughout the most adverse and difficult stage in his quest. The further he moves, the more complicated his psychological problem becomes. During the early days of the war, he enjoys the charming flavour of life: drinking with his friends and mixing up with the ladies. He describes his new status quo, saying:

You know Los Angeles was the biggest city I ever saw. All those streets and tall buildings. Lights at night everywhere [...] They never asked me if I was Indian; sold me as much beer as I could drink [...] Double starch in my uniform and my boot shining so good. I mean those white women fought over me (C 50).

Ironically, these good times are illusionary and temporary for Tayo who later realizes that his uniform, not himself, is what people praise. Likewise, Tayo affirms, "white women never looked at me until I put on that uniform." As the war ends, he loses everything: "The war was over, the uniform was gone" (C 50, 51).

The war separates Tayo from his uncle Josiah and cousin Rocky. They have been killed, and this scene often haunts him. Tayo, could not believe that the corpse belongs to a Japanese but Josiah, his uncle, feels homesick on top of being fatigued. "They called it battle fatigue," the narrator asserts, "and they said hallucinations were common with malarial fever" (C 24). His malarial fever probably leads to hallucinations. Tayo is the greatest sufferer whose case is the most complicated because he is conscious "that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away when the war was over" (C 51). In other

words, he is, unlike them, aware of his mixed-blood identity. Ironically, war, which is supposed to save Tayo from the discrimination he had earlier, further alienates him from his Pueblo people, his land, and traditional customs. Therefore, he becomes ill when his desires remain unfulfilled, and join the army hospital in Los Angeles. The cause of Tayo's illness is that he feels profoundly lost. He lies there "with the feeling that there was no place for him; he would find no place in that house where the silence and emptiness echoed the loss" (C 43).

In her essay "Healing the Planet/Healing Ourselves," Deena Metzger (1991) clearly warns that the impact of war is something universal and people not only suffer from physical but also psychological and cultural symptoms: "We are suffering from global fatigue and despair, from cultural self-loathing, from national suicides, all of which leads to serious increases in attacks against life itself" (199). Different kinds of wars caused, still cause, and will cause cultural, psychological, social, national, and global diseases in communities that suffer from self-loathing. Tayo's problem is a personal desire of getting unfulfilled things and a form of the collective desire of natives who want to be liberated from the whites' authority. The white life and culture which Tayo witnessed and experienced during the war caused him a greater dilemma. It was Josiah who has given Tayo a vision to look at nature: "This is where we come from, see. This land, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going." Tayo reacts as a part of his healing and tries "to find some clouds on the western horizon. He wished then they had taught him more about the clouds and the sky, about the way the priests called the storm clouds to bring the rain" (C 54, 56). Looking at the clouds, Tayo expects rain which will water his psychological draught.

The doctors at the veteran's hospital in Los Angeles fail to cure Tayo's illness because the white doctors have not understood the root cause of the illness. They are mistaken to term his illness as "battle fatigue." It is a great irony that those who are the cause of his illness are engaged in curing him. Tayo, who realizes that his cure is not possible, in the world of whites, moves forward to assert his identity which can be located in the world of the native. To do so, the only thing he has to do is to perform a ceremony that is new concerning the traditional one. The invalidity of the traditional ceremony is ascribed to the whites' arrival which polluted the environment. By linking Tayo's disease to a certain ceremony, Silko suggests that people should have a look at their diseases about the global sickness that appears to be overtaking the planet. For instance, pollution, poisons, wars, and diseases should be taken into consideration. "One aspect of this personal/global dis-ease" is "the concept of being culturally ill." One of the significant notions is that "an individual illness is dialectically tied to the health of the community and the earth" (Wilentz, 2000, 83). Yet, it is complex for him in the present to be free from the psychological burden of the whites and of the half-breed consciousness haunting him.

In "Healing the Witchery: Medicine in Silko's Ceremony," St. Andrews (1988) notes: "In Amerindian thought, illness is a manifestation of imbalance.... One isolated part cannot be healed; the whole must be healed" (87; 88). Consequently, illness, which is an indication of imbalance, cannot be healed separately. Tayo, in this case, is stuck in the middle: he can neither forget his engagement with whites' witchery nor agree to take Auntie's insulting manner. Therefore, Tayo's position becomes more complicated for he is now completely frustrated and traumatized journeying home.

