



'Yellow Woman': Leslie Marmon Silko (Women Writers: Texts and Contexts)

Melody Graulich

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In the past twenty-five years many Native American writers have retold the traditional stories of powerful mythological women: Corn Woman, Changing Woman, Serpent Woman, and Thought Woman, who with her sisters created all life by thinking it into being. Within and in response to these evolving traditions, Leslie Marmon Silko takes from her own tradition, the Keres of Laguna, the Yellow Woman. Yellow Woman stories, always female-centered and always from the Yellow Woman's point of view, portray a figure who is adventurous, strong, and often alienated from her own people. She is the spirit of woman. Ambiguous and unsettling, Silko's "Yellow Woman" explores one woman's desires and changes--her need to open herself to a richer sensuality. Walking away from her everyday identity as daughter, wife and mother, she takes possession of transgressive feelings and desires by recognizing them in the stories she has heard, by blurring the boundaries between herself and the Yellow Woman of myth.

Silko's decision to tell the story from the narrator's point of view is traditional, but her use of first person narration and the story's much raised ambiguity brilliantly reinforce her themes. Like traditional yellow women, the narrator is unnamed. By choosing not to reveal her name, she claims the role of Yellow Woman, and Yellow Woman's story is the one Silko clearly claims as her own. The essays in this collection compare Silko's many retellings of Yellow Woman stories from a variety of angles, looking at crucial themes like storytelling, cultural inheritances, memory, continuity, identity, interconnectedness, ritual, and tradition.

This casebook includes an introduction by the editor, a chronology, an authoritative text of the story itself, critical essays, and a bibliography for further reading in both primary and secondary sources. Contributors include Kim Barnes, A. LaVonne Ruoff, Paula Gunn Allen, Patricia Clark Smith, Bernard A. Hirsch, Arnold Krupat, Linda Danielson, and Patricia Jones.

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