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N. SCOTT MOMADAY

by Martha Scott Trimble

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N. Scott Momaday

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I

"I don't know what an Indian is. The 'American Indian'—that term is meaningless; to me it means very little." Dr. N. Scott Momaday—a Kiowa Indian, professor of English, writer, and lecturer—made this statement as he was entertaining questions at the conclusion of his lecture, "The American Indian in the Conflict of Tribalism and Modern Society," January 13, 1971, in the Student Center at Colorado State University. The content of Dr. Momaday's lecture, and student reaction to it, are both basic to an understanding of the Indian past, of the assumptions of his reading public, and of his professional accomplishments. They are particularly basic to an understanding of his contribution to the literature of the American West.

A young man, dressed in a manner typical of the counter-culture with an "Indian"-style band around his head, had asked Momaday why he had "chosen the white man's way." "Don't kid yourself," Dr. Momaday had first said, adding, "I don't think I have." He explained that he considered it each individual's right to take advantage of the opportunity for a higher education. Implicit in the question was an image of "the Indian" as someone totally different from other men. Dr. Momaday's answer reveals his fundamental philosophy of life: he sees no contradiction in being both an American Indian who participates in tribal dances and a college professor. At a time when tribal leaders are reportedly emphasizing the need for education as a solution to and substi-

tution for outpost retaliatory stands in order to advance the "cause" of the Indian, Dr. Momaday exemplifies the best of two cultures for the greater good of all. His life thus reveals that some kind of accommodation to a dichotomous culture is not only possible but productive, wholly American.

For his opening, Dr. Momaday explained the Jemez Pueblo greeting, "Tahama'me"—"Where are you going?"—in contrast to the English, "Hello." The Jemez reply is "Tadah"—"Nowhere." Using concrete examples from both the Kiowa Indians and the Jemez Pueblo Indians among whom he grew up, he depicted the vitiation of the Indian after the advent of the white man, explained without incrimination or reprisal the Indian-white relationship, and closed on a note of hope for reciprocal Indian-White educative exchange.

One of Momaday's most important explanations of the Kiowas' past concerned the explosion of meteors in North America on November 13, 1833, "the year the stars fell." That shower of meteors followed the unbearable summer when the Kiowa object of faith, Tai-me, was stolen, and it marked the beginning of the decline of the last culture to evolve on this continent—that of the Kiowas. Their eventual subjection to treaties with the white men, their decimation by epidemics of cholera, their loss of the buffalo, and the resulting destruction of their "synthesis of self" came in swift succession. In spite of a popular belief in "savage nobility," Federal authorities took actions which denied the Kiowas and other American Indians their individuality. This "Indian problem," Momaday said, "defies definition, implying one problem and one principal solution." According to Momaday, "Diversity is said to be the principal barrier in the way of cultural assimilation; it will be for generations to come"—especially since the several hundred Indian tribes in the United States speak hundreds of different Indian languages. Also, he said that the relationship between white people and the Indian was "doomed at the outset" due to the conflicts of interests of

the Spanish, the French, and the English. Especially to the agriculturally-oriented English, the Indian "stood in the way of progress."

Two legends that Dr. Momaday related signify two turning points in the history of the Kiowas. One, the legend of Tai-me (Part X in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*), began when the "Thing" with the "feet of a deer" and a "body of feathers" promised to the man who had gone in search of food for his crying children whatever he wanted. The second legend told about a Kiowa who went to save his brother who had been captured by the Utes. His captors told him that, if he could carry his brother on his back and walk over greased buffalo heads, both he and his brother would be freed and would be given a horse (Part XIX in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*).

According to the first legend that Momaday told, Tai-me came when the Kiowas were about to enter the plains, at a time when their objective was pure survival. They had had much suffering and had little hope, but Tai-me gave them a religion. "The Tai-me myth," Dr. Momaday explained, "is not entertainment but emotional reaction to the elemental experience of being." Out of this myth grew the Sun Dance; even if the "myth was inadequate," the ritual enabled the Kiowas to have an existence in a world "beyond the senses to perceive." Momaday called the second legend an "expression of the truest response to being." Although the Kiowa and the horse had come independently to the Plains three hundred years ago, they were a single entity for a hundred years. The horse brought a new, material way of life to the Kiowa—a way that included mobility and independence. "He could prevail against his oldest enemy—distance."

The Sun Dance was eventually prohibited by federal law, and the buffalo were gone. "Perhaps the most immoral act ever committed against the land was the senseless killing of the buffalo," Dr. Momaday reflected. Their religion taken from them, the Kiowas had nothing to sustain them; their spirit was broken.

With religion and independence gone, they degenerated, suffered the loss of their "last hope—hope itself."

What had become a morality of "intolerance" among the white men of the Nineteenth Century, Dr. Momaday continued, has changed to a "morality of pity" in the Twentieth, and it has also acquired an element of "impatience" with hearing of the Indians' plight. The white man's morality led to the Allotment Act of 1887, a provision for subdivision of Indian lands, which resulted in a reduction of a hundred million acres of their lands by 1933. Then the Relocation Act of the 1950's forced young Indians into urban areas where they could not cope with the loss of their tribal identity. At this point in his lecture, Dr. Momaday alluded to Abel, a character in *House Made of Dawn*. Abel is a portrayal of one of the young men affected by the Relocation Act. "None but an Indian, I think," said Dr. Momaday, "knows so much what it is like to have existence in two worlds and security in neither."

"Where are you going?" Momaday then asked. In answer to his question, Momaday gave the audience some examples from his own experience. In 1946, when he went to Jemez Pueblo in northern New Mexico, there were a thousand inhabitants; in 1971 the population had grown by thirty per cent, and with the growth had come the conveniences of electricity, automobiles, and a sewage system—as well as all their attendant problems. Delinquency, unheard of a quarter of a century ago, had become "cancerous." All this had occurred in an Indian pueblo; and pueblos he termed the "most anachronistic clusters of humanity in this country, islands of refuge committed absolutely to the premise of independence and isolation."

Some of the old pueblo culture exists. The race at dawn before the spring clearing of the irrigation ditches, just south of Jemez on the old wagon road to Ysidro, remains as an "expression of spirit in terms of pure physical exertion," a "going in the flow of things" which so many people have lost today. To ward

off the immorality of indifference, each person should ask himself, "Where are you going?" An elimination of prejudicial attitudes is a start, Dr. Momaday said. To make the Indian something other than an Indian is not the answer. "It is valuable," he stated, "to make this educative process a kind of reciprocal thing—to learn from each other." He believes that assimilation into a single society is desirable. "The Indian," he said in the conclusion of his lecture, "can provide us with an ethic toward the American landscape, in particular." Going further, Momaday said, "What is an American: a person who feels in a particular way about this country as a physical entity."

In student responses to the lecture, two paradoxes prevailed. Although Momaday has said he does not know what an American Indian is, everyone else presumes to know. As there is no *one* Indian problem, there is no one "attitude-toward-the-Indian." These responses show that each person tends to create his own "image" of the Indian. Some are blind to any Indian problem, some only vaguely aware of something loosely termed *the* Indian problem but blind to their own prejudices, biases, and airs of superiority, and others "sympathetic" toward the Indian because of abstract, altruistic notions. Whether the influence is one's region; whether it is James Fenimore Cooper, Hollywood, and TV; or whether it is a souvenir search for a Navaho pawn piece at a trading post in the Southwest or for an Indian doll (made in Hong Kong), most Americans have a stereotyped idea of the "Indian," and they do not like to have their image tampered with. To mollify those with a celluloid or plastic concept of the Indian is to resist the Indian's attempt to bridge two cultures by acting as a human being. Such is the audience to whom Momaday addresses himself when he writes or speaks of "the Indian." A person should first question his own attitude toward the American Indian. He should study Indian culture and should develop an open mind. Only by means of such endeavor can he expect to understand writers like Momaday.

