The Role and Scope of Culture in the Development and Healing of PTSD in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*
Abstract

This essay discusses the perceived case of post-traumatic stress disorder in Leslie Marmon Silko's character Tayo from the novel *Ceremony*, using personal accounts of actual PTSD-suffering war veterans as a point of reference. The goal is to fathom the influence that culture may have in the development and healing of PTSD, and to identify possible trans-cultural aspects. The main focus of the analysis is therefore on personal background, interpersonal relationships, post-war experiences, and experienced symptoms.
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1. Introduction

As members of the human species, we all share essentially the same neuropsychological template in the way we perceive illness, but arguably no two individuals have identical physical sensations or the same experiences. This is because we filter, mediate, negotiate, and otherwise interpret the signs and symptoms processed by our bodies through lived experiences, shaped by our social and relational worlds (So 167).

Though post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is, and arguably always has been, a common disorder in war veterans and other people subjected to traumatising experiences, it has only recently been recognised as a genuine medical condition (see Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd edition). Research into the origins and dynamics of PTSD is still ongoing on a large scale, and though progress is being made, there is still a lot to learn about the personal factors that can lead to PTSD, and that have to be taken into consideration when healing PTSD.

One interesting and promising approach to delving deeper into the complexity of this disorder is to take a closer look at fictional and non-fictional depictions and accounts of first-hand sufferers. PTSD is a highly personal ailment that expresses itself in many different ways, depending on the sufferer's personal background and surroundings, as well as the nature of the traumatising experience itself. However, in all likelihood, common ground for all sufferers of PTSD does exist, and this thesis attempts to shine a light on one possible part of that common ground, namely the relationship between human beings and the culture that surrounds them.

The main focus of my examination is on Leslie Marmon Silko's character Tayo in the novel Ceremony. A number of other, non-fictional accounts of PTSD in war veterans will serve as a point of reference for the analysis of Tayo's condition. Special attention will be paid to aspects of personal background, such as culture, ethnicity, gender, childhood; post-war experiences – that is the reception upon return to home –; as well as the symptoms experienced, such as dissociation, rage, somatisation. Some of Tayo's most prominent symptoms include a feeling of invisibility, as well as physical expressions of his inner struggle, such as vomiting and fainting. These manifestations of his disorder will therefore be the focal point of the examination.

The goal of this comparative discussion is to analyse the extent to which the surrounding society and culture have shaped Tayo's situation as an individual, and to examine whether there are aspects that might transcend his cultural frame in such a way that they, in essence, may be applied to war veterans who stem from other, non-Native U.S.-American cultures. As my primary reference
material, I am using the book *Soldier's Heart – Survivors' Views of Combat Trauma*, edited by Hansel, Steidle, Zaczek, and Zaczek, which is a compilation of non-fictional first-hand accounts from PTSD-sufferers in the form of short essays and poems. Laurie Vickroy's *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* will provide the theoretical background, as far as literary theory is concerned. Regarding the more general theory of PTSD-research, I will use two essays from *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, edited by Van Der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth. Other researchers whose work will be used in the course of this essay include Joseph So, Edith Swan, Greg Garrard, and Ronald Fischer.

By analytically dissecting Tayo's personal problems to reveal similarities between his thoughts and feelings and those of non-Native American PTSD-sufferers, I am hoping to be able to show that Silko's *Ceremony* is not just a story about Native Americans, but about human beings in general. Though the novel's settings and storyline events may seem hard to grasp for many non-Native readers, their substance is not as alien as it may appear on first impression. The setup of Tayo's character, with his rather unique personal background, provides an interesting basis for observations of the human psyche in distress. Through his ever absent father he is half-white, through his long since deceased mother he is half Native American, and a grudgingly accepted member of the Laguna Pueblo. This constellation makes him a discriminated minority within a discriminated minority, and leaves him vulnerable to the impact of traumatic experiences. Tayo's ambiguous positioning in society forces him to scrutinise and re-evaluate the course and events of his life, in order to be able to finally establish the stable and reliable sense of identity that is necessary for survival.
2. Theoretical Background

Culture is a double-edged sword. Because of human beings' dependence on it, its loss becomes traumatic. [...] culture provides protection at a cost. Strong attachment to persons and lifestyles leads to a deeper sense of loss when the life of the culture is disrupted. When people adhere to a system and bond to the other individuals within it, the loss of those persons and the disintegration of the system become traumatic (DeVries 400).

Since my analysis will be based on both fictional and non-fictional material, it is important to point out the underlying correlation between the depicted attributes of the fictional character Tayo and medically recognised symptoms of PTSD. It is also necessary to mention that Silko's *Ceremony* was originally published in 1977, three years before the official inclusion of 'posttraumatic stress disorder' as a diagnosis in the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). 'PTSD' can therefore not have been the exact term that might have been on Silko's mind while writing her novel. Despite this, for the sake of clarity in this essay, 'PTSD' will be my term of choice when hypothesizing about the author's background idea. This is based on my observation of a strong congruency between Silko's depiction of Tayo's condition and official descriptions of PTSD, which leads me to assume that the basic concept is the same in both instances.

A strong indicator that Silko indeed devised Tayo as a PTSD sufferer is the fact that it is mentioned explicitly that Tayo has been diagnosed with “battle fatigue” (31). With the novel set in the aftermath of World War II, when ‘battle fatigue’ was a common denominator for the disorder that is now known as PTSD, an analogy between PTSD and Tayo's condition seems quite feasible. Furthermore, an evaluation of Tayo's thoughts, behavioural patterns, and reactions to his surroundings serves to strengthen the argument. He is described as having trouble sleeping, having nightmares, being unable to separate the reliving of his memories from present reality, having trouble eating and keeping his food down. Fits of anger and aggression, for example his physical attack on fellow war veteran and tribal member Emo, are also part of the picture, as is a general loss of control over the body in certain moments, such as vomiting, fainting, or slipping off the mule's back on the way to the bar.

When compared with descriptions of actual cases of PTSD, the parallels become obvious – Van Der Kolk, McFarlane, and Van Der Hart, for example, characterise the disorder as follows: “What distinguishes people who develop PTSD from those who are merely temporarily stressed is that they become 'stuck' on the trauma; they keep reliving it in thoughts, feelings, actions, or images” (419). More parallels can be found where Laurie Vickroy quotes Kai Erickson with a list of
trauma symptoms that include “periods of nervous, restless activity – scanning the surrounding world for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages, reacting with a start to everyday sights and sounds – against a numbed, gray background of depression, feelings of helplessness, a loss of various motor skills and a general closing off of the spirit as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm” (12).

