



Nature and Psychological Engineering: An Ecopsychological Study of Silko's Ceremony

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at investigating the relationship between the human mind crisis in relation to its immediate environment in Leslie Silko's Ceremony. Ecological psychology is the study of the psychological origins of the ecological crisis, as well as the interaction between the human mind and the Earth's ecological crisis. An entirely new perspective and research methodologies have been provided by Ecological psychology for post-traumatic psychological healing as well as the proper handling of man-nature relationships. From an ecopsychological perspective, post-traumatic psychological resilience should be guided by ecological psychology theory, starting with ecological psychology regarding post-traumatic resilience, to establish a green eco-psychotherapy system, to attain harmony between nature and man, pay heed to trauma, and continue to grow. In the 1990s, the field of ecological psychology grew in popularity. Ecological psychology has made a positive attempt to investigate the core causes of the problems that human society and psychology have faced. It has a significant value in enforcing environmental consciousness, strengthening environmental learning, and expanding psychological research and application. In Ceremony, Tayo's character is suffering post-traumatic conditions and environmental disconnection. When he refurbishes his relation with nature he gets healed and his mental peace returns. The study exhibits how significant it is to renew a good relationship between man and nature to bring and maintain joy and peace on Earth.

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1. Introduction

Ceremony portrays human psychological relationship of Native Americans people with their native environment and its effects on them during the period of colonization of their native land. Whiteman's culture deeply tempered the native culture and unearthed many people from their roots. This up-rootedness from their surroundings brought a kind of alienation among such people who succumbed to the Whiteman's ways. Resultantly, Native American people were stranded and entangled by different intricate psychological complexities. The cure for such maladies lay in their rich cultural and environmental norms customs and tradition like storytelling, native rituals, and tribal myths. American Indian writers through their literary discourses have showcased their resistance vehemently. They define themselves in relation to their land-based existence and in a harmonized interaction with their environment instead of Western way of life that emphasis esseparateliving. The whiteman's war shown in *Ceremony* suggests Tayo's mental sickness and his return to his own environment that heals him to the full. Tayo, a war veteran, with a *whitewashed* mind was a misfit among his own people until he embraces his own Eco family. Through the character of Tayo, Silko shows the psychological issues suffered by the Native American people due to their refusal from embracing their environment before the advent of the Whiteman. Tayo like many

other Native American people is ensnared by the two extremes: indigenous and outlandish. Tayo is both psychological and physically removed from his own environment and hence is subject to spiritual and physical issues. Silko's description of the land, the character of Tayo, and the ritual of ceremony reflect the healing and soothing process of the native people emphasizing their land-bounded existence in connection to their immediate natural surroundings. Throughout the novel, Silko manifests the importance and richness of Native traditions and their sense of connectedness to their environment and motivates the need to ensure the eco-consciousness to live a healthy and joyful life.

2. Literature Review

Silko very artistically demonstrates an eco-conscious way of living of Native Americans in *Ceremony*. She gives an exhaustive account of Native American people mentally removed from their surroundings and are *enlightened* by the Whiteman to abhor their own natural environment they are actually a part of this disconnection from their environment was not only physical but also had caused a mental detachment from their ancestral spiritual way of Native life. In this way they were subject to dissimilar mental disorders. This sense of rootlessness is a consequence of dissimilar historical and individual issues. Alcohol consumption among Native Americans is one of the basic reasons for their devastated and chaotic images. In his essay, "Images of Drinking in *Woman Singing*, *Ceremony*, and *House Made of Dawn*" Warner (1984) says that:

Not surprisingly, the issue of the "drunken Indian" has also preoccupied a number of Native American writers, ... offer strikingly complementary visions of Indian drinking: N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Simon Ortiz' "*Woman Singing*" (1969), and Silko (1974). While each of these writers avoids the easy moralizing of temperance fables or of earlier sentimental tales of naive noble red men corrupted by liquor-dealing white devils, they all view drinking as a major source of Indian alienation and cultural decay. (pp. 15-30)

Silko's autobiographical sights are apparent in *Ceremony* as she herself shuffled between two different cultures in her life. Silko (2003) states, "The stories are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together. Don't go away, don't isolate yourself, but come here, because we have all had these experiences together" (p. 59). Silko in *Ceremony* portrays diverse situations of spiritual and psychological connectedness which emphasizes the native eco-consciousness and its healing effects on the native human life.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Emergence of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, as a new literary theory, arose in the closing years of the 20th century. It aimed at redefining man's relationship with the natural world. It was William (1978) who first coined the term "Ecocriticism". It comprises both ecological and critical tenants. The word ecology, having its origin in Greek language, is derived from the Greek word 'Oikos' meaning "home/house," while criticism deriving from *kritikos*, means "capable of judging." William Howarth construed Ecocriticism as "house judge" i.e. to be able to evaluate the integrity and quality of that home. Hence, Ecocriticism examines human literary expressions in relation to the natural environment based on this (Fenn, 115).

