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Ceremony: (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)



Synopsis

Thirty years since its original publication, *Ceremony* remains one of the most profound and moving works of Native American literature, a novel that is itself a ceremony of healing. Tayo, a World War II veteran of mixed ancestry, returns to the Laguna Pueblo Reservation. He is deeply scarred by his experience as a prisoner of the Japanese and further wounded by the rejection he encounters from his people. Only by immersing himself in the Indian past can he begin to regain the peace that was taken from him. Masterfully written, filled with the somber majesty of Pueblo myth, *Ceremony* is a work of enduring power.

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Customer Reviews

I'd read some of Leslie Marmon Silko's short stories before starting on this novel. They were like gems, polished, smooth, and echoing with a gentle quiet not commonly found in English literature. *CEREMONY* is a far more ambitious undertaking; the building of a literary castle. Set in New Mexico, in and around Laguna Pueblo, immediately after WW II, the plot concerns a young Indian war veteran who has been traumatized by his experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese. When we meet him, he's barely conscious, being released from a mental hospital. He lost his half-brother on the Bataan death march, his favorite uncle had died at home, a herd of special cattle---adapted to life in the desert---has disappeared, and his old friends are drinking themselves away in bars. To top it all off, Tayo, the central character, is illegitimate and half-white, raised by relatives, not accepted fully by everyone in the family. He seems destined for the asylum, jail, an early death from alcohol, or suicide; not exactly unknown fates for young Indians then or now. Elders arrange a healing

ceremony for him, but the healer is a maverick, not tied to traditional methods. Tayo's whole life and consciousness merge into the healing process and that process begins to look like a prescription for the Indian peoples in North America to heal nearly-fatal wounds dealt their cultures over the last five centuries. Silko sees the materialism and violence of Western civilization as a curse threatening the continued existence of everyone on the planet, a curse stemming from evil itself rather than from a particular group of people. In tones that ring most uncannily today, she wrote in 1977 [p.191] "If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery; they would never know that they were still being manipulated by those who knew how to stir the ingredients together: white thievery and injustice boiling up the anger and hatred that would finally destroy the world: the starving against the fat, the colored against the white." The ceremony thus begins as a curative ritual for a single man, but expands beyond a simple hogaan to the whole world. Dream figures come to life, life becomes a dream, life is healing and healing is life. Silko attempted a very difficult task and I am not sure that it is entirely successful. Sometimes, the pieces don't seem to match. Her World War II sequences don't ring entirely true either. Americans never evicted Japanese soldiers from caves before the Bataan death march; they were not executing prisoners then. The shoe was on the other foot. But these are quibbles. CEREMONY's language, the poetry, the beauty of the land, the theme of healing--- all come through to make an unforgettable novel, an original voice that deserves an honored place in American literature. If you have a special interest in Native American literature and have enjoyed N. Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, or Sherman Alexie, Silko's work will be a welcome addition.

Never have I read such a novel as cathartic and therapeutic as Silko's "Ceremony". I first encountered it in an English Lit. class in college. As 'sophomoric' as I thought I was at the time, it was not until a few years later that I reread the novel and fully grasped what was being said through the protagonist Tayo and his actions. "Ceremony" is a journey of the soul, a Bataan Death March that we are all forced to experience at some point or another in our lives. That is what makes this novel timeless and accessible to us all. Leslie Marmon Silko, who I believe won a literary award for this novel, opens the heart and mind of the reader to a theme which has been recorded since the ancient Greeks (see Aeschylus' "Oresteia"), that of mathos through pathos, enlightenment through suffering. Having already paid a heavy price as a veteran of WWII, Tayo returns to the suffering of his tribe. It is then that Tayo is able to recover what he never knew he had lost, his heritage and soul that was intricately linked to everyone and everything around him. The author attacks the demons

plaguing Tayo with the rich symbolism in Native American culture (pay particular attention to the use of yellow and blue colors) and the aid of an enigmatic medicine man. Silko's weapons are in Native American song and myth, histories that empower Tayo to fight the state of mind that oppresses the Laguna Pueblo people on his reservation. With this, Tayo is able to finish his Bataan Death march once and for all, his past behind him, and his heart born again as true a Native American.

Richard Alvarez Gonzalez 802-90-0261 Expository Writing Review of Ceremony

War is one of the most terrible evils man has known, yet it has been going on for ages. Since the beginning of known history man has been at war with his fellow man, himself and the world. In Leslie Marmon's novel Ceremony the point of view towards war is different from that of most people. A sense of loss takes central stage in the novel; loss of loved ones, loss of land, of heritage, and loss of self. Tayo and his cousin, Rocky, joined the army looking for a way out and adventure, they would go and fight a Great War. While fighting in the jungles of Asia, Rocky gets killed. Now Tayo is back, the war is over, but not for him. Tayo feels responsible for his cousin's death. He was supposed to protect him and he failed, and now his memory haunts Tayo's every second of existence. In the beginning of the novel we take a look into Tayo's disturbed and tormented mind, as he takes us along the story of his life, of death, war, and rejection. Tayo is a man desperately trying to hold on to his sanity while he wastes it away on a bottle of alcohol which sends him into constant sickness spells and confines him to a bed from which he is terrified to move. As his sickness progresses, Tayo is taken to see a medicine man that sends him on a journey to retrieve his uncle's dreams, thus putting his own fears and doubts to rest. It is during this journey that Tayo completes his healing process with the aid of a woman with whom he will fall deeply in love, Ts'eh, a mystical character that appears and disappears various time in the novel, seeming as if a dream or a creation of Tayo's mind. Ts'eh is a very interesting character because there seems to be various references to her in the novel, but with different names, adding another spark of magic to the story, and making it a trip into fantasy and wonder. Of course, the story is full of legends and mystical occurrences, unlikely events that seem to complete the story and make it right; and poems that interrupt the story and explain the Laguna people beliefs, merging with the story and coming together in a story of hope. Complex and engaging, Ceremony reveals a whole new world of magic, mysticism and beauty. It is a book that must be read carefully in order to understand all the little details here and there, which will in order reveal a much larger picture. A piece of literature which may carry different meanings, and messages, to different readers.

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