Momaday is an "American Indian," with a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Stanford University. More particularly, he is a poet and a critic of the American Romantics, and his first book was a critical analysis of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, a lesser known Nineteenth-Century American poet. Momaday earned the Pulitzer Prize for his next work, a first book of fiction, the realistic and symbolic account of a Twentieth-Century Indian named Abel. A product both of the Kiowa nation and of today's technological-scientific culture, Momaday undertook a personal pilgrimage into the Kiowa past, which he re-created in prose-poetry to enlighten the whites. Momaday stands as a proud survivor of a people bereft of their independence and denied their tribal rights, their religion, and their ceremonies. Yet from those who have oppressed his people or whose forebears have done so, he asks for understanding, for unification, for a sense of wholeness through the blending of cultures.

Born, reared, and educated in the West, principally in the Southwest, Momaday qualifies for the title "Western Writer," though the extent of his writing thus far also places him in the current of American literature, whether in the mainstream or counterstream. The son of Natachee (neé Scott) and Alfred Morris Momaday, Navarre Scott Momaday was born near Anadarko (the Kiowa Agency) twenty miles north of Lawton, Oklahoma, on February 27, 1934, the grandson of Aho and Mammedaty (in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*) and Anne and Theodore Scott. The surname Mammedaty was legally changed to Momaday around 1932. A teacher for most of his life, Al Momaday, as his letterhead states, is also "Indian Artist, Trader, Appraiser." Scott's Cherokee mother, herself a teacher, is known both as an author of Indian books and as an artist. In 1969 she was awarded The New Mexico Press Women's Zia Award as an outstanding woman writer of New Mexico (*The Amerindian*, Nov.-Dec. 1, 1969, p. 2).

At the age of one, Scott Momaday moved with his parents

five hundred miles west to northern New Mexico. He grew up on reservations inhabited by Navahos, Apaches, and Jemez Pueblo Indians. By the time he was six months old, he had been given his Indian name, Tsoai-talee, by an old Kiowa man who kept a journal of pictographs recording important events in the history of the Kiowa people (Momaday, "The night the stars fell," *Viva,* May 14, 1972, p. 2). At Jemez Springs he lived in a large stone house called Stonehenge, about which he later said, "it is aptly named, for there is a kind of Druidic mystery to it; it is informed with something like timelessness" ("Revisiting the family home," *Viva,* July 16, 1972, p. 2).

Since his parents had been teachers at Indian schools, he was early familiar with formal education. He attended parochial and public schools until his senior year at the Augusta Military Academy in Virginia, from which he received his high school diploma in 1952. That fall he entered the University of New Mexico. He studied law during the academic year of 1956-1957 at the University of Virginia, but returned to New Mexico where he received his B.A. in Political Science in 1958. Upon his graduation he taught at Dulce, on the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation in northern New Mexico, roughly one hundred miles east of the Four-Corners area—where Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona meet—the heart of Indian Country.

In 1959 Momaday received a Creative Writing Fellowship from Stanford in recognition of his respect for, control of, and enjoyment in using language.

At Stanford he received both his M.A. (1960) and his Ph.D. (1963). He became a member of the faculty of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Granted a Guggenheim Scholarship for 1966-1967, he spent the year in Amherst, Massachusetts, preparing a critical study of Emily Dickinson, from whom he learned "a good deal about language—and in the process a good deal about the art of intellectual survival" (Momaday, "A love affair with Emily Dickinson," *Viva,* August 6, 1972, p. 2).

In 1969 he was taken into the Gourd Dance, or Taimpe, Society —a Kiowa organization so old that its true age is unknown (Momaday, "Driving east for Kiowa dancing," *Viva,* July 23, 1973, p. 2). In the same year he joined the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley as Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature, a position he left in 1972 to return to Stanford as Professor of English and Comparative Literature. On leave of absence from Stanford during 1972-1973, he was visiting professor at New Mexico State University at Las Cruces, assuming full faculty responsibilities at Stanford in the fall of 1973.

He married Gaye Mangold on September 5, 1959; they are the parents of three daughters: Cael, aged ten; Jill, eight; and Brit, five.

II

Published in 1965 by the prestigious Oxford University Press, Momaday's *The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* was an outgrowth of his doctoral dissertation. His edition made available to the public for the first time all of Tuckerman's poems, including nine unpublished poems. Critical interest in Tuckerman had been growing for almost half a century, more especially perhaps after the appearance of Witter Bynner's *The Sonnets of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* in 1931, and following the significant contribution to American literature that came from the publication in 1950 of Tuckerman's *The Cricket,* written more than eighty years earlier. Samuel A. Golden, in his *Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* (1966), calls Momaday's book "a valuable contribution" which provided Tuckerman with a wider audience (pp. 147-49).

Momaday acknowledges that Tuckerman's emergence has only begun, making no claim that his own study is the definitive work. As editor and critic, Momaday perceives that Tuckerman stood in historical opposition to the mainstream of Nineteenth-Cen-

tury American Romanticism. Momaday writes that "In order to understand Tuckerman's isolation, it is necessary to bear in mind the special importance which Americans placed upon the idea of self-reliance" (p. xxii) more than a century ago. Momaday's intent to "search out" not only the literary meaning in Tuckerman's poems but also their "*consequent* historical meaning" (p. v) is clear. He writes in the Preface, "It seems to me that historical analysis is an indispensable step in the critical process" (p. v).

He asks the critic to look at the intellectual age "against which the poems assume so crucial an individuality" (p. v). In addition to this historical aspect, he stresses the individuality of both the poet and the poems. Why Momaday should select Tuckerman (1821-1873), who lived in Massachusetts his entire life, who has been rarely anthologized, and who is little known to students of American literature—why Momaday should select such a writer for a detailed analysis becomes clearer after one reads Momaday's own work, glimpses his isolation and independence, studies his intellectual milieu, and recognizes in him, too, a creativity at crosscurrent with the mainstream of the age.

The study tells as much perhaps about Momaday as about Tuckerman. In his Introduction, Momaday calls Tuckerman's isolation "complex" (p. xxii) and refers to his dedication "to the use and value of reason in the world of matter" (p. xxiii). Tuckerman's thought placed him at odds with the "chief spokesman of the nineteenth century mind . . . Ralph Waldo Emerson," concerning nature, wholes, pantheism, mysticism (pp. xxiii-xxv). Momaday emphasizes the literal nature of Tuckerman's solitude over Emerson's symbolical solitude. Tuckerman, according to Momaday, had a concern for detail and particulars, attributing "no moral significance to the details themselves." He departed from intuitive tradition, seeing a "various and inscrutable mask" where Emerson "found realized in nature the transcendent spirit of the universe." "Tuckerman," Momaday writes,

"appreciates fully the anomalies of the natural world: light and shadow, here and there, appearance and reality" (p. xxv).

Paramount to Momaday were Tuckerman's "eye for the minutest aspects of the world," his acute sensitivity, and his experience which was pervaded by "an always apparent sense of grief" (Tuckerman had lost his young wife, and his grief for her began his long solitude). Momaday says, "He knows well the side of Man that is most vulnerable to pain, and he treats of it throughout his work with respect and compassion" (p. xxvi). The Introduction to the Tuckerman edition closes with Momaday's pronouncement that if Tuckerman is "to emerge completely in our literature he had best be revealed for the right reasons"—for his opposition to what we call American Romanticism and for his poems, which are "valuable in their own right" as "the best possessions of a man whose vision is keen and whose judgment is sound" (p. xxviii).