Regarding these similarities, there can be no doubt that Silko's aim was to create a character that suffers from PTSD. However, since the novel's background is heavily centred around the Laguna Pueblo culture, it stands to reason that part of Tayo's thoughts and experiences would seem quite unfamiliar to a PTSD sufferer who stems from a different culture. Since my aim is to identify possible trans-cultural aspects in Tayo's condition, I found it necessary to include some excerpts from Soldier's Heart, the aforementioned compilation of essays and poems written by non-Native U.S.-American war veterans who suffer from PTSD. Even with these non-fictional accounts as a reference, my analysis cannot be seen as medical research, though – its main focus lies not on evaluating the accuracy of Silko's portrayal of PTSD symptoms, but on assessing the individual sufferer's perspective on the role that the surrounding culture and interpersonal relationships might play in the development and curing of the disorder.

The term ‘culture’ will be used here in the sense of “a shared meaning process” that is “passed on through socialization processes within specific groups, which requires communication of key symbols, ideas, knowledge, and values between individuals from one generation to the next” (Fischer 29). Humans are social beings, and when we live in groups – as we usually do –, we are bound to interact with each other at some point. Many would not like to admit it, but I believe it is safe to say that we all use our fellow human beings as points of reference; we define ourselves using the mirror of our surroundings, and we suffer when all we receive from our peers is rejection, misunderstandings, and hostility. This is true in real life, and it is also evidently true for Silko's Tayo, who, upon his return home from the war, finds himself caught between the different agendas of various people and cultures with no obvious way to turn.

The culture that develops through and around a group of human beings sharing the same habitat can serve various different functions. It can be seen as a “protective and supportive system of values, lifestyles, and knowledge” that, once fully established, tends to be strongly resistant to change (DeVries 400). It can thereby “buffer [...] its members from the potentially profound impact of stressful experiences” (DeVries 400). This mechanism of culture also has its drawbacks. To an individual that does not fit into the prevalent cultural system, its rigidity can entail harmful consequences. In such cases, according to DeVries, “social extrusion and stigmatization may result as a cultural defense reaction to the unwanted information or behavior” (401). A traumatic experience can lead to a breach between an individual and the surrounding culture, especially if the
experience takes place in a context that is alien to the culture, or that is seen as a taboo. If the traumatised individual cannot gain recognition, understanding, and acknowledgement from the other members of the surrounding culture, disintegration sets in and can lead to a feeling of total forlornness. The individual thus runs a large risk of developing PTSD.

To re-establish channels of meaningful communication with other people is one of the most important steps for an affected individual on the way to recovering from PTSD. Finding a listener who cares can be difficult, though, and for those who find it hard to express their feelings in spoken words, or who want to reach a larger audience, writing can be a valuable means of processing the disrupting emotions. However, as Vickroy points out, narratives and other literary materials about trauma are seen as problematic by some scholars – their value as a reliable source of information is disputed, since they may contain “distortions and intentions”, as well as “intrusive literary conventions such as chronology, characterization, dialogue, and a directive narrative voice” (5). However, she also states that, in her opinion, the verbalisation of traumatic experience “resists the narrativizing, chronologizing, and moralizing”, and that “serious trauma writers attempt to guide readers through a re-created process of traumatic memory in order that this experience be understood more widely” (7-8). A reading of Silko's Ceremony regarding these assumptions suggests that Vickroy has a point. The storyline of Ceremony is anything but chronological, and the narrative is fragmented, repeatedly broken by short stories and poems.

The case is a bit more complicated as far as the allegation of possible moralising is concerned. The issue addressed by Vickroy refers to “taming” the problem of traumatic experiences by applying “political purposes” to trauma narratives, such as “the reconfiguration in the 1980s of Vietnam veterans as victims and the war in more positive terms” (7). Since Ceremony is a novel that speaks decidedly against the glorification of war, and that supports the idea of taking responsibility and action in order to free oneself of victimisation, it is unlikely that it contains the kind of moralising that is debated in Vickroy’s treatise.

Nevertheless, Silko certainly intends to give her readers a message: that of the importance of remaining connected to the world and its people, of recognising one's own role in the fate of the world at large. Ceremony is, after all, part of the recognised literary canon of the Ecocriticism movement, and there can be no doubt that this movement has a mission. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that even within Ecocriticism, Ceremony is subject to some critical voices, primarily due to its “almost utopian ending” – Greg Garrard, in his book Ecocriticism, describes the issue as follows: “By reducing social, national and ecological conflicts to a dualistic spiritual confrontation of ‘witchery’ and ‘ceremony’, or ‘natives’ and ‘destroyers’, Silko forfeits the subtle discrimination needed to respond to environmental justice issues in favour of a one-off drama that can only issue in disaster or utopia” (129).
Despite these reproaches, *Ceremony* remains one of the acclaimed novels of the movement, and serves as an inspiration to many. Since it is designed as a classic hero's tale, the dualistic 'good' versus 'evil' constellation seems justifiable, in my opinion. I see *Ceremony* primarily as a trauma narrative that takes the issues of environmental justice to the level of the individual. Tayo's world is made up of what he sees, thinks, and feels, his only concern is to create meaning from the chaos inside of him – the full scale of social, national, and ecological conflicts is quite simply not part of his picture of the world. The novel accompanies Tayo on his way into and out of the disorder, it explores the intricate workings of his mind and spirit in depth, concentrating mostly on his thoughts and reactions to certain events – Tayo's mind is, so to say, the setting of the tale. Though the novel is written in third person narrative, almost all the action is evaluated from Tayo’s point of view. Vickroy's words about trauma narratives enacting “the directing outward of an inward, silent process to other witnesses” fittingly describe the essence of *Ceremony* (3). The story traces the development and changes of Tayo's image of the world, of humanity, of himself, and of himself in relationship to the world and other human beings. How is he supposed to tackle his affliction? Is he supposed to follow the white doctors' recommendations or the customs of his own culture? Can he even rightfully claim to be a part of the Pueblo culture, and can the traditions of that culture offer him the support he needs? These are some of the questions that Tayo needs to answer for himself, if he is to rediscover his place in the world, and thereby his sense of self.
3. Analysis

3.1 Tayo's Sickness

PTSD means anger, shame, isolation, guilt, nightmares, pain, numbing, and praying for death (Ann Powlas, 1st Lieutenant, USA Nurse Corps – Hansel et al. 12).

When Tayo first returns to America after the war, he is treated for battle fatigue at a Veterans' Hospital. There, everything is white: the walls, the ceiling, his bed clothes, and even the doctors. The extensive lack of sensory stimulation makes it possible for Tayo to blend into the whiteness himself, he perceives himself as “white smoke” (14). For a while, this is a rather comfortable state of being for Tayo, because “white smoke had no consciousness of itself” (14), and it is also “dense; visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there” (15) - in other words, being white smoke enables Tayo to block out any memories, it keeps them invisible from him, and it keeps him invisible (or so he hopes) from anyone who might prod him into reliving the memories.