#### **4. TAYO'S HEALING**

Mentally crippled and traumatized, Tayo comes back home fully determined to establish his identity in his native culture. Even though Auntie's behaviour does not change, Tayo gets warm love from his grandma who compensates for what has humiliated him: the pathetic condition caused by his psychological illness and Auntie's ill-treatment. With the help of his grandma, he proceeds on his journey and extends it to meet two native medicine men



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one after the other. Ku'oosh, the first healer, helps Tayo to improve his condition but he cannot cure him completely. Silko comments that "Tayo's healing is connected to the faith which this old medicine man [Ku'oosh] had, a faith which went back to things far in the past" (Seyersted, 1978, 35).

Tayo expects to meet hardships and humiliations. So far, his compass is correctly directed this time. Symbolically speaking, in comparison with his invisibility in the veterans' hospital, due to the doctors' denial of his identity, he is in the process of being visible again. There, his identity and consciousness are described as "white smoke." In other words, the doctors saw him but did not realize "it was hollow inside." Commenting upon Tayo's condition, one day a doctor said: "He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound" (C 29). After Josiah's death, Grandma is the only person left at home to love Tayo tenderly. She is the only one who understands his real problems, so she wishes to call an Indian medicine man. She said, "Those white doctors have not helped you at all. May be we had better send for someone else" (C 44). She does not care what other people comment about Tayo: "He's my grandson. If I send for old Ku'oosh, he'll come. Let them talk if they went. Why do you care what they want? Why do you care what they say? Let them talk. By planting time, they'll forget (C 44). Thus, regardless of what other people say, the old grandma calls for Ku'oosh, a traditional Laguna healer. At home, the Laguna medicine man, Ku'oosh is certain of one thing Tayo's healing is "important to all of us. Not only for your sake but for this fragile world" (C 46).

Accordingly, he advises him to meet another medicine man named Betonie who, in turn, cures Tayo completely by helping him to perform a certain ceremony. Betonie suggests that Tayo meet Night Swan and Ts'eh, recovers Josiah's cattle, and finally comes to village Kiva safely escaping the Jackpile mine. By performing the ceremony as suggested by Betonie, Tayo recuperates his lost cultural identity in his native culture. The ceremony which includes different stages must fulfil Tayo's needs to reach that balance. Betonie proves to be of great help to Tayo because both of them are mixed-blood Indians disinherited by the whites. Betonie's story reveals to Tayo that he is not the only one to suffer the humiliation of being a half-breed disinherited Indian. What Tayo learns from Betonie's story is what Silko implies in her seminal essay "Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination":

You are never the first to suffer a grave loss or profound humiliation. You are never the first, and you will understand probably not be the last to commit or be victimized by a repugnant act [...] Other older or more experienced than you who suffered similar losses (892- 93).

Betonie's story gives Tayo hope and the spirit to carry on his journey. His story heals Tayo by making him convinced that he is not the only person to suffer the loss of identity, others suffer too.

Betonie, who is a clever healer easily understands that Tayo's cure requires a new ceremony that takes such a post-war phenomenon directly into account. Therefore, he sets Tayo on a real quest guiding him through his vision. Betonie is certain that his ceremonies are effective in Tayo's cure because they have been modified from time to time:

The ceremonies [that] 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 (C 120).

People mistrust ceremonies, but the shift keeps them strong. In this sense, George Liptsitz (1989) argues that the ceremonies must change for the people to survive and that the culture must not become stagnant:

In addition, even the Indian ‘ceremonies’ [Tayo] tries have lost much of their power because they have not been changed to fit new circumstances. Only a medicine man outside his own tribe can lead him to the truth, a truth which involves a critical stance toward both Indian myth and Anglo-European history (221).

At the end of the Betonie-Tayo interaction, Tayo’s healing has begun as a result of Betonie’s Ceremony, a poem that emphasizes that

The dry skin was still stuck on his body. But the effects of the witchery of the evil thing began to leave his body. The effects of the witchery of the evil thing in his surroundings began to run away. It had gone to a great distance. It had gone below the north (C 141).