Momaday details Tuckerman's opposition to American Romanticism more explicitly in "The Heretical Cricket" (*Southern Review*, Winter 1967) than in the introduction to his Tuckerman edition. "There are literatures of resistance," he writes. "Against the sheer momentum of great literary movements, they are frequently suffocated; occasionally they are lost and forgotten" (p. 43). Momaday believes *The Cricket* to be significant literature of resistance to American Transcendentalism; yet he acknowledges that "the full meaning of that resistance has yet to be found out and assimilated" (p. 44). He notes how Tuckerman's interest in science provides a point of view contrasting with a poem like Bryant's "Thanatopsis" (p. 45). Bryant's poem "disintegrates into religious sentimentality," whereas *The Cricket* deals not merely with "how to die but with how to live in the certainty of death" (p. 49). Tuckerman's poetic approach involves "not reprieve but the certain necessity of moral intellectual responsibility; not subconscious, but conscious awareness" (p. 50). Momaday indicates here that, to him, a poem "must

concern us with the matter of intellectual integrity in a context of intellectual dissolution." *The Cricket,* Tuckerman's "testament of heresy," reveals both his isolation and his response to it (p. 50). This "sense of isolation is defined in terms of intellectual honesty rather than self-reliance" (p. xxvi).

Momaday, an Indian who grew up in pre-World War II America, experienced the isolation inherent in that condition. His response to isolation resembles Tuckerman's. Like Tuckerman, Momaday has been dedicated to the world of reason as evidenced by his academic career. Momaday's thought places him at odds with others writing in mid-Twentieth Century, both in his poetry and in his fiction. In addition, he has certainly shown in his creative work a closeness to nature.

Momaday's first work does not ostensibly identify him as embarking under a "Western" aegis. However, aside from making the complete poems of Tuckerman available, Momaday established criteria for evaluating Tuckerman in *his* age, and these criteria are useful for evaluating Momaday in *his.* A discussion of Momaday's early creative work rightly begins here, because what he saw in Tuckerman appears similar to what has emerged from his own life and work.

Momaday, a poet who has been especially commended for his lyrical style, first appeared in print in the *New Mexico Quarterly* in the summer of 1959. The work he published was a poem of five six-line stanzas, "Earth and I Give You Turquoise." Another Momaday poem, "Los Alamos," appeared in the next issue of the same journal. Here the poet's concern is with the connection between the machine age and the desert landscape: "Machinery is scattered over the earth like hurled coins/. . ./ The desert smiles and waits/And there the night settles, transfixed by the moon" (p. 306). The last stanza closes with "I have dreamed a city peopled/By one sufficient man/And faithful reproductions" (p. 306). These two poems foreshadow the subject matter, imagery, style, and symbolism of his longer works.

"The Bear" (p. 46), "Buteo Regalis" (Latin for "The Hawk of the King"), and "Pit Viper" (p. 47) appear in the Spring 1961 issue of the *New Mexico Quarterly*. "Before an Old Painting of the Crucifixion" first appeared in *The Southern Review* (April 1965), along with "Angle of Geese." These two poems appeared with six others in the Spring 1968 issue of the *New Mexico Quarterly*; an editorial comment noted that the presentation was the first time a major selection of N. Scott Momaday's poems had appeared in one place. Included were the five poems published from 1959 to 1961 plus "Simile" and "Rainy Mountain Cemetery" (the latter also appears at the end of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*).

Yvor Winters, one of Momaday's Stanford mentors, has said that some of Momaday's poems display "post-Symbolist methods" (*Forms of Discovery*, p. 294). By "post-Symbolist methods," Winters means the attempt to convey ideas "in terms of sensory perceptions" in the belief "that all ideas arise from sensory perceptions" (*Forms*, p. 251). The three Momaday poems that Winters discusses—"The Bear," "Buteo Regalis," and "Before an Old Painting of the Crucifixion"—do use vivid images that evoke a sensory response and that, in consequent contemplation, express abstract ideas arising from sensory perceptions of such things as wilderness and time.

As a poet, Momaday may have been influenced to some extent by Winters, himself a poet as well as one of the New Critics. Although Winters eventually took a broader approach to criticism, he always showed a New Critic's insistence on a close reading of each part of a poem as it relates to the whole. Winters is best known for his hatred of obscurity in literature and for his belief that a poem should express a moral concern. On the other hand, he admires the difficulty of "post-Symbolism" if it succeeds in conveying an idea. Momaday's poems contain abstract ideas that are powerfully stated and that express a moral concern. They are post-Symbolist in that they can be understood only

with difficulty through a perception of their sensory expression. In fact, Momaday's poems measure up to Winters' standards of excellence so well that the critic called Momaday a "great poet: [*i.e.*] a poet who has written at least one great poem" (p. 289). Winters says that Momaday has also written "a few lesser poems."

"The Bear" and "Buteo Regalis" are examples of the "fine lesser poems." "The Bear" describes in syllabic verse an old bear who is seen "dimensionless, dumb,/in the windless noon's hot glare." He carries scars from wounds inflicted years before by a trap that had maimed him. As the poet watches, the bear moves "from sight,/as buzzards control,/imperceptibly, their flight." The image of the circling buzzards conveys a sensory suggestion of an explosive force or violence behind the outwardly calm mask of nature. Similarly, "Buteo Regalis" concludes with a description of a hawk diving to kill a rodent; the last line, which pictures the dive, also evokes a sense of impending violence: "Angle and curve, gathering momentum."

In describing periods of calm before approaching violence, Momaday resembles a poet he much admires, Emily Dickinson, who sought to make each of her poems a momentary stay against confusion. Momaday's "Before an Old Painting of the Crucifixion" (the poem that Winters calls "great") considers whether peace and order have resulted from Christ's supreme sacrifice. The mural captures in the timelessness of art the Savior's agony (like the timelessness of art in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn") When the poet's gaze wanders to the nearby sea, he realizes from looking at the ocean swells that the timelessness of the painting and the act of the Crucifixion itself are vain because, as Winters puts it, "there was a moral void; time was geological, not human" (p. 294). By exploring one moment, each of Momaday's poems helps us to see that time is the flux between order and chaos; his prose works investigate a broader section of that flux.

III

In assessing Momaday's potential at that time in his career when he had already edited Tuckerman's works and had published poems of his own, one must consider specific experiences in the young Kiowa's past: his acquaintance with the Indian ways of the Southwest, the death of his grandmother, and his growing awareness of the need for a blend of white and Indian cultures. His output during the next few years, then, came as a natural sequence in the development of a more explicit and direct recreation of his past.

Invited to submit to Harper & Row some poetry for publication, Momaday instead submitted the prose manuscript of *House Made of Dawn* for the Harper Prize Novel Contest, even though he had missed the deadline (New York *Times,* May 6, 1969, pp. 1, 35). Harper & Row published the book in 1968; Signet followed with a paperback edition in 1969. "Three Sketches from *House Made of Dawn*" had appeared in the October 1966 issue of *The Southern Review,* with a footnote announcing the pending publication by Harper & Row, and with a statement by the author:

> The novel is about an Indian who returns from World War II and finds that he cannot recover his tribal identity; nor can he escape the cultural context in which he grew up. He is torn, as they say, between two worlds, neither of which he can enter and be a whole man. The story is that of his struggle to survive on the horns of a real and tragic dilemma in contemporary society. . . . (p. 933)

The three sketches were incorporated into *House Made of Dawn*: "The Sparrow and the Reed" principally as the first chapter; "Homecoming" as the first part of the second chapter; and "The Albino" as part of the fourth chapter. A comparison of these

sketches in their journal form with the form they have in the novel shows that Momaday had carefully revised them to achieve greater clarity and precision.

