

MYTHOLOGY IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *CEREMONY*

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In the novel, *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko relates the myth of the man transformed into a coyote by Coyote, and how his people performed a ceremony to slowly bring him back. This story relates to the story of Tayo and comes at a crucial point in the novel. Tayo has been transformed and he is at the beginning of his struggle back to life.

The myth in question is in the form of a poem, albeit one with complex structure and with little relation to traditional western poetry. In it, an old mother realizes that her son-in-law is missing and suspects Coyote, the trickster, of some mischief. She sends out people to search for the son-in-law, and after noting the abandoned hunt, the tracks in the sand and the places he slept beneath the trees, they find a coyote, whom they identify as the missing man. With the advice of the Bear People, they work a ceremony to restore the young man: they make hoops; they make bundles of twigs; they draw a corn painting and a Pollen Boy within.

This myth has many interesting aspects. Structurally, it rises to a point of anticipation before the man-coyote is found, and then moves into a second phase, the ceremony. In this first section, the influence of Coyote is always suspected. Coyote is a primal force in Native American mythology: a chaotic, creative, transformative force, both necessary in society and, in this case, a challenge to all that society holds dear. He has taken a man hunting alone, vulnerable and unsuspecting, and has transformed him. But the man cannot cope with life as a coyote, he is unable to adapt, and order must be restored.

The ceremony is the means for doing this, and contains some interesting imagery. The hoops are created from the wood of trees such as he had slept beneath as a coyote. He has become linked with these aspects of nature and must travel back through them, as if through doorways, to regain his humanity. Pollen Boy is at the

center of the ceremony, and pollen can be seen as a symbol of fertility and thus renewal. Blue is a recurring theme, and is the color of the sky and thus the source of sunlight. It could also represent water, vitally important in the deserts. Together, the image of a blue pollen boy points to growth: the energy of the sun, the touch of the water, the reproductive power of the pollen. And from growth can come healing.

Within the novel, this myth occurs very near the middle, as Tayo works with Old Man Betonie upon the first steps of his recovery. It is clear from the context that we are to associate Tayo with the lost man, for Tayo too is lost. Tayo went out to war – hunting – where he was away from his people and vulnerable. He has been returned to the Laguna but he has been transformed by the chaos. Just as the lost man cannot utter words, just nod his head, so too Tayo does not have the words to express what has happened to him. Tayo is sick and weak, just as the transformed man is. Yet, there is possibly hope, for while Coyote can be difficult, he is a trickster, not evil: his actions usually have a point. Transformation, if it can be dealt with, can cause a person to grow. There is the hope of ceremony, that if Tayo can embrace the ceremony and regain what he has lost, he will gain something more. Indeed, in the book, the myth is told as Tayo is preparing to undergo the same ceremony as in the myth, the same attempt at regeneration. Yet, just as the myth does not reveal whether the ceremony succeeded, we do not know whether the ceremony will succeed in Tayo's case either. Ceremonies take time: they are not merely the hoops and the bundles and the Pollen Boy, they are understanding and connection.

Traditionally Coyote tales were told orally, and thus this myth is within a non-traditional context. However, some aspects of the oral tradition remain: the structure retains a lyricism and the poem itself a power. In this

context, however, it has also become a myth within a myth, a reflection of the story of Tayo within the novel. This use has changed it in subtle ways. We read the myth relating it to Tayo, without considering it for itself.

This myth is used by Silko as analogous with the story of Tayo. At the point in the novel, it reinforces the use Silko makes of Tayo as the hero of his own myth, of the author's created mythology, by the strong connection between the two.