This kind of defense mechanism is not uncommon in people who suffer from PTSD. Some voices from Soldier's Heart clearly illustrate this – Jerry Osby ‘Doc’ Andersson describes his situation as follows: “Mental wounds that society can't see are among the worst, and I have kept my wall around them. [...] There was no communication in my wall” (Hansel et al. 199). Army nurse Dana S. characterises her mental means of protection as a “bubble” (142), while Ralph 'Tripper' Sirianni chooses a more prosaic and straightforward wording: “Vietnam taught me how to build defensive barriers to keep in the pain” (202).

It is interesting to note that different people use different imagery to describe the shape and formation of their mental mechanisms – a wall, a bubble, a barrier, and, in Tayo's case, a dense fog – and it can be asked why that is so. The image of the wall and the barrier seem like the obvious choice here, as this is exactly the kind of structure one would usually use in order to keep something separate from something else. The bubble that Dana S. chose to represent her defensive barrier appears a little more extraordinary. However, she also states a distinct reason for her choice: “I once saw a documentary called ‘The Boy in the Bubble.’ Born with total immunodeficiency, the boy was fated to once-removed contact with everything in the world. For a quarter of a century I also lived inside a bubble, which served similar protective functions” (Hansel et al. 142).

Tayo's mental image of a fog surrounding him also comes across as very specific, which suggests that it carries a deeper meaning for him. This impression is intensified as more details of the inner fog landscape are revealed to the reader. When Tayo sees himself inhabiting a “gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely and their own bones mark the
boundaries”, his mental imagery clearly reflects the earthbound hunting culture of his native people (15). Another indicator that Tayo’s mental image of his illness is heavily coloured by his cultural background is the way in which he explains his condition to a new doctor who asks Tayo if he has ever been visible. Tayo then “spoke to him softly and said that he was sorry but nobody was allowed to speak to an invisible one” (15). The peculiar wording of this statement makes it sound like a recognised cultural taboo that Tayo means to hold on to.

The fact that Tayo speaks of himself in third person in some of the conversations with his doctor suggests that he is projecting the point of view that he believes will meet him when he returns home: “He can't go. He cries all the time. Sometimes he vomits when he cries” (16). Tayo is obviously distressed about his inability to control the crying – the aforementioned “remote and foggy mountain” becomes Tayo's first refuge, because “it was not possible to cry” there (15). His constant crying seems to invoke a feeling of shame in Tayo, either due to the guilt that he lays on himself for everything that has happened, or maybe due to a more general notion of how a man is supposed to demean himself. Quite likely it is a combination of both factors, with the possible addition of a third: the crying makes Tayo's inner turmoil more than obvious to the world around him, while he would rather keep it hidden.

*Soldier's Heart* mentions several veterans who experience somewhat similar situations that make them feel uncomfortable in the presence of others – Clyde Q. laments certain people's lack of understanding for his emotional reaction to seeing certain things on TV that bring back memories of his war experience. This lack of understanding is what “hurts the most”, he states, and continues to say that “I see something sad on TV and I start sobbing. I have to leave the room to spare myself embarrassment in front of friends and family. [...] Sometimes I feel less than a man when I cry” (Hansel *et al.* 21-22). Nurse Ann Powlas addresses the problem of showing what really was going on inside her mind for fear of rejection: “I couldn't let anyone know because of the shame. How could anyone else understand it when I didn't? [...] I withdrew from people or wore a mask when I was with them. If they really knew me, they would see the shame and know there was something terribly wrong with me” (Hansel *et al.* 12).

The key word in both examples is ‘understanding’, or rather the lack thereof. Positive feedback obviously makes it easier to work through a challenging mental problem, negative feedback on the other hand can harm or even cripple the process. In a disorder such as PTSD, where regaining a sense of trust and confidence in people and events is crucial, it can be especially devastating if an attempt to reach out is met with a rebuff or accusations. Hansel *et al.* define healing from PTSD as “a process of making connections”, and continue to say that the reality of this fact, even though it may seem self-apparent to family members or therapists, “is not so obvious to veterans, who struggle against feelings they may neither understand nor connect to their combat
experience” (Hansel et al. 15-16). The problem goes farther than this, though, because in many cases the PTSD-sufferer is quite aware of the need to reconnect, but cannot act upon this knowledge due to underlying fears. The account of Dana S. lends evidence to this dilemma: "I believe my ultimate healing from the trauma of the war will be found in reconnecting to the human family, but my trauma itself lies partly in the rejection I experienced, and causes me to flee all connection” (Hansel et al. 98).

Tayo is evidently not willing or able to establish a genuine connection with the hospital doctors in order to disclose the full scope of his suffering. His feelings of shame and embarrassment seem to be deeply rooted in his self-image. When the doctor tells Tayo that he is allowed to cry, Tayo's first reaction is anger – “He wanted to scream at the doctor then” –, but he is quickly overwhelmed by the impossibility of putting his distress into words – “the words choked him” –, and instead of addressing the mind-numbing intricacy of his situation – being caught between clashing cultures and the need to cope with the indescribable horrors of war – Tayo gags and vomits (16).

Tayo's vomiting is an involuntary, psychosomatic representation of his distress – speaking in medical terms, it is a so called somatisation, which denotes “physical symptoms and somatic complaints, with no known organic cause” (So 168). Interestingly, some medical scientists regard somatisation as a phenomenon that almost exclusively affects non-western cultures. So disputes this notion in his article about the correlations between mind, body, and “the sum of lived experience” (170). According to So, somatisation is not an imaginary illness, not one of a number of “psychiatric exotica” as some Western scientists like to categorise it - it can affect anybody, not just what Western scientists like to label “members of a society where there is a lack of semantic network to express emotional states, that is, non-western, least developed countries” (168).

So argues that the low number of reported cases of somatisation in Western societies is primarily due to the fact that Western medicine does not recognise the legitimacy of the complaints and stigmatises its patients as “excessive users of healthcare resources in a country with universal healthcare” (169). This view bears some parallels to the treatment Tayo receives from the doctor at the Veterans' Hospital. When the doctor says to Tayo that “it's easy to remain invisible here, isn't it” and then proceeds to send him home despite Tayo's protests, the doctor essentially tells him that he is not as sick as he would like to appear, and that he is taking up much needed space.