The seminal forms of other chapters were also printed in a literary journal before the novel was published. "Two Sketches from *House Made of Dawn*" appeared in the *New Mexico Quarterly* (Summer 1967) : "The Bear and the Colt" was incorporated into the next to the last chapter of the novel; and "The Eagles of the Valley Grande" was placed just after what had been "Homecoming" in the first chapter.

House Made of Dawn, a novel of only sixty-five to seventy thousand words, appeared on the editor's desk. It was not a book of poems as the editor had anticipated. Frances McCullough was the editor who saw the literary value of the book and backed it. *House Made of Dawn* was dismissed casually by some reviewers, and sadly misunderstood by others. Only a handful recognized its merit. Then to the surprise not only of the author but also of numbers of incredulous reviewers and others in the publishing world, the judges for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction named *House Made of Dawn*—a first novel by an unknown author—the 1969 winner.

The trustees of Columbia University awarded N. Scott Momaday $1,000 in the same year that Norman Mailer was awarded the Prize for General Non-Fiction for his *The Armies of the Night,* an award that he shared with Dr. René Kiles Dubos, a microbiologist, for his *So Human an Animal: How We are Shaped by Surroundings and Events.* In spite of its presence in the ranks of such award-winners, there were relatively few reviews and critical materials published on *House Made of Dawn.*

Most of those reviewers who did write about *House Made of Dawn* stressed the fact that Momaday is a Kiowa and therefore writes about Indian life as an insider. Momaday's Kiowa heritage seemed to be of such concern to some reviewers that they overlooked important aspects of the novel in order to com-

ment on the author's Indian background. After finding fault with Momaday's style, William James Smith said (apparently in an unsuccessful attempt to be witty), "it seems slightly un-American to criticize an American Indian's novel" (*Commonweal,* Sept. 10, 1968, pp. 636-37). However, many reviewers did see that the novel is a complex work of art. They indicated that readers would have to read creatively—*i.e.,* to look closely for hints of the characters' relationships. The reviewers added that to understand and enjoy Momaday's work, readers would also have to accustom themselves to the novel's rapidly shifting and sometimes ambiguous chronological frame of reference.

House Made of Dawn opens with a brief prologue that describes Abel running in an early spring dawn on the reservation. Abel's running with the dawn at the end of the last chapter (p. 191), however, emerges as a religious act leading to self-realization. The intervening chapters describe the events that help explain Abel's run. Momaday divides these chapters, each one headed by a specific date, into four parts of varying lengths. The first part, entitled "The Longhair," contains seven chapters having dates ranging from July 20 to August 2, 1945. It is set in a pueblo at "Walatowa, Cañon de San Diego." Parts two and three take place in Los Angeles in 1952—the former, "The Priest of the Sun," occurring on January 26 and 27, and the latter, "The Night Chanter," on February 20. The final part, "The Dawn Runner," returns the reader to Walatowa and contains two chapters dated February 27 and 28, 1952.

Momaday's combination of specific chronological ordering with the circular repetition of the scene showing Abel's run emerges as a key to understanding the novel's essential nature. The book contains oppositions arising from two points. One relates to the point of view Momaday expressed in his lecture: the differences between the white's and the Indian's view of the world and the need to reveal to each culture the knowledge possessed by the other.

The haunting descriptions of the always acutely present landscape contained in the novel spring from Momaday's background. As he says in "What will happen to the land?": "Landscapes tend to stand out in my memory. When I think back to a particular time in my life, I tend to see it in terms of its setting, the background in which it achieves for me a certain relief. Or, to put it another way, I am inclined closely to associate events with the physical dimensions in which they take place . . . my existence is indivisible with the land" (*Viva,* July 30, 1972, p. 2).

The other opposition has something of the same nature, is, if one likes, a concretization of the first opposition. What the reader initially thinks he knows about what happens in the novel, and why, sometimes turns out later to contrast with what he actually does know. As a minor illustration, ask what theater Abel served in during the Second World War, and then ask what is the basis of that knowledge (pp. 25-26 and 107-108, *House Made of Dawn*). (All references to this work are from the Signet edition.)

As the novel continues, the effect of these oppositions grows more profound. At least with reference to the book, if the contrasts between actual knowledge and apparent knowledge can be reconciled, it will be clear that the materials Momaday presents have not been merely organized into unity by the artistic conventions available for that purpose but rather have become fused into unity through the combined efforts of both author and reader. These efforts might eventually yield cultural results also.

Plotting the events of this novel has some conventional aspects. In *House Made of Dawn* specific dates stand at the head of the chapters. But the events Momaday depicts are forced into an apparently plotted order by those dates. In actuality, they explode out of their chronological patterns, and not only because Momaday depicts them more than once. Many have taken

place at some period before the date on which we see them described. We are sometimes not clear about the specific time of their occurrence. We are not sure, for example, how old Abel was when he captured the eagle as a member of the Eagle Watchers Society (pp. 18-25), nor how old "old enough" was when Francisco took Abel and his older brother, Vidal, to explain to them the movements of the sun along the silhouetted rim of Black Mesa (pp. 177-78).

In one sense, it is important that we not be sure when such events occur; their having happened becomes more pervasively influential that way. Their mystery, part of their significance, increases.

The book, then, is a pool, circular in structure, not a rising-action-climax-falling-action-all-from-the-same-point-of-view piece of fiction. Momaday patently does not use a consistent point of view, for example. In Part Three, "The Night Chanter," Momaday presents Benally, Abel's Navaho friend in Los Angeles, as a conventional first person narrator. The other three parts are not so conventional. For example, Part Two, "The Priest of the Sun," utilizes an essentially omniscient point of view, but one noticeably modified by stream-of-consciousness when it portrays Abel's agonized return to a hazy awareness after his severe beating by Martinez, a Los Angeles policeman who took pleasure in tormenting the Indians he came into contact with.

A strong sense of the mystery of what goes on in the novel emerges most clearly from Momaday's characterizations. As there seems to be no likely cause-effect pattern in parts of the plot, so there is no fully graspable sense of motive behind the characters' behavior. In fact, the vivid descriptions of the land are balanced by a vagueness, a mysteriousness in the descriptions of the appearances and behavior of the characters, with only a few exceptions. Momaday describes Angela St. John thoroughly, and the Albino. The others, even the central figure, Abel, are

not thoroughly described. However, even the detailed descriptions of Angela and the Albino add to the novel's sense of mystery. Especially bewildering are the motives behind their conduct—conduct having extremely important consequences in Abel's life. The scene during which Abel kills the Albino provides the most striking instance of Momaday's refusal to give an explicit explanation of motives, Abel's as well as the Albino's (pp. 77-79).

Generally speaking, those figures whom we meet at Walatowa, including Francisco (Abel's grandfather), and the Catholic priests, Father Olguin and his distant predecessor, Father Nicolàs, remain in deeper shadow than do people like Milly and the "relocated" Indians Tosamah and Benally, all of whom we see in Los Angeles.

If we as readers remained in shadow, the novel could not challenge us so deeply as it does. Before we can grow enlightened about the sometimes mysterious characters in the book and their sometimes bewildering conduct, we have to recognize that, as in his poetry, Momaday writes with symbolic intent. When we look for symbolic significance, we no longer need be discomfited by the lack of information about, for example, the disease that had "stiffened" one of Francisco's legs (p. 12). Instead, we can hypothesize about the significance of the disease and its bearing on the novel's themes. Then if we wish to guess which disease had afflicted Francisco, we have a basis to use. We work backward from the significance of the crippled leg to what might have been its literal cause rather than the other way around.