Prior to begin with Ecocriticism, it is worth noticing that ecology examines the relationships that exist between organisms and the environments in which they find themselves. Ecocriticism is broadly defined as the interrelationships among plants, animals, and people, as well as their environment. In this sense, Donald Hughes says:

Human ecology...is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of the human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt; with its air, climates and weather; with its many living things, animals and planets, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun (Ben G., 13).

Resultantly, ecology is considered to be the natural web of life, with humans occupying a place within it (Ben G., 15). Nevertheless, ecocriticism emerges to assess this natural

network where humans are viewed as superior to other creatures. In 1990s, critics began to attempt to delineate the theory in detail and determine what it actually represents.

Ecocriticism is defined by William Rueckert, known as an authority in this field, as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, xx). In 1996, the exponent of Ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty described it as "the study of the link between literature and the physical environment." Ecocriticism offers an earth-centered approach to literary studies, says Glotfelty, "much as feminist criticism studies literature and language from a gender-conscious viewpoint and Marxist critique inculcates an understanding of modes of production and economic class to its reading of works" (Glotfelty and Harold Formm, xviii).

Ecocriticism, according to the definitions, explores problems regarding man's relationship with nature that has hitherto been ignored by the academics of literature. Ecocriticism lays emphasis on simplicity, beauty, equality, esteem, and consciousness among all the species in the immediate physical environment they are surrounded with. It is Eco critics are of the opinion that beauty may be found in the reciprocal human-nature relationship as well as in natural environments. The fact that all plants and animals, including humans, are members of the same family on Earth is what gives the planet its true beauty. Similarly, it promotes preservation of plants and animals whom ecology accepts as an integral part of its system, as each organism has value in its own being and it functions vitally in the natural web of life.

Ecocriticism has now been broadened and linked to other humanitarian and social sciences. The prefix 'eco' is associated with dissimilar approaches such as eco-feminism, eco-politics, eco-terrorism, eco-psychology, and even eco-phobia in many fields. Today, conglomerating theory with other sciences, social and humanitarian, is required to effect change in the lives of the entire species. The word 'eco', in this respect, has been added to psychology to create a new discipline aimed at reconnecting the psyche of humans with nature. The theory's rapid spread demonstrates its usefulness in assessing the myriad difficulties that face species and the entire Earth.

3.2 Ecopsychology

In his book, *The Voice of the Earth*, published in 1992, Theodore Roszak is credited to originate the term Ecopsychology. It is derived from the words "psychology" and "eco," which both imply "study of the spirit or soul." As a result, Eco-psychology evolves as a blend of psychology and ecology that looks into the human psyche in terms of its relation to its natural environment. The term was coined in an influential endeavor to draw together psychologists and environmentalists psychologists for intellection that would benefit both the areas of knowledge. Ecopsychology emerged as a new academic subject as a result of their efforts, with the express aim of exploring the human inner world in connection to the outer (Corbett & Milton, 2011).

Earth-centered therapy green therapy, Ecotherapy, and nature-based psychotherapy are some of the terms used to describe the theory. Whit Hibbard defines Ecopsychology as the "greening of psychology," which he describes as the "healing of the human psyche in relation to nature" (28, 2003). A number of critics and academics have attempted to describe the idea in order to determine its essential objectives. Ecopsychology is a term used to describe a method of studying the relationship between humans and the natural environment by means of ecological and psychological principles. It aims to bring together psychologists and ecologists to discover and understand new approaches to human beings' emotional bonds with the natural environment (Blaschke, 3). In point of fact, the human-nature interaction is not a topic that has recently been brought up in literary works. As a result, scholars such as Cauty and John Davis explain Ecopsychology as a reawakening and growth of humanity's lost connection to the natural world (10, 2013).