At first glance, this could also be interpreted as the doctor's official give-up on trying to heal Tayo with ‘white medicine’ and therefore leaving him to the care of his family and tribe, but since the doctor clearly states that “no Indian medicine” is supposed to be used on Tayo (34), he must be convinced that Tayo is as successfully healed as he possibly can be. After all, he succeeded in making Tayo talk again, and as far as the doctor is concerned, a walking, talking patient with no
visible physical damage probably falls into the category of ‘healed’. However, Tayo is still ailed by his – to the outside world – invisible illness, the illness of his heart and mind that finds its only expression in vomiting, crying, and fainting. The doctor's attitude matches that which Dana S., in Soldier's Heart, ascribes to her husband; she says that he “embraces the comforting but erroneous assumption that so long as I appear to be ‘normal’ most of the time, then my condition can't be very serious” (Hansel et al. 55).

According to Tayo's own estimation, his condition is still life-threatening when he is sent home from the hospital. On his way to the train platform, his body succumbs to a growing feeling of weakness and Tayo faints. To him, the process feels like becoming “invisible” again, and he expects to die – “the way smoke dies, [...] fading until it exists no more” (16-17). The prospect does not seem to frighten him, though, since he is contemplating the generosity of his doctors in his last conscious thoughts, appreciating the fact that they, by sending him on his way alone, are “finally allowing him to die” (17). The lingering feeling of death lurking just around the corner remains with Tayo for a long time. His determination to stay alive is wavering depending on the level of energy he can muster up as the days go by. Tayo finds that it takes “a lot of energy to be a human being”, and energy is one of his rarest commodities (25). When Grandma finally decides to call in the Pueblo healer Ku'oosh, Tayo feels that his last chance for improvement has come: “If this didn't work, then he knew he would die” (39). However, he finds that he actually does not care any more whether he lives or dies, he decides to let things go the way they please. This, later on, earns him the peculiar realisation that it is “easy [...] to stay alive now that he didn't care about being alive any more” (39).

Another of Tayo's symptoms is his anger. Anger is a very common symptom in war veterans who suffer from PTSD, and the accounts in Soldier's Heart bear testimony to that. Most often, the objects of this anger are the government and society at large, as well as families and friends. Many war veterans feel betrayed, abandoned, misunderstood, ignored, and, especially in the case of Vietnam veterans, unjustly attacked. A very prevalent phenomenon is a feeling of disillusionment, a shift in perspective. The ‘normal’ concerns of ‘normal’ people in everyday life suddenly seem trivial, things that were taken for granted before the war-experience become questionable, and many of society's conventions suddenly appear to be nothing but lies, or at the very least based on misconceptions. A kaleidoscope of voices from Soldier's Heart:

Ann Powlas: “I didn't know why I was suddenly so angry or how to express my anger. The feelings had been pushed down too long and there was an explosion. The anger made me strike out at whatever was nearest, which sometimes was my own body or that of someone dear to me” (Hansel et al. 12).
Ken Sauvage: “When I got back from Vietnam, the first emotion to surface was a terrible anger. I was angry that the majority of the people in this country were unaware, seemingly by choice, of the horror that was taking place in their name” (Hansel et al. 61).

Dana S. about her family and friends: ”My concerns were so alien to those of everyone around me!” (Hansel et al. 143).

David H.: ”I died back in Nam in '68, a little at a time, when we came back from the leech hole. We didn't know that people, especially our own family, would reject us. [...] I've tried everything to fit in society. It doesn't work!” (Hansel et al. 20-21).

Earl Z.: ”Since Vietnam, I've seen the world in a much different light. There is no camaraderie, people are all for one, and one for themselves. There seems to be no respect, no real team effort, no watching each other's back. I truly miss that” (Hansel et al. 27).

Though the causes and details of their anger can differ greatly with each veteran, the essential problem for all of them seems to be a discrepancy between the generally accepted status quo and their personal assessment of how things really are or should be. Tayo's anger has at least two different triggers, one being the feeling that he is lacking control over the way things go, and the other being the situation of his people, as well as their ways of handling their situation. His fellow war veteran Emo is especially anathema to Tayo, since he is a personification of the destructive energies that threaten to destroy Tayo's world. Emo's behaviour and statements provoke Tayo into an outbreak of extreme violence, during which he almost kills Emo with a broken bottle. When his doctor asks him about his motive during the hospital check-up that follows the incident, Tayo simply states that “Emo was asking for it” (53).

3.2 The Underlying Causes

When the lovers that I had are no longer there, when my friends have all died or been taken away, that's when I feel like I'm walking alone (Adrian S., USMC – Hansel et al. 43).
Tayo is the unplanned and illegitimate mixed-breed child of a Laguna Pueblo woman named Laura and an unknown white man. Laura's Pueblo community reacts with disdain to her lifestyle and her acquaintances with white men, and her family has to deal with a lot of gossiping, which is especially difficult for the older sister Thelma. The novel does not offer an explicit recount of Tayo's childhood years, though several short references are given. There is also one slightly longer tale about a nameless boy who is living in poverty under a bridge in Gallup with his mother. The reader certainly gets the impression that this boy must be Tayo, but he could also be seen as a representative not only for Tayo but for a lot of other Native American half-breed children whose mothers find themselves on the outskirts of society with no way to turn. These slum-dwelling children are forced to witness a great deal of unpleasant and frightening events, such as their mothers selling themselves to white men, Mexicans, and black men, sometimes for money, sometimes for "half a bottle of wine" (111).

The boy in this tale within the tale is used to being left alone for longer periods of time, he is used to deprivation of food and shelter, and he knows no security or stability. His mother frequently leaves him alone, and at least once she is also forcefully removed from him by the police, along with almost all the other inhabitants of the slum. Despite these harsh circumstances, the boy obviously connects some degree of tenderness and care with his mother's figure; he always expects her to come and pick him up sooner or later, and he savours her close embrace and familiar smell when she returns to him.

When Tayo is four years old, his mother leaves him with her family: her mother, brother, and sister. It seems that her original plan is to leave him there only temporarily, but as it turns out, Tayo is there to stay indefinitely. At an undisclosed point some time after this, his mother dies. It is unclear whether she has been a part of her son's life in any way in the in-between phase, but at least he has the opportunity to attend her funeral. Tayo's uncle Josiah is his moral support in this situation, he stands close to his little nephew during the funeral, holds his hand on the way from the graveyard, and gives him "a candy cane left over from Christmas" to comfort him (93).

Josiah is the only member of Laura's family that welcomes Tayo with – literally – open arms and an open heart. Laura places her four-year-old son in her brother's arms, tells him good-bye and leaves, while her son is kicking and screaming, trying to follow her. Josiah however "held him firmly and told him not to cry because he had a brother now" (66). Said brother is Rocky, aunt Thelma's son, and he is decidedly not happy about the newcomer's presence. "Go away, [...], you're not my brother. I don't want no brother!" is his initial reaction. Only hours later, however, he peacefully slumbers next to his cousin, allowing him to share his bed. Luckily for Tayo, Josiah is the only grown-up in the house upon his arrival. Had his aunt Thelma – henceforth known as Auntie
– been present, the likelihood of Tayo being allowed to share Rocky's bed would have been drastically diminished.