The Indian subject matter of the novel contributes a source of symbolism external to but complementing the symbolism created within the context of the novel by such things as Abel's and Angela's names and the Albino's sickly whiteness. We may resolve many of the mysterious things unique to *House Made of Dawn,* but Momaday, in making his points about the range of relationships possible between cultures, wishes to leave at least the non-In-

dian reader with an abiding sense of what he does not know. The novel's many scenes depicting Indian religious activities are the primary means of presenting the mystery that must remain. The activities associated with the feast of Santiago, a Catholic saint who metamorphosed into the originator of the pre-Christian Pueblo culture, provide one example, for one has only a general idea of the dynamics of the "rooster pulling" ceremony, even after reading Father Olguin's tale exposing the possible origin of the ceremony (pp. 39-40); and the ancient ceremony enacted seven days later, on August first, remains as essentially mysterious to the reader as it is unsettling to Father Olguin. As Momaday says of the people of the town: "after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky" (p. 56).

Of course this sort of symbolism connects to the symbolism unique to the novel. The song Benally sings ("House Made of Dawn": hence the novel's title) to his battered friend the night before Abel leaves Los Angeles to return to Walatowa is one version of the last song of a formal nine-day purification ceremony in which the major participants are a priest and a patient (pp. 134-35). Within the context of the work, Benally would be serving as a symbolic priest preparing Abel for his return to the reservation and his subsequent ability to make the ritual run in the dawn after Francisco's death. Abel makes the run either despite or because of his great physical and psychological anguish.

In the recurring ritual running, the themes of the novel most intensely fuse with the traditional symbolism of the Indian religious beliefs. As Abel resumes consciousness after his beating at the hands of Martinez, a beating ultimately arising from his refusal to fear Martinez, he remembers what he saw after knifing the Albino. He was hiding and saw one group of runners, the "runners after evil," go by "with great dignity and calm, not in the hope of anything, but hopelessly; neither in

fear nor hatred nor despair of evil, but simply in recognition and with respect. Evil was" (p. 96).

The mystery still remains, for although Momaday explains that Abel "suddenly saw the crucial sense in their going," he does not say whether the insight came as Abel watched from hiding on the night of August 1, 1945, or as he remembered the event during his struggle back to life on the night of January 26, 1952.

Whichever the case, the insight implies a recognition of the need for forgiveness that a neutral or resigned response to the presence of something negative or evil involves. This process also includes the forgiveness of those who called him from his life to fight a war he did not grasp and who put him in prison for six years for killing a being he considered a snake, and therefore evil, *i.e.,* the Albino (p. 136). Perhaps he could run, finally, because he recognized that the snake, too, should continue to exist—a recognition that goes beyond the Christianity which for so many years in the Pueblo preached forgiveness.

In addition to Momaday's treatment of evil, other themes appear in the book. Perhaps the suffering of the urban Indians is the most noticeable of these, rendered more painful to watch because of their reluctance to admit to themselves that they suffer. Their strategies for avoiding such recognition make up much of the material in Parts Two and Three of the novel. Momaday does not assert that suffering is an Indian prerogative, of course, for all the non-Indian characters of any importance to the novel also suffer. What he does suggest is that Indians may have ways to overcome suffering which others might profit from knowing about. These others might risk the loss of some of their own culturally determined portions of their sense of self, but that risk would be no more than that which cultures subordinate to Western Civilization were forced to take. Growth to maturity requires some such risk for every individual anyway. Benally, however, sometimes yearns rather sentimentally for

the tribal way of life. We see this longing in his description of the night before Abel returns (p. 172).

In-depth scholarly evaluation of *House Made of Dawn* has been slow in appearing. The complexity of the novel and the layers of possible interpretation may delay what will be a growing body of evaluative work. Hopefully, if studied for sociological or anthropological reasons, the book will not be dismissed without adequate attention to its literary value. So, too, if studied as literature, it should not be accepted as art only but also as a re-creation of unique human experience.

Exemplifying the caliber of literary analysis which Momaday's novel merits is Carole Oleson's "The Remembered Earth: Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*" (*South Dakota Review*, Spring 1973). Providing a vanguard for serious, in-depth criticism of Momaday's work, this article attempts to interpret concretely many aspects of *House Made of Dawn* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* which earlier review-type criticism dismissed as too ambiguous or too complex or too much unresolved to allow for prescriptive interpretation. The special importance of Oleson's article is that it opens up for critical analysis such inescapable problems as the thematic relationships between the two books, the real nature of the Albino in *House Made of Dawn*, the function of the prayer-song "House Made of Dawn," and the potential symbolism of the "seventh dawn."

House Made of Dawn is clearly somewhat more than the surface summation Momaday gave of it in *The Southern Review* in 1966. His novel is a complex, symbolic expression of how language and culture tend through their own territorial imperatives to encompass one, sometimes to a point of isolation. If one voluntarily or forcedly intermixes with another culture and its language, he may find that in the interim he has lost both cultures and must become reacculturated. *House Made of Dawn* transcends any Indian problem; that the novel is a universal statement does not make the effect of Momaday's portrayal of

the deculturation of an Indian youth any the less lamentable. If man is the archetypal Adam, in the archetypal Eden, year by year, society by society, generation after generation—if he is the "house made of dawn," the regeneration comes about.

IV

That *The Way to Rainy Mountain* should follow *House Made of Dawn* adheres to a natural progression, a unique novel succeeded by a unique hymn. The uniqueness follows from the fact that each is a demarcation from the norm in American literature, Western or general. Momaday has written in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* that "Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe" (p. 113). (All references to *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are to the Ballantine paperback edition.) *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is Momaday's account of that time in his life when he gave "himself up to a particular landscape in his experience" (p. 113). The book is in addition an autobiography, an epic account of the Kiowas' golden age, and a creation hymn. Momaday's brief narrative should also remind whites of the part they played in the destruction of another culture. In order to achieve so many purposes, Momaday presents fragments in "the history of an idea, man's idea of himself," which "has old and essential being in language" (p. 2). These fragments include "mythology, legend, lore, and hearsay—and of course the idea itself, as crucial and complete as it ever was" (p. 2). Momaday recreates the Kiowas' self-definition by giving himself up to the old domain of his people in a journey that evokes "a landscape that is incomparable, a time that is gone forever, and the human spirit, which endures" (p. 2).

As most reviewers noted, Momaday uses a significant structure to tell about his journey and about his surrender to the land. The book's structure is both tragic and epic. A poem at the be-

ginning and one at the end enclose the narrative. A Prologue and an Introduction explain the purpose of the book, and an Epilogue suggests the significance of the quest. The journey itself is described in three sections that order the narrative like the three acts of a tragedy. Each major section is composed of a number of sub-sections; the total of these sub-sections is twenty-four, corresponding to the twenty-four books of an epic. Furthermore, each sub-section has three parts: the first part usually tells a Kiowa myth or legend; the second consists of the lore or hearsay collected by some white anthropologist or historian; and the third part generally sets forth an account of Momaday's own experiences or memories.

The organization of these sub-sections achieves in prose an effect similar to what Winters has called the "post-symbolism" of Momaday's verse. The experience described in each part of a sub-section relates in some way to the experience of the other two parts. The myth or legend of the first part of each sub-section seems strange and simple to most non-Indian readers. The "scientific" or "factual" information of the second part sheds some light on the origins of the myth or legend, making it more understandable to non-Indians. However, the third part of each sub-section serves to destroy any complacency that the non-Indian reader may have derived from the first two parts. Momaday expresses his experiences in terms of strong sensory perceptions. As in his poetry, these sensory images evoke abstract ideas; and in that evocation, our sense of the "simple" legends and the dry facts is suddenly invested with mystery and awe, because we suddenly see that the myths express a truth, that the sensory experiences which lead to Momaday's insights are also those of the myth. As in *House Made of Dawn,* the reader is reawakened to the power inherent in landscape, in language, and in belief.

