

**MOMADAY AND THE LAND ETHIC: A STUDY OF
HIS WRITINGS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
HOUSE MADE OF DAWN**

**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Thesis

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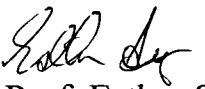
DECLARATION

I, Julie Sun Wahlang, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.


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Shillong,

16th December, 2008

Julie Sun Wahlang

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Introduction

Navarre Scott Momaday is regarded as the Father of Native American Renaissance. His accomplishments in fiction, poetry, painting and printmaking, and overall scholarship, have established him as an enduring American master. A writer-warrior and staunch believer in the restorative and reconciliatory power of words, indeed a “man made of words”, Momaday has built a monumental career in the arts, using his familiarity with both the Native American life and the ways of non-Native America to build a bridge between the two worlds:

I am an Indian and I believe I am fortunate to have the heritage I have. I grew up in two worlds and straddle both those worlds even now. It has made for confusion and a richness in my life. I've been able to deal with it reasonably well, I think, and I value it.¹

Novarro Scotte Mammedaty (as recorded in the Standard Certificate of Birth, but which was later changed to the present form) was born on February 27, 1934, in Lawton, Oklahoma. His father, Alfred Morris Momaday was a Kiowa painter and art teacher, and a great storyteller. His mother, Mayme Natachee Scott, descended from early American pioneers and Cherokee parentage, was also a teacher and writer of children's books, who passed on to him her love of writing, and encouraged his own incipient talents. In the preface to his collection of

stories and poems, In The Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, he pays due tribute to his parents:

From the time I could first function in language, I've been in love with words. How I gloried to hear my father tell the old Kiowa stories, which existed only at the level of the human voice. And how I loved my mother to invent stories in which I played the principal part. In my earliest years I lived in a home that was informed by the imagination, by the telling of stories and the celebration of language. Not only that, I lived on several American Indian reservations in those days.²

The family lived on several Kiowa, Navajo, Apache, and Pueblo reservations that accounts for Momaday's "Pan-Indian experience" even before he "knew what that term meant". Though he received the cultural best of both the Native and Anglo worlds, he also witnessed enduring tradition as he confirms, "From birth, I grew up being in touch with sacred matters." In an American Poetry Review interview with Joseph Bruchac, he recalled:

I saw people who were deeply involved in their traditional life, in the memories of their blood. They had, as far as I could see, a certain strength and beauty that I find missing in the modern world at large. I like to celebrate that involvement in my writing.³

Momaday's schooling continued in both reservation and off reservation schools. He says, "I was the only person for whom English was a first language". His memoir records,

My mother and father wanted me to have the benefit of a sound preparation for college, and so we read through many

high school catalogues. After long deliberation we decided that I should spend my last year of high school at a military academy in Virginia.⁴

And it was in his senior year at Augusta Military Academy that he was exposed to an overwhelmingly white society. At the time, it seemed most natural for him to go back and forth between both the worlds. However, he maintains that being a Native traditionalist caused him little trouble but admits that if it had happened at a later stage, he probably would have been “terrified.”

After graduation in 1958, from the University of New Mexico, and a year of teaching on the Apache reservation at Jicarilla, Momaday won a poetry fellowship to the creative writing program at Stanford University. Under the guidance of the celebrated critic, poet and scholar Yvor Winters, Momaday earned a doctorate in English literature in 1963, and accepted a teaching post at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His doctoral dissertation was published in 1965 as The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, with a polemical foreword by his mentor, Winters.

In 1967 he published The Journey of Tai-me, an early version of the 1969 work The Way to Rainy Mountain, which – illustrated by his father – wove together translations of Kiowa legends and stories, historical narratives, and personal recollections. Then came the

groundbreaking first novel, House Made of Dawn in 1968, which won him the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969. The New York Times Book Review found the novel ‘as subtly wrought as a piece of Navajo silverware.’ Momaday fashioned his debut work from his father’s stories of the *glorious past of his people, their legends and rituals, the sacred landscape of the Southwest, and his own experiences and observations of the conflict between the two cultures in which he moved.* The novel has been viewed as an American classic that paved the way for a Native American Renaissance. Additionally, he was the first Native American novelist to focus on the plight of the contemporary Native American, and to establish it as representing the cultural estrangement and social alienation characteristic of post-war American fiction in general. By so doing, he served as both model and motivator to younger writers, as a guide to those elements of the past, of legend and landscape, and of the present that have the power to reconcile us to our best selves, regardless of cultural backgrounds.