From the very beginning of their relationship, it seems to be Auntie's goal to invoke a feeling of unworthiness in Tayo. While Josiah immediately takes Tayo under his wing, accepts him as a full-fledged member of the Laguna Pueblo, and teaches him about the ways of their people, Auntie instead educates her nephew about his mother's shortcomings, and lets him feel that he, as an illegitimate half-breed, is inferior compared to Rocky. However, Auntie is very careful not to let her behaviour become obvious to the other members of the family. Edith Swan, in her article “Feminine Perspectives at Laguna Pueblo: Silko's Ceremony”, states that Auntie “is waging a fight that only Tayo sees and apprehends”, namely the war between her Christian, ambitious self, and the old ways of the culture that surrounds her, and that she perceives as threatening and suffocating, partly because “rules of lineal descent give Auntie no choice about her obligation to raise the half-breed child of her dead sister since that child is viewed as hers – her son” (312).

Josiah, who, as an unmarried male, still resides with his maternal family, becomes Tayo's surrogate father, his one true friend in the world. His teachings give Tayo's life meaning, direction, and purpose. Since Josiah is such a central figure in Tayo's life, his death has devastating effects on his nephew's well-being. This effect is enhanced manifold due to the lingering memories of a fever hallucination that has plagued Tayo during the war. The hallucination causes Tayo to see his uncle standing amidst a group of Japanese soldiers that have been lined up in order to be shot by Tayo and his fellow soldiers. Tayo, however, is unable to follow his sergeant's order to pull the trigger. While the other soldiers proceed with the execution, Tayo stands “stiff with nausea” and watches “his uncle fall, and he knew it was Josiah” (8). The hallucination does not stop there, however, it continues even when Rocky forces Tayo to take a close look at the corpse - “and that was when Tayo started screaming because it wasn't a Jap, it was Josiah, eyes shrinking back into the skull and all their shining light glazed over by death” (8).

Rocky reasons with Tayo that the dead man cannot possibly be Josiah, who, according to Rocky, is “probably up on some mesa right now, chopping wood” (8). Though Tayo logically understands what Rocky is saying and rationally agrees with him, the incident leaves its imprint on him – it marks the beginning of his developing psychological affliction. If Josiah had still been alive when Tayo finally returns to his home after the war, maybe Tayo would have had a chance to not develop such a severe case of PTSD. Josiah's actual death is the event that tips the scale to Tayo's disadvantage – he has lost his only true friend and soul mate, the one person in Tayo's world that would likely have understood the nature of his suffering, and that moreover would have given him the feeling of being welcome at home.

As it is, Tayo does not feel like he is welcome at all. Laden with feelings of guilt about
Rocky's death under Japanese captivity, Tayo endures his aunts accusing stares that are “probing for new shame” (29). He knows that she will take care of him, “because he was all that she had left” (29), but he also knows that her care is not the loving kind, it is motivated by pure necessity: “she needed a new struggle, another opportunity to show those who might gossip that she had still another unfortunate burden which proved that, above all else, she was a Christian woman” (30). The other two living members of Tayo's family, Grandma and Robert, seem to be of little help as well, at least during the first time after his return home, when “the sickness and his crying overwhelmed them” (31). Though both Grandma and Robert adjust their behaviour later on and lend their support to Tayo, all they do in the beginning is to ignore him.

All in all, there just does not seem to be any solace available to Tayo upon his return home. Even memories of Josiah's kindness only result in pain, and one night when Tayo has a dream of his uncle hugging him in a loving embrace, he wakes up crying, “because he had to wake up to what was left [...] He lay there with the feeling that there was no place left for him; he would find no peace in that house where the silence and the emptiness echoed the loss” (32). The emotional coldness of the situation suggests to Tayo that “it was him, Tayo, who had died, but somehow there had been a mistake with the corpses, and somehow his was still unburied” (28). Tayo's living soul and horrible suffering seem to be completely invisible to his remaining family.

It is said that Grandma keeps mentioning Rocky's name, even though “she knew the sound of Rocky's name made [Tayo] cry”, and she even goes as far as telling him not to cry, because “[Rocky] didn't want you to cry” (27). Under the circumstances, this could be regarded as a rather cruel refusal to acknowledge Tayo's grief, suffocating his cry for help, and simply leaving him stranded high and dry. However, Grandma comes around after a while, stating that she has been sitting and thinking about Tayo's precarious situation for a long time, and indeed she becomes the first person to reach out to Tayo in a truly helpful way, giving him a sense of acceptance and belonging, because she openly states that he is “[her] grandson” (32), and that he should be seen by a Laguna medicine man, never mind what the Army doctor said about Indian medicine, never mind what the neighbours will say about giving traditional treatment to someone who, as Auntie likes to critically remind her mother, is “not full blood anyway” (33).

Grandma calls in the Laguna healer, Ku'oosh, who gives Tayo some valuable insights into the makings of the world, adding to the spiritual wisdom that Tayo has been taught by his beloved uncle Josiah before the war. Ku'oosh tells him that “this world is fragile”, and he tells him about the importance of choosing the right words, describing it as “the responsibility that went with being human, [...] , the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said” (35-36). However, though Tayo understands what Ku'oosh is trying to convey, he finds himself unable to do what the healer is asking of him. He is incapable of finding
the right words, because the things that he has experienced during the war are so radically different from anything that his culture has faced before. Tayo is sure that the healer will not and cannot believe him, if he tells him about the circumstances of white warfare – “killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was all too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns; [...] the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous” (36-37).

In the war that Tayo has been forced to fight, the enemy was largely invisible, death could come unseen from behind the thick canopy of trees, and, what was perhaps the worst, the differences between friend and foe also became invisible – both in death, when the corpses' skin turned a universal black, and in life, when Japanese faces suddenly took on Laguna features, and more specifically Josiah's features. Tayo does not know “how to explain what had happened. He did not know how to tell [Ku'ooosh] that he had not killed any enemy or that he did not think that he had. But that he had done things far worse, and the effects were everywhere in the cloudless sky [...]” (35-36).

While Ku'ooosh's ritual is not enough to fully heal Tayo, nor any of the other Laguna veterans, the fact that his family has acknowledged his problems as worthy of a tribal healer seems to have a positive effect on Tayo. Though he is still far from well, and even has to admit to himself that he does not actually care about staying alive anymore, he is at least able to get some restful sleep once in a while and keep his food down most of the time. With the support of Auntie's husband Robert, Tayo leaves his sickbed and once again partakes in tending the family's livestock, as was his task before the war. Yet even though his life is beginning to appear 'normal' again on the surface, Tayo still feels that he is lacking something important, and that Josiah would be the one that could provide him with what he needs: “He wished Josiah were there, not forever like he had been wishing, but just long enough so Tayo could tell him how he'd been feeling lately” (27).