The first part of the first sub-section, for example, tells the Kiowa creation myth: "the Kiowas came one by one into the

world through a hollow log" (p. 17). A pregnant woman got stuck in the log; so not too many people emerged, and consequently, the Kiowas are not a numerous people. To commemorate their origin the people "called themselves *Kwuda,* 'coming out' " (p. 17). The second part of the sub-section simply explains what *Kwuda* means and gives some additional information about the etymology of the word and about customs of the Kiowas. The third part, Momaday's own experience, offers a sharp contrast: "I remember coming out upon the northern Great Plains in the late spring" (p. 19). He describes the scene in terms that give strong sensory impressions. Momaday's description not only gives us an abstract idea by way of these sensory impressions, but it is also an epiphany—the term that James Joyce used to mean a moment of sudden insight at a certain conjunction of time, place, and characters. Each sub-section, then, is itself a drama with an exposition (myth or legend), complication (anthropological or historical hearsay), and denouement (the epiphany that Momaday experiences).

The book's narrative continuity unites the sub-sections; taken together, they form a tragic epic. The Introduction to the narrative begins with a description of the country near Rainy Mountain, an area in which loneliness "is an aspect of the land'" (p. 5). Aho, Momaday's grandmother, had died near Rainy Mountain in the spring; he returned to her home that summer. In remembering her, he began to think about the origins of the Kiowas and of their adoption of Tai-me as their sun god. Like "a memory in her blood," Aho had a strong sense of "the immense landscape of the continental interior" where the Kiowas first began their journey. Momaday explains that "a sense of confinement" in the mountains impelled the Kiowas to seek the open spaces of the plains; he says that "The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind in the wilderness" (p. 8).

When the Kiowas left the Yellowstone country and entered

the Black Hills, they made a legend at the base of Devil's Tower that changed their tribal character. The legend tells of seven sisters whose brother suddenly became a bear. In running from the attacking bear, the sisters climbed a tree and were taken into the sky where "they became the stars of the Big Dipper" (p. 9). The bear clawed the stump of the tree, which became Devil's Tower. Momaday explains the legend's significance: "From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky" (p. 9).

Also of deep importance to the Kiowas was their annual Sun Dance. As a little girl, Momaday's grandmother witnessed the last enactments of her people's restoration "in the presence of Tai-me" (p. 11). In spite of the deicide that came when the whites forbade any more Sun Dances, Aho for the rest of her life continued to pray "out of suffering and hope, having seen many things" (p. 11). Momaday's childhood memories of his grandmother's prayers and of the "coming and going, feasting and talk" in her house contrast sharply with the "funeral silence in the rooms" that he feels after her death. While sitting on the steps of the empty house, Momaday sees a cricket placed in his line of vision so that it seems to fill "the moon like a fossil" (p. 14). Like Tuckerman's cricket, Momaday's has symbolic value; in feeling that for him the cricket's "small definition is made whole and eternal," Momaday senses the power of mythic vision, a harmony of world and spirit that Aho never lost. After having his vision and after visiting his grandmother's grave the next day, Momaday is ready to retrace not only the physical journey of his people but also their spiritual quest.

As Momaday follows the route from the Yellowstone to Rainy Mountain, he has experiences or remembers childhood scenes that parallel narratives of Kiowa mythology. In "The Setting Out," he recounts his people's mythic journey from the story of their origins to their development as Plains horsemen and warriors. The Kiowa myths and legends explain how, after they

emerged from the hollow log, the *Kwuda* split into two factions over a dispute about who got what parts of an antelope. Other myths tell how dogs became an integral part of Kiowa life, and how a woman gave birth to a child of the sun. Captured by grandmother Spider and split by a magic ring, the sun child twins kill a snake which their Spider grandmother says was their grandfather. The last myths retold in "The Setting Out" explain how a hungry man finds Tai-me and how another hungry man becomes a "water beast" when he eats some strange meat.

The anthropological and historical information in each subsection adds somewhat to an understanding of the myths; and Momaday's epiphanies add the wonder and delight that are missing in any non-Indian's reaction to the stories. In most of the myths of the first section, man is the receiver, the believer of the wonder. What Momaday terms "the perfect being in terms of distance and of silence and of age" (p. 19) of the small things of the earth brings meaning to the reader whose own background in myth has been forfeited to an unrecoverable past. Understanding the Indians' mystic harmony with nature and the universals of creation taxes most non-Indian readers; they have lost, millenia ago, their own Sumerian, Druidic, Hellenic, Norse, or other attempts to explain phenomena, which today require a "scientific" explanation. Today's demand for relevance and causation tend to preclude vision, the Indian's being in the "flow of things," and natural explanation.

The Indian mythic past is close enough in time, however, to be recapturable. Momaday brings myth into his own realm of understanding and hence into the reader's by his epiphanizing. For example, after the myth of the boy spider (p. 32), Momaday says, "I know of spiders" (in the third level of sub-section VI, p. 34). Or, the remaining twin's transformation of self into "medicine" of religious significance (p. 45) is epiphanized in Keahdinekeah (p. 46). His own great grandmother's veneration for this "medicine" Momaday sees as "holiness . . . imparted to the

human spirit." The subjects of the three levels are thus related to bring a new meaning and add a wonder and enchantment to the relatedness of all created things.

In the second section, "The Going On," Kiowa legends help us to understand the Kiowa experience as Plains horsemen and warriors. We learn in this section that by using their wits the Kiowas escaped when outnumbered by their enemies. The storm spirit, *Man-ka-ih,* also posed little threat for the Kiowas, because he grew from a clay horse that they had made, and so he understood the Kiowa words for "Pass over me" (p. 65). Other legends illustrate how high a value the Kiowas placed on courage and fidelity.

As one reads "The Going On," the inadequacy of the "scientific" information grows more apparent, whereas Momaday's experiences and memories begin to resemble the legends more closely. For example, in sub-section XIII, we are told the legend of an arrow straightener who saved himself both by his wits and by his skill at making arrows straight. One night he spotted something moving outside his tipi. He went on straightening arrows, but he began to speak in Kiowan, saying, "If you are a Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak to me" (p. 62). When the man outside the tipi did not answer, the arrow straightener shot an arrow into his enemy's heart. The second part of this sub-section simply says that "The old men were the best arrowmakers, for they could bring time and patience to the craft. The young men—the fighters and hunters—were willing to pay a high price for arrows that were well made" (p. 63). In contrast to the dry facts of the second part, the third part consists of Momaday's thoughts about Cheney, an old arrowmaker whom he had seen in his youth. Momaday's father told him that Cheney prayed aloud to the rising sun; and in his mind, Momaday knows "where he [Cheney] stands and where the sun comes up on the land" (p. 64). From Momaday's own experiences we see how the arrow straightener derived wisdom

from communion with the land; the arrow makers of the second part might as well be working on an assembly line for all the sensibility that the "scientific" description attributes to them.

The third section, "The Closing In," begins with legend, history, and personal experiences that appear in sub-sections XIX and XX in the usual sequence. We are told legends about warriors and horses. In one legend, two brothers are released by the Utes because one brother manages to carry the other on his back while walking along a row of greased buffalo skulls. In the other legend, a fine hunting horse dies of shame when its owner turns it from its course during a charge. The historical parts of these sub-sections tell us about the U.S. Cavalry's slaughter of Indian ponies in 1879, when the Kiowas surrendered, and about horses that the Kiowas sacrificed to Tai-me during a smallpox epidemic of 1861. Momaday's experiences that correspond to the other parts are his boyhood feelings while riding a horse west of Jemez pueblo and his thoughts of the sacrifice of horses during the smallpox epidemic.