In 1969, Momaday was initiated into the Gourd Dance Society, an ancient Kiowa ceremonial organization that promotes the traditional event every July at Carnegie, Oklahoma. Momaday says that during such an event, “the Kiowa language buoys me up in my spirit, and my being is defined in ancestral voices.” Around this time, he also became an

associate professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, where he designed a graduate Indian Studies program and developed a course in Indian oral tradition that he has taught since at Berkeley, Stanford, and the University of Arizona. The same year, he was honoured with the Outstanding Indian of the Year award by the American Indian Exposition.

In his book, Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday, Charles L. Woodard introduces Momaday as the storyteller who has been telling his essential story, in poetry and prose, in public performances, in recorded conversations, and by painting and drawing. He calls him the “man made of words”- an identity that has become increasingly definitive, as he explores and develops the story he means to tell. To understand him, one must also understand the variety and fullness of his artistic expression which he creates out of the integrated and integrative awareness that constitutes his cultural heritage. He achieves his identity through his voice which is at once individual, and communicates shared cultural experience; it is also ancestral and capable of transcending time for ‘in words there is eternity.’ Attempting to explore his identity through his writings, Momaday stated, “We are determined by our language” and that one’s existence is intrinsically involved in it:

At the heart of the American Indian oral tradition is a deep and unconditional belief in the efficacy of language. Words are intrinsically powerful.⁵

He later amplified this view:

I have been called “the man made of words”, a phrase that I myself coined some years ago in connection with a Kiowa folktale. It’s an identity that pleases me. In a sense, a real sense, my life has been composed of words. Reading and writing, talking, telling stories, listening, remembering, and thinking (someone has said that thinking is talking to oneself) have been the cornerstones of my existence. Words inform the element in which I live my daily life.⁶

Matthias Schubnell corroborates the above when he describes Momaday’s writings as “forms of discovery,” a phrase that his mentor Winters uses frequently. Not only are they reflections of his being, but they allow him to explore, and understand, and formulate his own identity and the forces that have shaped him.

The two autobiographical narratives The Way to Rainy Mountain, and The Names: A Memoir, and an essay, *The Man Made of Words* corroborate his view that man’s existence is ordered, controlled and preserved through language. In The Names: A Memoir, Momaday explored his heritage through a mélange of tribal tales, boyhood memories, and family genealogy, with a double focus on the possibility of reconciling Indian-white conflicts and on a rediscovery of the lost unity of the natural world and the self. There are obvious connections

between House Made of Dawn, his two autobiographical works, The Gourd Dancer, and indeed his later writings:

I think of all of my work as being one story...It proceeds out of the same pre-historic legendary experience, and it comes about quite naturally.⁷

Colorado: Summer/Fall/Winter/Spring, combining Momaday's words with the photographs of David Muench published in 1973, won the Western Heritage Award the next year.

In 1974 he accepted a teaching assignment at Moscow State University, the first American to teach American Literature there:

It was an experience, a high point in my life...Something about that time and place made for a surge in me, a kind of creative explosion. I wrote numerous poems, some on the landscapes of my native Southwest, urged, I believe, by an acute homesickness. And I began to sketch...The poems and stories, the drawings here, express my spirit fairly, I believe. If you look closely into these pages, it is possible to catch a glimpse of me in my original being.⁸

Many of the poems in The Gourd Dancer were written during this time. Greatly influenced by his father, Momaday also took up painting, sketching and printmaking, and his works have been exhibited in the United States and abroad, gaining him a retrospective in 1992-1993 at Santa Fe's Wheelwright Museum.

Angle of Geese and Other Poems, his first collection appeared in 1974, followed by The Gourd Dancer in 1976. Reflecting and reinforcing

Momaday's belief that his poetry emerges from and sustains the oral tradition, the poems emphasize the radical mystery of nature presenting what Roger Dickinson-Brown commented in *Southern Review*,

perhaps the most important subject of our age: the tragic conflict between what we have felt in wilderness and what our language means.⁹

Poetry is his first love, and he regards it as a very old and elemental expression which is as 'venerable as song and prayer.' He adds that in poetry we address ourselves without pretension or deceit, and without the intervention of interest; rather it is an act of 'disinterested generosity'. The poet 'gives his words to the world in the appropriate expression of his spirit.' Pointing out that poetry belongs to none in particular and to everyone in general, he quotes Emily Dickinson, who he feels has given a viable definition of poetry as "my (her) letter to the world."