Silko employs such a poem to refer to Tayo’s dry skin and spiritless body which cannot get rid of the witchery of evil unless there will be a reconciliation that includes himself with land and spirits. Therefore, “the knowledge that words evoke the thing meant and that words can both heal and hurt is integral to the worldview of Native American and Amerindian societies through the Americas” (Wilentz, 2000, 84).

For the Laguna Pueblo people, the land is the fundamental feminine entity that one cannot live without because s/he will feel estranged from a mother. During the war, Tayo who forgets the Laguna stories and prays for the rain away proves that he is ignoring the native landscape and the tribal traditions. Cursing the rain is contrary to Josiah’s teaching about being and becoming one with the land. Consequently, Tayo has to find harmony between the people and the land newly. The suffering of people and land from drought indicates that the relationship between them is imbalanced. What is desperately needed is a ‘Cosmic Ceremony’ premeditated to bring people, like Tayo, back into harmony with the land and reconciliation with the spirits as well:

After Tayo Completes the first steps of the ceremony, he is ready to enter into the central rituals connected with a ceremony of cosmic significance, for only a cosmic ceremony can simultaneously heal a wounded man, a stricken landscape, and a disorganized, ‘discouraged society’ (Allen, 1979, 11).

As an alienated man, Tayo revisits the land itself to re-contact with the power of healing that he may find there. Tayo is a representative of the people, especially those who have suffered a lot from social, psychological, and cultural crises.

On his journey, Tayo has to recover the speckled cattle, and also bring rain and snow “to end the drought caused by his headless act of cursing the rain.” Tayo moves further ahead “on a metaphysical quest to seek the regenerative spirit he and the people have become separated from.” To do so he has to be guided by a map. Betonie has already provided him with an outline of a cognitive map of the ceremony that awaits his participation: “It is a map which includes four important elements-stars, cattle, mountain and woman” (Fuller, 2000, 33). Tayo meets Night Swan, a lady who serves as his mother’s substitute. Compensation for what he has been missing so far, whether the compassion, care, and love of his careless mother or his Auntie’s cruelty. Night Swan makes love with him and “her love saves him from total disintegration.” Herself a half-breed, she reassures Tayo about their mixed descent and explains the discriminating behaviours of the full-blood Indians and the whites:

They are afraid, Tayo. They feel something happening, they can see something, something happening around them, and it scares them. Indians or Mexicans or whites-most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same colour of skin, the colour of eyes, that nothing is changing. They are fools. They blame us, the

ones who look different. The way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves (C 98).

Thus, Night Swan reveals to Tayo that change is inevitable and that half-breed is a reality in the post-contact era. The main focal point of recovery, to her, is changing. Fearing change is the most challenging step a man can do in his or her life.

The Night Swan's theory proves that both Auntie and Emo are wrong because they believe that if they maintain the pure lineage and do not mix Indian blood with other races, they can preserve Indian culture. In contrast to their belief, Patricia Rieley (1992) maintains that the survival of the Laguna people depends on the mixed breeds who can blend the old and the new, stating: "Tayo, and other important mixed-blood characters, Betonie and Night Swan, represent the kind of adaptation that is necessary for survival in the face of contemporary reality" (330). Similarly, Tayo, who is guided by Betonie's vision, heads towards Mount Taylor to look for the lost cattle and a new way of life. While looking for the cattle, he encounters, at the foot of the mountain, a woman, Ts'eh as the "lady of the apricot tree." For Silko, "Ts'eh is the modern incarnation of the mythical Laguna mother, Ts'its'tsi'nako or the thought woman" (Herzog, 1985, 27). Only through his association with Ts'eh Tayo can recover the cattle and win back the rain and snow. Additionally, certain rituals, which are associated with the Native American curing ceremonies stress, "that the patient re-enact mythological events as a necessary means of identification" (Herzog, 1985, 28).

When "the patient re-enacts the hero's adventure, identification is complete [...] the present moment, which joins past and future, becomes a centering process, a locus of consciousness and being forever becoming" (Bell, 2002, 26). To identify himself, Tayo should be conscious of the present time, a bridge between the past and future. Likewise,

He had been so intent on finding the cattle that he had forgotten all the events of the past days and past years. Hunting the cattle was good for that. Old Betonie was right. It was a cure for that, and maybe for other things too [...] He knew then why the old timers could only speak of yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment [...] and this present sense of being was qualified with bare hints of yesterday or tomorrow, by saying, "I go up to the mountain yesterday or I go up to the mountain tomorrow" (C 176).