Nevertheless, the rise of eco-psychology in the wake of the complexities of the modern contemporary world, on the other hand, is a necessity to stir up unconscious human minds to this very fact that the Earth confronts numerous ecological issues. It is noteworthy that discussing the Earth's ecological issues isn't done to instill fear, but rather because humans are

the most significant users of natural resources without having any ecological consciousness (Fisher, 5).

The idea of the 'ecological unconscious,' a relationship between the outside world and human psyche, was initially promulgated by Theodore Roszak (Davis & Canty, 2013). Moreover, Ecopsychology promotes ecological consciousness by means of reawaking the unconscious human mind. Roszak is referring to a man's unconsciousness regarding his surroundings in this context. He claims that the ecological unconscious resides at the heart of the mind. An industrial society is plagued by collusive madness because of a deep repression of its ecological unconscious, according to eco-psychology. Hence, unabated access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity. (Hibbard, 44). Roszak claims that true access to the unconscious mind in a corporate age is difficult, but that humans should recognize that awakening of the unconscious mind is necessary for a healthy mind and behaviour toward the natural environment.

The ecological unconsciousness is reinvented, as though it were a gift, in the newborn's charmed sense of the world, observes Roszak, who advocates for people to experience nature from a young age. In functionally "sane" adults, Ecopsychology aims to reclaim the child's naturally animistic quality of experience (Hibbard, 44). In this respect, Howard Clinebell claims that Ecopsychology assists humans in recovering this gift as a resource for establishing what Roszak refers to as the "ecological ego," which is critical in transforming man's attitudes and behaviours toward nature. To build a spiritual and emotional relationship with nature, Roszak considers that positiveness of attitudes and acts toward the natural world can be nurtured in childhood. It's a kind of strategy to encourage people to respect the whole ecosystem by integrating their spirit into the eco-family.

In terms of the Earth and environment, human civilization is currently at a turning point. In addition to issues caused by humans, a reluctance to abandon the cultural paradigm in favour of nature makes progress difficult. Humans, Ecocritics think, need to be made aware of their current thinking structures and attitudes toward nature are causing issues for them in the future (Leigh, 3). As a result, eco-psychologists contend that human health is intertwined with the health of the earth and that the two are reciprocally inclusive of one another (Leigh, 6). A healthy and sound relationship is typically reciprocal and beneficial to both parties in that it helps them retain a good outlook by avoiding feelings of anxiety, despair, rage, and overwhelm (Carrington, 7). Hence, it is critical to reconnect the psyche of human beings to nature in order to live a healthy life.

As a matter of fact, there is no way of oral interaction between humans and nature; however, there is a need for a deep connection between the inner and outer worlds. More than an intellectual endeavor, Ecopsychology necessitates a thorough dive into the inner world. Scenery, plants, animals, and other aspects and products of the Earth are all included in nature as a phenomenon. In this context, a human-nature interaction is one where humans interact with natural elements such as animals, plants, and the terrain (Carrington, 7). Ecopsychology promotes direct interaction with nature in order to make people more aware and sensitive to their environment. Furthermore, the profound human-nature relationship encourages individuals to think optimistically and shift from anxiety and dejection to love and delight.

4. Textual Analysis

Silko, in *Ceremony*, not only emphasizes the equality of all products of nature, including humans but also their relation to each other along with its effects. *Ceremony* exposes man's exploitation of nature's bleak environment and nature's impact on human consciousness and mental peace. *Ceremony* is an Ecopsychological endeavor aimed at inspecting the man's relation to his environment and its response by implying Ecopsychological theory. Her ultimate goal is to create an environmentally sound environment free of oppression and psychological issues. This is because she opposes "the conventional dominance of nature in mainstream Western society"). Ceremonchy demonstrates her belief that human happiness is directly linked to its immediate environment. The earth's prosperity is inextricably linked. Western civilization, according to Joseph Meeker, is "the collective image of the tragic hero facing ecological disaster," and "our presumed conquest over nature has brought little genuine satisfaction, for with it has come to the discovery that our very existence depends on the complexity of natural systems that were destroyed in the process" (35). The ideal healthy

man's relation lies in the harmony among all the members of Ecofamily and this harmony can be achieved by truly integrating oneself with one's ecosystem. The human integration with his ecoconsciousness instills in him a sense of rootedness to his true essence and enables him to integrate himself to the greater whole of this ecosystem.