In 1978, he became a trustee of the Museum of the American Indian, a part of the Smithsonian Institution. A year later, he received Italy's highest literary award, the Premio Letterario Internazionale Mondello; the Distinguished Service Award of the Association of Western Literature followed in 1983 and in 1985, he was named Regents Professor of English. He has been a visiting professor at Columbia and Princeton Universities and at the University of Regensburg, Germany. He holds twelve honorary degrees from various American universities and

was named to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1987. He is the founder and chairman of The Buffalo Trust, a non-profit foundation for the preservation of Native American culture and heritage for young people coming of age today.

Among Momaday's more recent writings, his second novel, The Ancient Child (1989) and In The Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems (1992) stand out. In the first, the legend of *Tsoai-Talee*, the sacred rock formation, Devil's Tower in Wyoming, which is the source of Momaday's Kiowa name, adds resonance to the story of a successful contemporary Indian artist, estranged from his Kiowa heritage, in search of his identity. It suggests that what seems lost in the Native American culture can be recaptured through vivid memory and the imagination, leading to a reintegration of a self and a people. In ancient times, when the Kiowas roamed free across 'a land of innumerable long distances,' the tribe elders related the story of a boy who turned into a bear. In his novel, Momaday shapes the Kiowas' age-old tale into a timeless American myth. The Ancient Child juxtaposes Native lore and Wild West legend in a hypnotic, often lyrical contemporary novel in which time is seamless, imagination unbounded. Here is a magical, wholly unforgettable saga of one man's tormented search for his identity- a quintessentially American novel, and a great one.

In the Preface to the collection In The Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, Momaday says,

The poems in this collection were written over a period of thirty years, the drawings drawn over something less than twenty...When I knew what it was to write a poem, I wanted to know what it was to write a novel, then a travel piece, then a film script, then a play...I have tried to keep my mind alive for the sake of learning, which is to say for its own sake. That is my reason for doing what I do and for being who I am.¹⁰

This retrospective collection presents thirty years of selected works that offer a further exploration of myth and legend; it is an unadorned, yet refined brew of origins, journeys, dreams about the bear, an animal of cosmic significance to the Kiowas, the buffalo, and a life away from urban alienation, rituals as well as the landscape of the deep, continental interior. The book includes 70 poems, 16 new stories and prose-poems about the great tribal shields of the Kiowas and a strange, arresting, imagined recreation based on Billy the Kid. It also evokes traditional Plains Indian art, as well as Emil Nolde and Pablo Picasso, demonstrating Momaday's expressive power. These poems are 'meditations' that express instinctive continuities of a Pre-Columbian vision:

What moves on this archaic force / Was wild and welling at the source.¹¹

This was followed by The Native Americans: Indian Country (1993) and Circle of Wonder: A Native American Christmas Story

(1994), his only book for children, which serves as a recollection of his reservation childhood. He also wrote two plays *The Indolent Boys* and *Children of the Sun*. The first was initially given staged readings at Harvard in 1993, and its world premiere at the Syracuse Stage in 1994. The children's play was commissioned and produced by the Kennedy Center in 1997. These two plays are included in his 2007 work, *Three Plays: The Indolent Boys, Children of the Sun, and The Moon in Two Windows*. Its preface states that 'the telling of a story and the enactment of a play are closely related for both are examples of oral tradition.' A new book of poems and dialogues, In The Bear's House which was published in 1999, is a collection that combines paintings, a dialogue, poems, and prose pieces on the subject of the bear.

In 2004, he was named a UNESCO Artist for Peace, in recognition of his outstanding achievements as a writer and painter and his efforts to safeguard Native American heritage. He was also awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2007 at the White House, and is the Poet Laureate of the state of Oklahoma. But it is through the spoken word that his dedication to his people's heritage is most profoundly felt for as he says, "stories are realities lived and believed."