By searching for the cattle, Tayo stands for the mythical hero's quest for wholeness. The loss of both the cattle and the land is parallel. Even though the cattle and the land have been stolen, this does not mean the end. Such a combination of times proves that only through the present, past and future can one be united.

Likewise, on the way up Mount Taylor, in his search for the cattle, Tayo encounters a mountain lion, a sacred animal of the Laguna people. It also helps Tayo in releasing the cattle from Floyd Lee's fence. After releasing the cattle from Floyd Lee's Fence, Tayo returns to Ts'eh's abode at the base of the mountain. On the way, Tayo meets a hunter, another spirit helper, who is the most knowledgeable in the old ways. He accompanies Tayo down the trail to safety and offers him hospitality. Tayo's journey represents his "return from death to life" in which "the way this bit of smoke, this fence post, this clay with a dead rodent for a tongue, becomes animate again and thus able to tell his story to the tribal elders." The growth of Tayo is what matters amid all these hardships (Beidler, 2002, 19).

Tayo reconciles himself with the land by visiting mountain spirits in the disguise of various animals. He visits Jackpile Mine where his final ordeal takes place to be confronted with Emo as a representative of the evil forces. The mined landscape, as Karen Piper (1997) asserts, indicates that the Laguna land has been used for witchery practices. So, Tayo's



confrontation with Emo is a confrontation of his own heart's capacity for violence (486). He is capable of "Jamming the screwdriver into Emo's skull the way the witchery had wanted" (C 227). With the knowledge and power of the land and Ts'eh, he resists the powerfully felt impulse to bury the screwdriver in Emo's skull and completes his ceremony of self-regeneration. Through his appropriate inaction, he makes witchery turn upon itself. Tayo's action here marks his transformation from a fearful, ineffectual individual into a traditional Laguna hero capable of confronting the witchery at work in his world, and still surviving, as Patricia Rieley writes, "Tayo recognizes the witchery for what it is and moves increasingly away from the material world and into the sacred" (328).

Finally, to complete the rest of his quest, Tayo goes to the village Kiva, the spiritual centre of the Laguna village, where he is eagerly received by the Laguna medicine man old Ku'oosh, and other Kiva elders. There, Tayo narrates the story of his interaction with Ts'ch, the spirit woman to the old men, and becomes the storyteller. The old man inquires Tayo about the details of his interaction with the spirit woman he met in the mountains: "it took a long time to tell them the story; they stopped him frequently with questions about the location and the time of the day; they asked about the direction she had come from the colors of her eyes" (C 230). Tayo's coming to the village Kiva is his homing in. Here, homing in does not mean coming back to his private home, that is, his individual property, rather it suggests coming back to his tribal home where all the people are brothers and sisters. There is no discrimination between them, and everything is imbued by traditional or cultural practices.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Tayo's journey, which comprises three stages, proves to be a quest for healing from a disease that is described both physically and psychologically as a dire consequence of war atrocities. Throughout his journey, Tayo returns home to be engaged with his native culture after a long estrangement. In Pueblo society, his home, Tayo meets Ts'eh, Betonie, and Night Swan and passes through Mount Taylor and other mountains that stand for his symbolic house. Tayo's journey is made with a strong desire of locating his cultural position and acquiring his cultural identity. Consciously or not unconsciously, Tayo moves on in his quest journey crossing many hurdles on the way to his goal, healing physically and psychologically.

After meeting healers from different races and genders, Tayo emerges as a person with a name, identity, and dignity that emphasizes people together with a story that is inseparable from the land and Ts'eh. He not only establishes his cultural identity but also vitalizes the native culture. Tayo proves himself to be a cultural hero whose humanity is felt again. He is not only a part of his native tribe but also of humanity which is a very healing sort of thing that human beings require all the time. Tayo moves forward to achieve this reconciliation with land and spirits. Being tortured deeply inside, Tayo painfully realizes his cultural position and decides to take up a journey that begins with leaving home and ends at home again. A culturally dislocated man, Tayo comes back finally with the retrieval of his cultural identity. During his quest journey, he meets many ups and downs. He, however, succeeds in his quest mission at last and proves himself to be a cultural hero.

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