Tayo's yearning for a conversational partner that truly understands him is a feeling that is familiar to many war veterans. The problem is addressed repeatedly in Soldier's Heart, but two examples should suffice to bring the point across. These are the words of James F. Sedgley: “It is a long time before you have an inkling that maybe you are not like others, maybe not even normal. But with whom do you discuss such things? Who would understand?” (Hansel et al. 66) For Dana S., the desire takes on an even deeper, more spiritual character: “I often feel that there is no one out there like me, no one with whom I can experience that wordless, intuitive kind of sharing that to me connotes true intimacy and understanding. [...] The war took something important from me, but I can't even define it, much less begin to get it back” (Hansel et al. 98).

Tayo shares one important characteristic with this Dana S. – both of them are members of a discriminated minority, and moreover outsiders within their peer group. Tayo is a Laguna Pueblo Native American, and as such discriminated against by the white majority in his country; he is also
half-breed, but what is even more crucial to his suffering is the fact that he is determined to follow in the footsteps of his uncle, who has brought him up in a traditional way. Tayo's peers and fellow war veterans are quite the contrary. They vilify the dry and barren land of their ancestors, and envy the white people's wealth in the same instance as they curse their demeanour. They indulge themselves in nostalgic memories of wartime adventures and glory, reminiscing how it was to feel like they belonged, like they mattered, like they were dignified. To Tayo, all of this seems fundamentally wrong, and he tries to express his views and make the others understand their mistake, but all he achieves is to “spoil [...] it for them” (42).

As a woman from a conservative society that had strictly pre-defined ideas of what a woman was supposed to be like, Dana S. is faced with a similar challenge. She went to Vietnam as an army nurse, taking on the traditional female role of a caretaker. The constant exposure to blood, gore, horrifying wounds, severed limbs, and dying teenage soldiers left a deep imprint on the young woman, traumatising her profoundly. Yet the most devastating shock awaited her upon her return home. According to the public opinion, she was a nurse, not a veteran; she was a woman, supposed to take care of others, not supposed to be taken care of by others; she had the wrong idea about her condition, she could not possibly be suffering from PTSD, because, as she was “politely informed” at her local Veterans' Centre, “women don't develop PTSD” (Hansel et al. 98).

Much like Tayo, Dana S. found herself unable to connect to her wartime peers, and not for lack of interest from her side, but due to the other veterans' unwillingness to touch certain sore spots that Dana S. herself was unable to mask or ignore. Like Harley, Emo, and Leroy – Tayo's so called buddies –, these real-life veterans preferred to fill their conversations about wartime experiences with pleasant or amusing memories. Dana S. describes the nature of these situations as follows:

Male veterans either didn't recognize me as a real veteran or assumed they already knew what my war had been like. They were willing to joke about the *nuoc mam*, the jungle rot, and the Saigon tea, but they weren't willing to exhume the pain. I felt only partially connected to them: We shared the same esoteric vocabulary and arcane geography, but it seemed we didn't share the same emotional terrain (Hansel et al. 97, italics in original).

When Tayo spends time with his fellow Laguna war veterans, there is no comfort, understanding, or healing available to him. They are the closest thing to friends that Tayo has left after having lost both Rocky and Josiah, so he continues his efforts to try to have a good time in their company, despite the sad results that these occasions regularly have. He eventually realises that this kind of company is poison to him, but not before he has made some considerable progress in restoring his
self-esteem and will to live.

3.3 The Healing Process

The war is over for you. Your are discharged. Back to civilian life: But how? (James F. Sedgley, Platoon Sergeant – Hansel et al. 65).

"Many early cultures required a ritual purification of the soldier returned from war” - this is how Hansel et al. begin their chapter on “Isolation” in Soldier's Heart (45). The reason for this, they continue their statement, was that “the warrior, as well as his friends, family, and community recognized and accepted the reality of the warrior's participation in combat, accepted the fact that he was changed by it, and that he needed to be re-integrated and welcomed into society upon his return” (45).

This “flow of acknowledgement, support, and purification” can become disrupted or even be made impossible due to a variety of circumstances (Hansel et al. 45). In the case of the Vietnam war, acknowledgement of the full picture of US veterans' reality was thwarted by the controversies surrounding the war, and certainly also by the fact that it was an unsuccessful war for the United States. In the case of many Native American war veterans that had survived WWII but subsequently succumbed to its long-term effects in the form of drinking, drug abuse, loss of control, and violence, the reasons for failing to readjust were different. Even though their cultures belonged to that group of early cultures that Hansel et al. describe in the quote above, the effect of the purification rituals was not always enough any more to ban the metaphorical demons of war.

When Tayo is treated by the Laguna healer Ku'oosh, he cannot shake the feeling that even this will not be enough to help him disentangle the chaos that is suffocating his soul. Ku'oosh's methods are shaped after an image of the world that is not appropriate any more, at least not when it comes to a case such as Tayo’s – they are based on old stories. Since stories are so very important in Laguna culture, the logical conclusion is that Tayo now has to devise a story of his own, a story that adequately reflects his way through the tangled mess in his mind. The concept is most definitely not foreign to Tayo, since it is stated that when he was a child, “he had believed that on certain nights, [...], a person standing on the high sandstone cliff of that mesa could reach the moon. [...] If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; [...] it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone” (19). In Tayo's case, no one has gone the way he has to go before him, therefore he must find it himself. The significance of his quest has been instilled into him through his maternal culture which says the following about the meaning of stories for the
well-being of the people: “They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off/illness and death./ [...] So they try to destroy the stories, let the stories be confused or forgotten./ [...] We would be defenseless then” (2).

The importance of stories, of words, of being able to call things by their names is made clear already in the very beginning of Ceremony, when a Native American story of creation is told by the narrative voice: “Thought-Woman is sitting in her room and whatever she thinks about/ appears [...] Thought-Woman, the spider/named things and/as she named them/ they appeared” (1). Calling a thing by its name – even if only in thought – makes it real, tangible, and it is the first step to making it possible to deal with it and come to terms with it. If you cannot even name your problem, how are you ever going to figure out how to fix it? Consequently, it is Tayo's task to find a way to make sense of his inner turmoil, to literally wrap his mind around it, to put the things that happened to him into a larger perspective: the story of himself, his life, and the world that surrounds him. In order to find peace and harmony, Tayo must find his place in the overall pattern that makes up his world, he has to find out who he is, where he comes from, and where he wants to be going.