The last four sub-sections of "The Closing In" all contain three parts about experiences of Mammedaty (Momaday's grandfather) or about Aho. In these sub-sections, there is little difference in the form, style, and content of the three parts. Myth, history, and personal experience seem to blend in these passages. Reminiscence being largely within a person's own past, how can recall encompass one's entire heritage? Sub-sections XXI-XXIV, breaking from the set pattern of distant past, authority, and personal experience come close to the anamnesis of Platonism to fuse past and present. Through Mammedaty, Momaday removes himself to his grandfather's grandfather, Guipahgo (p. 97), roughly one hundred fifty years ago in the Kiowa past; by this symbolic ruse, Momaday brings the past of myth into the understanding of the present.

As in a sonnet, in which there may be a rise and a break, a query and answer, or a doubt and a vision, in *The Way to Rainy*

Mountain, the epic of a people, a break comes with sub-section XXI. At this point Mammedaty becomes past, authority, and present: inexplicably he saw and heard "something," which upon close examination was not there; his dress and family characteristic of prominent hand-veins are evident in a photograph; he learned how a mole pulverizes soil, thereby getting "possession of a powerful medicine" (p. 99). Unreality becomes reality. The fusion of the three levels is sufficiently within the grasp of reality to bring credence to the whole. The last two sub-sections bring Aho in like manner from past to present and tie Mammedaty and Aho to the author—and to the reader. The collective past surfaces in both a real and a symbolic conclusion.

The Epilogue begins with a description of the night the stars fell, November 13, 1833. That shower of meteors preceded by only four years the first treaty that the Kiowas signed with the United States. Seen in the light of the events that would follow that treaty signing, "The falling stars seemed to image the sudden and violent disintegration of an old order" (p. 114). The meteor shower marked the beginning of the end of the Kiowas' golden age which had begun in 1740 and "would persist for a while in decline, until about 1875" (p. 114). Though there was "very little material evidence that it had ever been," the culture of the Kiowas lived on in their memories and in their verbal tradition (pp. 114-15).

Momaday says that "the living memory and the verbal tradition which transcends it were brought together for me once and for all in the person of Ko-sahn" (p. 115). When she was a hundred years old, Ko-sahn told Momaday what it was like to be part of the Sun Dance. After giving us Ko-sahn's story of the Sun Dance, the Epilogue closes with two questions about Ko-sahn: "Was she become in her sleep that one who, old as she was, still had the feeling of play? And in her mind, at times, did she see the falling stars?" (p. 118).

The prose of the narrative is enclosed by or framed with two

poems that evoke the ideas of beginning and ending. "Headwaters" describes waters bubbling up around a hollow log that lies in the marsh of an intermountain plain. We are told that "What moves on this archaic force/Was wild and welling at the source." The impressions of a vital beginning that are evoked by the lines of "Headwaters" contrast sharply with the sense of an ending that is expressed in "Rainy Mountain Cemetery." In the latter poem, the speaker stands before a gravestone and is aware that in listening for the name of the dead, he will hear "The wake of nothing audible. . . ." (p. 119). As the speaker continues to watch and listen, the sun shortens the shadow cast by the tombstone; for the speaker, this "long approach of noon" is silence, "And death this cold, black density of stone" (p. 119).

In so framing his narrative with poetry, Momaday gives *The Way to Rainy Mountain* an intensity of vision at its beginning and ending that helps us to see the epic of the Kiowas not as universal in a cultural sense, but as indicative of the human condition when a people's imagination must come to terms with a particular landscape in a particular time.

Essentially the same story that Momaday tells in the Introduction to *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is told by Tosomah in *House Made of Dawn.* Since there are only slight differences in the details of the two accounts, they differ most significantly in their respective contexts. Essential as Introduction, the narrative of the Kiowa past focuses upon Aho's respect for her heritage: upon what Momaday calls a "holy regard for the sun," even though she had become a Christian; upon the Tai-me verbal tradition; upon her memory of the annual rites; and upon her praying. In both accounts, the Kiowa are "priests of the sun"; thus they became no longer slaves to survival on the southern Plains (*The Way to Rainy Mountain,* p. 7; *House Made of Dawn,* p. 119). That the same narrative is Tosomah's sermon as well makes him a Kiowa, Pastor, Priest of the Sun; but he is also the

Reverend John Big Bluff Tosomah at the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission.

In his Saturday sermon, "The Gospel According to John," he speaks on the importance of *the word* in the search for truth. With her "way around words," Tosomah's grandmother is placed in juxtaposition to the white man's ways of talking "through and around the word." Important to the sermon is the contrast between the way the white man "subtracts the Truth" and the way his grandmother added power to Truth by her words. The Sunday night sermon, in which the Kiowa story is told, though it stands alone as the section dated "January 27" in the structure of *House Made of Dawn,* concretizes the preceding sermon with the verbal tradition of the Tai-me story that out of the void, out of the darkness, the word *was*—and *is.* Indian respect for the wholeness of the universe includes a reverence for the word, especially as it has been passed orally for generations.

House Made of Dawn and *The Way to Rainy Mountain,* as fictional-non-fictional complements, not only make two distinct statements about the Indian but also permit the reader to discover for himself the extent to which cognizance of the Indian is possible. *House Made of Dawn* discloses how much a non-Indian can never learn, how he cannot fully understand how an Indian sees himself and the world around him. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* surprises the reader with how much he *can* learn. Though capturing the mythic vision of the Kiowas poses for the non-Kiowan a breaking of mental barriers, a sharing in their sense of being alive is natural. A "feeling of play" can result from wondering about and dwelling upon the land, a feeling that will never be possible so long as some men continue to conceive of the earth as something inert and lifeless. Momaday writes:

> For we are held by more than the force of gravity to the earth. It is the entity from which we are sprung, and that into which we are dissolved in time. It is the calendar of

life as we know it, from the time of origin. Human evolution, like a vagrant moment in geologic time, is there, deep in the comprehensive earth. The blood of the whole human race is invested in it. We are moored there, rooted as surely, as deeply as are the ancient redwoods or bristlecones.

("An opportunity to speak out," *Viva,* June 3, 1973, p. 2)

V

As columnist for the Santa Fe *New Mexican* supplement *Viva,* Momaday gives readers perhaps their best insight into his very human aspects, a Momaday somewhat different from "author." Upon entering his second year as a columnist he admits to having wanted to write a column, inspired by the San Francisco *Chronicle's* Charles McCabe, "the best columnist that I know." And he wanted to write for the *New Mexican.* He reflects that the experience has forced him to make new discoveries about his own perception and ability. He confesses "that writing a newspaper column is rather a special occupation, not at all like other sorts of writing. It is different, and it demands a different kind of energy and imagination" ("A columnist recalls," *Viva,* March 11, 1973, p. 15).

"My enthusiasms are legion," he writes, "but they are not always reasonable" ("A highly seasoned column," *Viva,* May 26, 1973, p. 2). He then lists a dozen unrelated subjects which he "yearn[s] unaccountably to know more and more about" and proceeds to discuss the art of cooking. Since his first column, April 16, 1972, he has indeed covered a wide range of subjects, including (without exhausting his latitude) restaurants and restaurateurs, movies, photography, witches, elephant jokes, flying, cooking, former students, priests, sisters, and the Church of Christo Rey.

Always there are people. His reminiscences and vignettes of individuals give evidence of his wide acquaintance, extensive reading and research, and inter-cultural exchange. In "Three personalities, one landscape" (*Viva,* December 10, 1972, p. 2), he weaves as personifications of the New Mexico landscape a friend and former neighbor Joe Tosa of Jemez Pueblo; Fray Angelico Chavez, a friend from the days he was parish pastor at Jemez; and Georgia O'Keefe, who "perceives in the landscape of New Mexico an essence and a quality of life that enables her to express her genius."