Ceremony invites Native Americans to return to their rich indigenous culture by embracing the eco-family for a healthy joyful life. Tayo's experiences are narrated in the novel, who is suffering from post-traumatic effects of war. At first, Tayo is at Whiteman's hospital for treatment of his ailment but does not recover from it until he joins his native environment. He is isolated and sick but is healed when he reconnects with his eco-family Traditional Laguna activities such as storytelling and ceremonial rites which make Tayo learn about Laguna culture, history, and ecological consciousness and help him to synchronize with the psyche of his own people and land. He realizes that in order to get cured, he need store linquish the sense of individuality and accept a collective consciousness by hearing the stories and actively participating in a medicinal ceremony. The sickness of such veterans is a communal issue, therefore, their recovery is a communal one as well. *Ceremony* depicts the Laguna Pueblo people as a community sharing the same ecological consciousness, but the story also suggests a sense of connection between them and their immediate surrounding. In Native-American societies, language, tales, and rituals have extraordinary powers: ceremonies are the only remedy for human physical and psychological issues, and stories have the capacity to cure people of their ailments. The significance of sharing true stories is found in abundance in *Ceremony*. "If you don't have the stories, you don't have anything" (*Ceremony* 3). Native Americans, in particular, rely on stories and their nexus to the past to strengthen their relation to the ecosystem they are a part of. By keeping the interaction of the younger generation with their ancestors' psyche, they maintain the necessary mental peace and bliss.

According to a Native American myth, as narrated in *Ceremony*, after a protracted drought, Green Bottle fly and the Hummingbird were said to have restored fertility and water to the earth. This story is used to provide a contrast to Tayo's modern life experience. Mixed-blood ancestry of Tayo and his education set him apart from his own people. He finds himself unable to disregard the world of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants; it's a vital element of his conscious learning. He also discovers his inability to forget Pueblo traditions and stories at the same time. He needs to find a means to bridge the gap between this double consciousness. Tayo's quest for psychological wholeness in the midst of multiple traumatic conditions, ranging from a rough upbringing to cultural exclusion and World-war-II combat experiences, is the core conflict of the novel. The key to Tayo's psychological recovery is in reestablishing a connection to his Native - American eco-consciousness. Tayo tries various Native practices to help himself heal from his deep psychological injuries. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition that affects those who have experienced at terrible event. Being a Post-traumatic stress disorder patient Tayo is well aware that the army physicians will be unable to cure him, moreover, white man's medicine, he thinks, only treats the symptom without giving the complete healing. Even after returning to his homeland, Tayo's health worsens and his grandmother eventually sends him to Ku'oosh for healing. "But you know, grandson, this world is fragile," Ku'oosh says, looking into Tayo's eyes (*Ceremony*35). The fragility of the natural world, Ku'oosh believes, necessitates on going care and balance and a human connection in order to exist. Ku'oosh speaks to Tayo in an ancient language that Tayo struggles to understand. A long list is rattled out by Ku'oosh comprising strange places, names, and people to Tayo. This split from ecosystem demonstrates how far younger generations have drifted away from the pure shared ecoconsciousness that would have prevented them from such modern sicknesses. Humans have gradually begun to reject all old customs and beliefs in this age of reason, labeling them superstitious. Humans began to rationalize, ignoring the emotional and psychological aspects of human connection with the surrounding world, to the point that he lost sight of his true place in the ecosystem. The disequilibrium in the ecosystem was caused by crass materialism and persistent exploitation of natural resources, which were justified by reason. Many species have perished as a result of this imbalance, and many more are endangered. This unwarranted imbalance has started to imperil our own survival in the ecology. Josiah, Tayo's uncle, informs him. "Only humans had to endure anything," he said, "because only humans could resist what they saw outside themselves." Animals don't put up a fight" (*Ceremony*27). Native Americans have had a complex, respectful, psychologically and physically dependent, reciprocal and protective relationship with the land since time

immemorial. The nature of this bond is one of stewardship rather than ownership. They believe that the responsibility of caring for the land and all of the creatures who share it with them has been entrusted to them. This sense of obligation is more than an emotional bond; it is inextricably linked to all parts of the earth's spirits. Hence, it facilitates them with an ideal state of satisfaction and bliss fullness.

Ceremony depicts the wholeness and effects on a man, community, and the universe when a person or a part happens to be disintegrated to the whole. Disease, alienation, and segregation, according to Silko and the Laguna people, are a direct result of being successful to remember the stories and their role in them, to recognise the interconnectedness of all things and all people, and to realize the need to sustain the human connection to the organic world its yielded consciousness to create a reciprocal and harmonious equilibrium. The narrative revolves around Tayo's discovery that being a human requires a lot of energy and that humans are intricately linked to everything around them and this interdependence helps them claim a healthy ecofamily.