Tayo's task to make sense of what has been happening to him is important “not only for [his] sake, but for this fragile world” (36). His task is to bravely face the horrors that fill his head, that he has been trying so hard to keep invisible by keeping busy, keeping moving “so that the sinews connected behind his eyes did not slip loose and spin his eyes to the interior of his skull where the scenes waited for him” (9).

At first, Tayo does not feel ready to undertake this quest at all, he probably is not even aware of the fact that he has been given a quest. He is still a captive of his crushing guilt – the guilt he feels for having cursed away the rain clouds that bothered him so in the Philippine jungle and that are now sorely missed back home in the barren desert, and the guilt for letting both Rocky and Josiah die without doing anything to help them. This survivor's guilt is ailing many war veterans, and can be very hard to overcome. It is named in almost all of the veterans' accounts in Soldier's Heart; it affects both soldiers and medical staff. Though a rational analysis of the events that cause the survivors such anguish would likely yield the finding that hardly any of them have any reason to blame themselves, the survivors' emotional assessment tends to look quite different. Hansel et al describe the importance of laying these issues to rest by reaching a state of acceptance:

Acceptance requires remembering traumatic events, often in a therapeutic setting, and getting back in touch with the feelings connected to these events. It can mean accepting that you lived when others died, without having to forgive yourself for living. It can mean accepting the death of others, and honoring their memory without forever carrying the debilitating grief of their loss, or the hopeless burden of keeping
them alive through thoughts (Hansel et al. 172).

Tayo's process of acceptance is finally set into gear when his uncle Robert takes him to the Navajo healer Betonie. With Betonie's help, Tayo begins to see a measure of clarity in the chaos of his life's story. Betonie's home is in the notorious city of Gallup, where the clash of Native American and white culture is especially blatant: poor, homeless Native Americans dwell on the banks of the river, drunkards roam the streets at night, but when it is time for a massive number of tourists to arrive for the celebration of the annual Gallup Ceremonial, all those undesirable subjects are temporarily driven out of town, so that they cannot spoil the picture. This is where Tayo spent his earliest years, maybe even saw his first light of day, and this is also where he is spiritually reborn, despite all of his initial fears regarding Betonie, and his own family's motives for sending him to the old man.

Since Betonie is such a peculiar character whose house is filled to the brim with strange artefacts, herbs, roots, old newspapers, telephone books, and calendars, Tayo suspects him of being a witch, and is temporarily convinced that his family has sent him here to get rid of him once and for all. Though he is certain that the old man would not stand a chance against him if he decided to fight his way out of this situation, Tayo stays put, paralysed by “the pain of betrayal [...] He was tired of fighting. If there was no one left to trust, then he had no reason to live” (122). “Despair. Mistrust. Fear.” – these are the words that Hansel et al. employ to characterise the feelings that commonly occur in veterans who are taking their first steps in the process of seeking help (59). “After rejecting and feeling rejected by society, vets are forced not only to admit their ‘weakness’ to a stranger, but also to invest something they have jealously guarded for many years – their trust” (Hansel et al. 59). Just like the veterans described by Hansel et al., Tayo feels that he is stepping out on uncertain terrain with this new approach to dealing with his illness.

Tayo’s misgivings do not escape Betonie’s attention, and being the straightforward person that he is, Betonie tells Tayo that if he cannot trust the medicine man, he should better leave before nightfall – “You can’t be too careful these days, [...] Anyway, I couldn’t help anyone who was afraid of me” (123). Apparently, this no-nonsense approach works, since Tayo decides to stay and confide in Betonie. When Tayo tells Betonie that he is considering going back to the hospital, because he was not afraid there, Betonie tells him in clear words that going back there would not be any better than letting his life waste away in the slums of Gallup, because “in that hospital they don’t bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them” (123). In the course of this first conversation, Betonie makes it clear to Tayo that he has to shift his focus away from what his aunt wants and believes, away from the guilt and the feeling of inadequacy that she has instilled in him all his life. He reminds Tayo that he, along with everybody else, is responsible for shaping this world and preserving it from corruption: “We all have been waiting for help a long time. But it never has been
easy. The people must do it. You must do it” (125).

Tayo's reaction to this is intense, “the words like knives stuck into his guts” - he knows that what the old man is saying is true, but at the same time he is angry, terrified, and possibly embarrassed, because suddenly it becomes obvious to him that he has been fed a lie not only by his aunt, but also by the white doctors who have told him – even “yelled” at him – that “he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like ‘we’ and ‘us’” (125). Tayo suddenly realises that neither his aunt, nor the doctors are right about him not being a part of a bigger ‘we’ – he finally realises something that he has known all along, namely that “the world didn't work that way” (125).

Betonic, who is a mixed-breed Native American himself, manages to identify and address the core of Tayo's problems. He is an unconventional sort of healer that is met with distrust by many of the more conservative members of the local tribes. These people, Betonic tells Tayo, believe that the traditional ceremonies must not be tampered with under any circumstances. But, he continues, that is a misconception, because “long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, [...] in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing” (126). According to Betonic, the arrival of the white people in the world of the native tribes has caused a shift in the elements that has made active changes to the ceremonies necessary. Betonic then reveals to Tayo that his ceremonies already include these changes, and that he is convinced that this is the right thing to do, despite the deep mistrust of the people. He bases his assumption on the teachings of his Mexican grandmother, who has told him that “things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are the things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth” (126).

Betonic's ritual stretches out over several days and nights, during which he, together with his helper Shush and Tayo, covers some ground in the surrounding mountain landscape. The ceremony consists of chants and sandpaintings, which is a traditional Navajo concept and therefore might be difficult to grasp for Western readers. However, the underlying idea seems to be to re-establish a place in the world for Tayo by physically placing him in the middle of the sandpainting, and to guide his mind back home by letting him step through several hoops along the painted footprints of a bear. In the end, Betonic informs Tayo about certain images – a star constellation, spotted cattle, a mountain, and a woman – that he has seen in visions during the ceremony, and that will be important for Tayo on his continued way. He also reminds him that “one night or nine nights won't do it any more, [...] the ceremony isn't finished yet” (152).

The novel reaches a crossroads at this point, and takes on a new direction. From now on, the storyline becomes more linear and chronological, following Tayo's personal hero quest. Along with this comes an abundance of ‘magical’ elements that remind of fairy tales. Since it would take up too
much space to analyse the meaning of all the spiritual symbols that appear during Tayo's quest and help him along the way, I will limit myself to examining the underlying psychological structures of the milestones that Tayo reaches on his journey to self-discovery.