Alive in the column are, among others, Francois Villon, Sir Frances Drake, and Karen Blixen, better known by her pseudonym, Isak Dinesen ("The woman who knew Africa," *Viva,* June 18, 1972, p. 2). Certain debts and influences he acknowledges in other columns: Emily Dickinson; Edmund Wilson, whose early work with Tuckerman's poems led Momaday to both Tuckerman and to Wilson, "who took it upon himself to place it [the Tuckerman manuscript] with a publisher" ("The influence of Edmund Wilson," *Viva,* July 2, 1972, p. 2); and Yvor Winters. Of Winters, Momaday writes, "He had a vivid sense of this landscape, having come to Santa Fe fifty years ago in order to recover from tuberculosis. And he taught school at Cerrillos." He believes Winters to be "one of the truly great men of his time"; "I could not have imagined such moral and intellectual integrity" ("The Man Who Took Literature Seriously," *Viva,* September 2, 1973, p. 8).

His family—his wife, three daughters, and the faithful black Labrador Retriever Cacique de Monte Chamiza—find their way into the column. He introduces Cacique in his second column. Participation in the animal blessing by Father Benedict Cuesta, Pastor of the Cristo Rey Church, had caused Cacique's "holier-than-thou notion of himself." In levity, Momaday comments, "And like learning, a little piety is a dangerous thing," sharing with the reader the knowledge that a mature St. Ber-

nard might well have played a part in the change. Of all this, Momaday concludes, "It was not exactly a crucial moment in the history of the West, but it seems to have brought about a modest change in the climate of my own household" ("Can a dog be pious?" *Viva,* April 23, 1972, p. 2).

The history of the West does, however, emerge from the columns, especially in characterizations of men like Pohd-lohk, the old Kiowan who kept his own history of events in pictographs. ("The night the stars fell," *Viva,* May 14, 1972, p. 2). Or Quincy Tahoma, a "Navajo of the old order" ("The isolation of Quincy Tahoma," *Viva,* August 20, 1972, p. 2). Billy the Kid figures with frequency; he rode beside Momaday and his horse Pecos on boyhood expeditions around Jemez, on the right side "and a couple of steps behind," Momaday keeping an eye on him, "for he bore watching. We got on well together in the main, and he was a good man to have along in a fight" ("Growing up at Jemez Pueblo," *Viva,* June 25, 1972, p. 2). Billy the Kid also appears in a fantasy dialogue with Isak Dinesen ("At best—a minor tragedy?" *Viva,* May 6, 1973, p. 24) as well as in a column solely his, "Cherish the legend of Billy the Kid" (*Viva,* October 29, 1972, p. 2).

Especially pertinent are Momaday's deep ties to and regard for the Southwest, his intuitive sense and intimate knowledge of Indians in general, and his great respect for language. Of the Southwest—his love affair with the region, with all of New Mexico, and with Jemez Springs and Santa Fe in particular—he has a great deal to say. Having a friend point out a "vaquero, a real one," Momaday experiences a "moment of truth and exile. . . . I am an Indian among cowboys" ("A bridge, a ghost, a cowboy," *Viva,* May 28, 1972, p. 2). Extolling the "sense of place . . . an equation in which Man and the landscape are related," he explains that his many years spent in New Mexico have given him opportunities to "observe and . . . assimilate the nature of . . . human existence—the quality of life—in this

corner of the world." He mentions the intricacy of the life there and then makes a point which pervades his writing: "And in the heart of this intricacy is one of our most valuable resources; that is, an inter-cultural mentality, a perpetual interaction of ideas and attitudes that is at once universal and unique" ("Three personalities, one landscape," *Viva,* December 10, 1972, p. 2).

Because he is both an Indian and very much his own Twentieth-Century man, Momaday is able to present the Indian in his natural setting—a whole man, as it were. He can give a Navajo ceremonial song and yet place himself in the pose of outsider by saying, "We have failed in our time to articulate the beauty of the world, for we have failed to perceive that the world is beautiful" ("Singing about the beauty of the earth," *Viva,* June 4, 1972, p. 2).

He takes the reader to the Kiowa gourd dance or explains how he learned the difficult Navajo language after an interim away ("Going into Navajo land," *Viva,* October 22, 1972, p. 2). Discussing the Indians and the 1972 elections ("The Indians and the Dodgers," *Viva,* November 5, 1972, p. 2), he can say, "The Indians have always been an unpredictable race. Indeed their strategy for survival has had to be predicated upon the element of surprise." He writes of his own Kiowa heritage—the Taimpe Society, Mammedaty's horse—and gives from time to time either the whole or fragments of "The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee" ("Thoughts On Life," *Viva,* August 12, 1973, p. 8; "A Memory That Persists in the Blood," *Viva,* July 22, 1973, p. 9; "A Garment Of Brightness," *Viva,* July 29, 1973, p. 2):

> You see, I am alive, I am alive.
> I stand in good relation to the earth.
> I stand in good relation to the gods.
> I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful. . . .

The Indian, he says, has "an idea of the self that seems whole

and affirmative, an appropriate ideal of human being and human conduct" ("A Garment Of Brightness," p. 2).

"Now, more than ever before, the Indian is in possession of his future as well as of his past. I believe that he stands to make a major contribution to the modern world" ("Learning from the Indian," *Viva,* July 9, 1972, p. 2). Momaday believes that the Indian is a man from whom a great deal can be learned, for the Indian has always known who and what he is; he has a great capacity for wonder, delight, belief, and for a communion with the natural world contradictory to the destruction rampant in "civilization." Momaday believes that the Indian ethic can help in the preservation of the planet Earth.

In his writing, Momaday exhibits his control of language, a control which develops from a deep respect for the word. One cannot, he believes, merely decide to be a writer. "It seems more a matter of necessity. One writes because he can, or must, and not because he chooses to do so." ("Does one write by necessity . . . or by choice?" *Viva,* September 3, 1972, p. 6). "A word has power in and of itself," he writes in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (p. 42). "They have a lot of *words,* and you know they mean something, but you don't know what, and your own words are no good because they're not the same," he has Benally say in *House Made of Dawn* (p. 144).

His preoccupation with language demands a reader's close scrutiny of all that he writes, for, as he says after reading an old letter he had written years before, "Language . . . can be powerful beyond belief" ("Letters: a window to the past," *Viva,* April 15, 1973, p. 2). The aesthetic perception of the Indian, "most apparent in children," he believes permits a vision that leads to an expression "that is at once universal and unique, the essence of abstraction and the abstraction of essences." "Perhaps this quality of abstraction," Momaday continues, ". . . is most fully realized in language" ("A Garment Of Brightness," p. 2).

Lecturer, critic, poet, Pulitzer fiction-award winner, Kiowa

soul-searcher-epicist, columnist, and educator—Momaday cannot be stereotyped. Nor can his two outstanding contributions to the literature of the American West. Indeed, his poems and columns merit wider distribution than they have heretofore had. He holds for readers an appeal reflected in the recurrence of elements identifying his unique style and structure, his subject matter, and for want of a more precise term, his spirit—that nearly indefinable aspect of a man which is the driving force for all that he is and does, that sentient attribute that characterizes his being and controls not only his thought but his communication to and interrelationship with others. Advocate of inter-cultural exchange, Momaday is a leading influence.

Momaday's next work cannot with certainty be characterized as "Western," despite editorial comment prefacing his first column: "he is writing an autobiographical work tentatively entitled The Names" (*Viva,* April 17, 1972, p. 2). Momaday synthesizes the West. He fuses past and present, man and land, Indian and non-Indian, life and language. With his respect for nature, beauty, being, and wonder, perhaps what he writes of the West is, as of a spring day in New Mexico, "About the isness of it all" (*Viva,* April 22, 1973, p. 2).

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