Ceremony's most pivotal moments take place wherever Tayo is either listening or participating in Native-American traditions. When medicine men visit him and return to conventional rituals and practices, or has a close relation with someone who lives in a traditional way, he makes progress toward healing. He finds psychological tranquility as he gains a better grasp of native cultural rituals and traditions and reestablishes his connection with natural phenomena, which he swiftly loses when he endeavours to find other ways of healing—whether in the war-glory on the battlefield, the alcoholic pleasures, or the medical methods of the army psychiatric hospital.

Josiah tells Tayo that "This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, the setrees, the vines, all the wild flowers. This earth keeps us going."But the wind and the dust, are part of life too, like the sun and the sky. You don't swear at them. It's people, see. They're the ones. (P.55 Ceremony). This acknowledgment on the part of Josiah shows how he and his fellow men consider their surround world a living organic whole where they all are equal. This harmonious relation establishes an intrinsic web awareness that keeps them connected. Their behaviour is responded reciprocally and affects back each other physically and psychologically. Josiah, Tayo's uncle, is well aware of the vitality of the harmony between the right time and place. Such spatio-temporal reverence is a significant aspect in knowing how to undergo mythic knowledge and how to fathom the potential psychological insights to get synchronized to the web of native ecoconsciousness. Tayo read books but ends up finding that these books do not collide with indigenous wisdom. "The problem was the books were written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with." (P.66) Whiteman's knowledge is shallow as the Whiteman only sees the outer realities and utility of these objects whereas for a native American the cattle are members of the ecofamily and they live with them in relation of complete harmony that establishes a healthy environment that provides them a soothing environment that cannot be possible otherwise. Tayo's submission to his native ecoconsciousness speeds up his healing process and eventually heals him too. Further, Tayo reminisces his killing off lies in his youth and telling of Josiah about the importance of the flies to his people. At the boarding school he was taught to kill flies as "they are bad and carry sickness" (P.89). Tayo was told by his uncle that forgiveness for the people was asked by a fly, hence, saved them from death: "Since that time the people have been grateful for what the fly did forus" (P.89) manifest their belief in mutual survival through caring each other and creating a relation of love unlike of hatred towards their ecological siblings and infusing sense of integrity in the higher ecosystem. If you save them, they will save you. Tayo also realises that healing demands right activation of memory, memory coming from the native land instilling the beliefs and extending health withing the things that is essential and natural to mind body. The Whiteman as Betonie believes "see no life when they look they see only objects. The world is a dead thing for them the trees and rivers are not alive. The deer and bear are objects they see no life." (P.113) The western education instead of enlightening the natives further removed them from nature and darkened their relation with their environment that is turning them insane which can now only be cured by communion with nature in a fulsome embrace with the embedded ancient native consciousness. Tayo is seen getting over his trauma as "he breathed deeply, and each breath had a distinct smell of snow from the north.... finally, he smiled. Being alive was all right then: he had not breathed like that for a long time." (P.115). Tayo manages to get over his sickness

and finds mental peace when he submits himself to the higher forces of ecosystem to establish a real connection to the consciousness, he was actually a part of. Returning to his native natural world was so surprisingly pleasant and healing as after reconnecting himself to that environment he realized that joy, tranquility, and bliss can be achieved by reconnecting his inner world with the natural world.

5. Conclusion

Leslie Marmon Silko expresses nature's belonging to humans and their psychological needs. She emphasizes to restore the lost connection with the natural world to get over mental maladies and regain the joy. The Earth can be a suitable place only if we listen to the music of the Earth which can be found in the true relation of man and nature. Tayo attains psychological equilibrium by placing himself in the most conducive environment. It heals Tayo from his post-traumatic stress and connects him mentally to ecosystem of his own people. He feels solace in nature and the surrounding world. The presence of all the members of this ecofamily helps him understand his relation to them and those who affected his awareness of his real self. In the moments of disintegration, despair, war, loneliness, and depression, environment helps him heal. Tayo's healing happens when he surrenders his *white-consciousness* to his native landed consciousness whereby he comes to realize his sense of being in the greater scheme of ecosystem of his own land, people, and understanding. Ceremony, through the process of the psychological healing of Tayo, reveals that the natural world and human beings must develop a sense of communion to consume happiness and tranquility.

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