The most vital parts of Tayo's task are to claim control of his fate and to identify his driving force. In order to accomplish the first part, he has to deny his aunt any power that she has had over him during the years, enforced by her “eyes and her teeth set hard on edge” (152). He also has to accept his white heritage, and Betonie settles that matter with a determined declaration: “Nothing is that simple […], you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians” (128). As for the second part – identifying his driving force –, that is something that Tayo has in common with many sufferers from PTSD; he has to come to terms with what has happened, and discover his aim in life, something worth fighting for. In the words of Paul Cohen from Soldier's Heart: “I could not go back and erase what happened. Like a diabetic, I could learn to live with it./But first I had to find something to live for. I needed a mission” (Hansel et al. 197).

Taking on a mission, becoming active, is a crucial part in taking control of one’s own life. Unfortunately, many war veterans who suffer from PTSD never reach the point where they feel ready to actively guide their lives into a positive direction, and Hansel et al. give tribute to that fact by choosing the title of their last chapter in Soldier's Heart with great care. “Healing”, “Acceptance”, or “Integration” are mentioned as tempting possibilities that were dismissed due to the fact that most veterans do not experience themselves as fully healed, integrated, or able to accept the nature of their experiences (170-171). The title that was chosen instead is Making Sense Of It All, because the veterans' contributions to the book show evidence that making sense of the experiences is at the core of the healing process. Hansel et al. construe that this process “can be viewed as a series of plateaus, upon which veterans pause as they make sense of their lives. At each plateau, they can stop and live awhile – a lifetime if they choose – deciding to accept who and what they are. Or they can go on, pursuing a greater sense of well-being within themselves or with society” (171, italics in original).

During the course of the novel, Tayo also reaches several plateaus of recovery – for example following the efforts of the healer Ku’oosh. Betonie’s ceremony carries him onto a new, much higher level that he has scarcely dared to hope might be possible. With the help of Betonie, Tayo quickly discovers the nature of his personal mission – he has to accept his uncle Josiah's inheritance: the spotted cattle. By finding and reclaiming the lost cattle, Tayo can fulfil Josiah's dream of creating a new, tough and robust breed that manages to survive on the reservation's barren land even during a drought. He can thus contribute to liberating the inhabitants of the reservation from their status of victimisation, by providing them with tools that can help to fight poverty. At the same time, this action will bring back a part of Josiah into Tayo's life.
The story could end with Tayo retrieving the cattle into his family’s possession and living happily ever after, but Silko pursues a more encompassing path. She lets her hero pass through several more trying situations, tempting him to follow the seemingly easier way – alcohol, denial, corruption – that the ‘destroyers’, led by Emo, have intended for him, and she finally lets him prevail both spiritually and physically. She lets him see “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. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (246).

Silko also provides Tayo with a perfect love match – the girl Ts'eh, who fills “the hollow spaces [in his belly] with new dreams” (219). Though the novel never quite reveals whether this girl is an actual person or just a figment of Tayo's imagination, she certainly helps him overcome his problems in a very substantial way. In the end, Tayo has successfully rejoined the community of his family. His re-established self-security has even gained him the acceptance of his aunt, who cannot find anything “left to watch for” – that is: no new shame – in his face (259). Instead, Auntie rails against Tayo's former buddies, who have let themselves be corrupted to the point of no return. The end of their story is the death of Harley, Leroy, and Pinkie at the hands of Emo – though the latter has managed to make all the murders look like accidents, and therefore does not end up in prison but is sent off into exile from the tribe. Tayo's story, on the other hand, has only just begun, as the novel's last words symbolise: “Sunrise,/accept this offering,/Sunrise” (262).
4. Conclusion

Though Silko's novel *Ceremony* is set in the context of Native American culture, with a hero whose personal background is strongly coloured by the value system of the Laguna Pueblo society, the story's essential issues can be seen as valid even within a larger frame of reference. The underlying psychological dynamics that Silko describes in her novel do not only apply to her hero Tayo, but can even be observed in the accounts of real-life U.S. American war veterans who suffer from PTSD. Their most striking commonality is the fact that all of them have lost access to their old frame of reference, that is to their peers, to their culture, and their former self-image.

Tayo’s road to healing may contain more spiritual aspects than that of the average PTSD-suffering war veteran, though it is not uncommon for such veterans to turn to religion in their struggle to find meaning in their experiences. *Soldier’s Heart* documents this, but it also documents a number of cases where healing seems unreachable and bitterness is the predominant force. In *Ceremony*, this side of the coin is represented by Emo and his gang, albeit tinged with a dose of mythical, fairy tale-like villainy. The path that they choose is a one-way road to destruction, and their doom comes upon them rather quickly. They are clearly not the kind of characters that anyone would want to identify with – they are the ones that willingly succumb to their bitterness and negativity, blaming everybody else, but never themselves.

Tere is reason to assume that the novel, especially in its second half, can seem quite strange and possibly even offensive to readers who come from a different culture than the author. Although some of the statements of Silko's characters could potentially serve as counterbalance, there is a strong emphasis on the inadequacy of white people. Not only are they – quite rightfully – accused of stealing the Native Americans' land, and exploiting it without regard to possible negative consequences, they are also described as being “only tools” that have been “invented” by Indian witchery to draw away attention from the real issue at hand: the witches secret plot to plunge the world into chaos and destruction (132). It may therefore be tempting to write off *Ceremony* as a typical effort to boast the image of the “Ecological Indian” who cares so much more about the fate of the world than white people do (Garrard 120).

However, there are a number of indicators that *Ceremony* has a deeper meaning than that. Betonie's advice to Tayo to evaluate each person individually, whether the person is white or a Native American, is one of the most important indicators. Though the tale of the ‘invention’ of white people can seem like an affront to the other race, it has to be seen as nothing more than a creational myth – Betonie's advice, on the other hand, concerns the status quo: white people exist, and no matter how they came into this world, they still cannot be condemned as a whole. They are part of the story now, they cannot simply be dismissed. Emo and his followers personify the
untrustworthy Indians, making it clear that it is not enough to just be a full-blooded Native American – if you desecrate the land, you desecrate the land. The will to harm and destroy does not know any racial boundaries in *Ceremony*.

Last but not least, the numerous similarities between the thoughts and feelings attributed to Tayo, and those described in the accounts of real-life war veterans collected in *Soldier’s Heart* serve as evidence that the issues that Tayo is facing are not restricted to the Laguna Pueblo culture. His story is also the story of many other people who, regardless of their cultural background, have been catapulted out of their world as they knew it by a traumatising event or development. Like Tayo, all of these people need to formulate and share their story, because the world is constantly changing, and this change has to be acknowledged and documented. If its existence is hushed and the sharing of the stories suppressed, negativity spreads and leads to bitterness and destructiveness. By telling their story, even though it might be uncomfortable to hear for many who have not yet felt the effects of the changes in person, the witnesses of the alterations “contribute to and benefit from the formation of a communal narrative memory” (Garrard 126).
5. Bibliography