Momaday's fiction and poetry make abundant use of his multicultural background and demonstrate his ability to draw upon this

rich resource. An appraisal of Momaday's writings must take into consideration the multiplicity of biographical, cultural and literary factors. One of the factors that has shaped Momaday's aesthetic sensibility and which, as he himself says, shapes an individual both physically and spiritually, is the Native American's deep, cultural attachment to, and reverence for the land. Native Americans define geography through myth, ritualistic ceremonies and spirit power; they equate the land that carries the life blood of tribal traditions to land that is more of an abstraction or metaphor for most Americans. Native Americans believe that the land is alive. The relatedness to the land is rooted in the perception of a shared spiritual reality that transcends physical differences. Some believe that this common essence is the life breath while others refer to it as the presence of the Great Spirit. Mythic events in the life of Native Americans become deposited in the landscape and continue to reverberate in springs, coves, and other spaces. People return to these sites to pray, fast, and gather special herbs, for they know the places have the power to respond to their entreaties. Native American writers are the unheralded nature writers of the American landscape.

Momaday too uses literature to create a consciousness about the sacredness of the land to the Native American. His 1971 essay *An American Land Ethic* drew public attention to the Native American

tradition of reverence for nature and the communally held faith in the earth matrix, as well as to the philosophy that explicitly conserves nature's resources. He says,

Ecology is perhaps the most important subject of our time¹² drawing its significance to modern American society in an era of environmental degradation. Momaday's subsequent works illustrate that to be ecologically embedded as an individual rooted in the land is to personally identify with the land, to adhere to beliefs of ecological respect, reciprocity, and nurturing, to actively gather ecological information, and to be physically located in what we now call, the ecosystem. He interprets the relationship of the Native American with the land as

“reciprocal appropriation”. If there is anything that distinguishes American literature from European literature, it is the emphasis on land.¹³

He explains this appropriation as one in which man invests himself in the landscape and at the same time incorporates it into his most fundamental experience. In the Native American world view the landscape becomes his natural element and the only element in which his life is possible.

The relationship between man and earth does not end with death as he returns to the earth, as it were. He further subscribes to the view that

‘the land itself seems to inspire artistic expression.’ The equation between man and nature or between writer and place is an important relationship for as he says, “one must know the land” and “move to understand movement.” In his racial memory, he recalls his ancestors

entering upon this continent 30,000 years ago...and a growing awareness, as yet vague, that human beings, for all their assumed superiority over the plants and animals of the earth, have inflicted wounds upon the environment that are surely much more serious than we’ve realized, that may indeed be mortal. As a poet, a painter, and a man I care about these things. My life is involved in them.¹⁴

The environmental crisis in a technology-based, microchip society is a spiritual crisis because the absence of a bond to land inevitably leads to a materialistic frenzy and threatens the very fabric of the principle of harmony in the universe.

Such a holistic view will provide a proper perspective for the appreciation of Momaday’s work. This study is not just an examination of Momaday’s path-breaking novel, House Made of Dawn, and his other works, and of the imaginative fashioning they give to the legacies in play, it also explores the rich, cultural and oral tradition of Native America. The bulk of Native American literature includes an archive of ethnic autobiography, poetry as well as culture-myths each located within its own context of history, social and political milieu, and popular culture through a wide range of inter-textual works. Momaday became a

touchstone for modern Native literary achievement on the basis of House Made of Dawn (1968) with his familiarity with Kiowa, Laguna and Navajo history, tribal creation story, and the Sun and Peyote cosmology, unique in the 'imagination of ourselves'. This work is primarily an attempt to explore the concept of an American land ethic that has greatly influenced Momaday's art, and that emphasizes through his writing, the need for harmony between man and 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.¹⁵



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Chapter I

Literary and Historical Perspectives of Native American Literature

American literature begins with the first human perception of the American landscape expressed and preserved in language.¹

- Navarre Scott Momaday

According to the *mappa mundi* invented by the Babylonians and later adopted by medieval Europe, there were once three worlds – Asia, Europe and Africa. Numerically, in this Old World scheme, America came to occupy the fourth place. But on being labeled the New World by the Europeans whose conquest began with the landing of Christopher Columbus on an isolated little island on the edge of the southeastern sea, America entered into a story of depredation for which the planet has no parallel. As a result of invasion from beyond its shores, it has suffered uniquely. In the course of a few centuries, its original inhabitants – though settled there for millennia, having arrived during the last glacial period about the twentieth millennium B.C., from Asia, crossing from Siberia over the Bering Strait, perhaps in three waves – have come to be perceived as a marginal if not entirely dispensable factor in the continent's destiny.

