

# Academic Critical Analysis

**After reading "Tony's Story" from the Scribner Anthology, post a critical analysis of the relationship between Tony's mystic beliefs and loss of innocence. Your analysis should be between 150 and 250 words, and may include an implicit/explicit question that invites further discussion.**

Tony has never left the pueblo. His source of wisdom is "the stories that old Teofilo told." Leon has been influenced by his period in the military. Leon has forgotten what old Teofilo taught, and has become a modern Indian. We get the impression that there is a long distance between his beliefs and Tony's. Both Leon and Tony feel uneasy about the policeman, but they have different ways of dealing with evil. Leon talks about it. He brings the matter to the tribal council, speaks to the Governor who promises to send letters to the BIA and to the State Police Chief, and all the time Leon keeps referring to his rights. "He can't do it again. We are just as good as them." Tony has his dream and does not talk about it. "But I knew that cop was something terrible, and even to speak about it risked bringing it close to all of us; so I didn't say anything". Instead he wears his charm and when Leon refuses to wear one because he relies on his rifle for protection and not on charms, Tony wears two. He may need double luck. In Tony's dream vision a sacrifice is needed to regain the harmony. His only worry is that old Teofilo is not there to chant the proper words for such a ceremony. The evil force is annihilated and Tony, in a way, is comforted. "Don't worry, everything is O.K. now, Leon," Tony says. If it's possible that an evil force can take on a human form (even the form of an outsider such as a white state policeman) and cause drought by upsetting the harmony in the Pueblo, Tony's killing is allegorically logical and fictionally justified. If not, it is only a gruesome and hideous crime.

Part of me wants to believe that Tony murdered the officer - not as the starting point of losing his innocence - but rather as a result of having already lost it. I don't believe that someone's loss of innocence comes about as an action as much as it comes about as a change in thinking. Killing the policeman would never have come about if Tony didn't think a certain way about the situation. For me, a surprising point in the story came when Silko

described Leon's "horror" about Tony killing the cop. It made me question what Leon's horror was about exactly. Was it about the fact that Tony did the killing? Was it because the cop was a state cop? Or that the killing happened at all? Leon believed that having a gun with him was essential for protection and that he should get revenge. Tony killed the cop and knew exactly what to do, say and think afterwards. It was Leon who was dazed and lost. After all, Tony said - more than once throughout the story - that Leon just "didn't get it". It makes me wonder who really lost their innocence.

The oppressive heat of a drought is referred to several times during the story, and readers may think of it as just part of the setting. But by the end, we realize how vital the drought is in Tony's understanding of his own story. The drought has an active influence on events. Leon and Tony are taking part in different stories. Leon's story consists of a racist policeman while Tony's story consists of an evil spirit.

I think that the correlation between mystic beliefs and the loss of innocence are there, just deeply hidden in Silko's text. For example, after the cop hits Leon in the face on page 580, Silko writes: "The big cop didn't answer. He was staring at the little patterns of blood in the dust near Leon's mouth. The dust soaked up the blood almost before it dripped to the ground - it had been a very dry summer." Following that story, Silko goes on to touch on the consequences of the run in with the cop. Consequences like running away, fear, bitterness, protection, hiding, storms and death. Then, the text goes on to describe a scene with the exact same details as the scene on page 580- the scene when Tony killed the cop. Silko writes: "He was on his back, and the sand between his legs and along his left side was soaking up the dark, heavy blood - it had not rained for a long time, and even the tumble-weeds were dying." (583).

Both instances describe an element of the weather (the dust, the sand, the heat) and the closest thing to moisture they had (blood). After Leon was punched by the cop, Tony was with him during all that happened afterwards. He knew the consequences of having a run in with the cop. That's why I believe that Tony knew the circumstances of his actions after he killed the cop. Part of me wants to believe that Tony murdered the officer - not as the

starting point of losing his innocence - but rather as a result of having already lost it. I don't believe that someone's loss of innocence comes about as an action as much as it comes about as a change in thinking. Killing the policeman would never have come about if Tony didn't think a certain way about the situation. Tony says on page 583: "'We've got to kill it, Leon. We must burn the body to be sure.' Leon didn't seem to be listening. I kept wishing that old Teofilo could have been there to change the proper words while we did it." He was already toying with the idea of killing the cop before he did it. His absence of innocence is already evident in the way he thinks. Tony killed the cop and knew exactly what to do, say and think afterwards. It was Leon who was dazed and lost. After all, Tony said - more than once throughout the story - that Leon just "didn't get it". It makes me wonder who really lost their innocence.

Tony explains to Leon that he wears an arrowhead around his neck for protection. Leon replies: "You don't believe in that, do you?" and says that he has a .30-30 for protection purposes. Leon actually laughs at Tony and finishes by saying: "'What's the matter,' he said, 'have they brainwashed you into believing that a .30-30 won't kill a white man?' He handed back the arrowhead. 'Here, you wear two of them.'" In a pinch of irony, while wearing his arrowheads, Tony was the one who killed the cop with Leon's gun while Leon stood by and watched.

Leon appeared to be "all talk". When it came to displaying and using his "toughness", enforcing "his rights" and his "desire to get revenge", he would tremble, run away, fidget and shake instead. He would say things out of bitterness (such as his desire to kill the cop). But when the cop was really and truly killed, it was Leon - not Tony - who was shocked, scared, horrified, etc. Throughout the story, Leon spouted things off, almost as a little kid does, giving no attention to the reality of what he was saying. That's why I believe he lost his innocence instead of Tony. At the end of the story, Leon finally realized the embodiment behind his words after they came to life. Before, they were just thoughts, fantasies, beliefs. Mystic beliefs even. But once he saw the consequences and outcomes of said beliefs, his innocence was lost because he realized that his beliefs weren't quite as okay and permissible as he had originally thought.

Mystic beliefs are defined as "a broad range of beliefs and ideologies related to 'extraordinary experiences and states of mind'". So if Tony had already lost his innocence based on a certain thought pattern, and mystic beliefs are a thought pattern, then it would be fair to say that Tony may have lost his innocence as a result of his mystic beliefs.