In July 1990, representatives of nations all over the Fourth World met in Quito to review their experience of the past five centuries since Columbus's discovery of America. The declaration begins thus:

[We] have never abandoned our constant struggle against the condition of oppression, discrimination and exploitation which were imposed upon us as a result of the European invasion of our ancestral territories.²

They brought together political memory, and going deeper than alliance, their unanimity was founded on notions not just of Indian dispossession but of human survival. Native American tenacity and resilience argue for a belief whose source lies in cosmogony, ancient yet modern accounts of how the earth was and of how we as a species have come to inhabit it. According to the literary evidence and testimonies of the Native people of the Americas, an underlying coherence is to be found in the creation story told in the "bible of America", the *Popol vuh*, literally, the "Book of the Community", of the Quiché Maya. A classic of world literature, this sixteenth century work is about the evolution understood years later by Europe; its natural philosophy is a way of life critical to that of the planet itself.

Thus Native American literature, like the life and culture of which it is a part, is centuries old, more than thirty thousand years perhaps, and its roots lie deep in the land. The ancient Pueblo people called the earth

the Mother Creator of all things in this world; and along with all life on earth, we originate from its depths. So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills and canyons, the plants, and the sky, the term *landscape*, as it is in the English language, is misleading. 'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view' assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate* from the territory he or she surveys. The land, the sky, and all that is within them- the landscape- includes human beings. Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation among the animate and the less animate things. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Essays on Native American Life Today*, is, as she says, structured like a spider's web:

It begins with the land; think of the land, the earth as a spider's web. Human identity, the imagination and storytelling were inextricably linked to the land, to Mother Earth, just as the strands of the spider's web...From the spoken word, or storytelling, comes the written word, as well as the visual image.³

Native Americans thus have great reverence for the word, spoken as they are, from the heart, unpremeditated and unrehearsed, believing in its symbolic power to change the world for better or worse, Silence too is described as the sanctuary of sound. In the essay, *The Native Voice*, Momaday says:

Words are wholly alive in the hold of silence; there they are sacred.⁴

Native Americans have been accustomed to remembering their histories and the ways of life through time-proven processes of storytelling. In Steven Spielberg's *Into the West*, a television series aired on HBO which begins in the 1820s and is told through the third person narration about events spanning the US period of expansion, a Native character, Loved by the Buffalo, says, "When you tell a story, you touch the Grandmothers and Grandfathers." Indeed, Native Americans depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival. The oral narrative, or story, became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained and its continuity and accuracy are reinforced by the landscape. The myth, the web of memories and ideas that create an identity, is apart of oneself. This sense of identity was intimately linked to the landscape that has often played a significant role in a story or in the outcome of a conflict. It is for this reason that Pueblo people have always been extremely reluctant to relinquish their land. Their world vision was inclusive; and it embraced all levels of human experience. Thus stories about the Creation and Emergence of human beings and animals into this world continue to be retold each year for four days and four nights during the winter solstice. The events and details in *hummah-hah* stories were

sorted out into a loose narrative structure. Everything became a story. And everyone was expected to listen and be able to recall or tell a portion of it. In the Storyteller Leslie Marmon Silko cites,

The Laguna People
 always begin their stories
 with 'humma-hah':
 that means 'long ago'.
 And the ones who are listening
 say 'aaaa-eh'.⁵

Thus the remembering and the retelling were a communal process. Indeed stories are most frequently recalled when people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact location where a story took place. The precise date of the incident often is less important than the place or location of the happening. Events were placed in an achronological order. 'Long, long ago,' or 'recently' are usually how stories are classified in terms of time. But the place where the stories occur are precisely located, and prominent geographical details recalled, even if the landscape is well known to the listeners, often because the turning point in the narrative involved a peculiarity of the special quality of a rock or tree or plant found only at that place. Momaday says in *The Man Made of Words*:

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it.

He ought to imagine the creatures that are there and all the faintest motions in the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.⁶

Geary Hobson states, ‘in the remembering of heritage there is strength, continuance, and renewal’ throughout the generations. Anna L. Walters echoes the same sentiment in *Come, My Sons*:

It is in remembering that our power lies,
and our future comes
This is the Indian way.⁷

In Grant Foreman’s Indian Removal, Col. George S. Gaines and another observer speak of

seeing the departing emigrants (Choctaws) touching the tree trunks, twigs and leaves about their homes in token of farewell to these old friends (Foreman, 56).

This scene, in which the Choctaws stored away memories of their homeland, is a deeply poignant illustration of what it is to remember the earth. Hobson adds:

Heritage is people; people are the earth; earth is heritage. By remembering these relationships- to the people, the land, the past-we renew in strength our continuance as a people. Literature, in all its forms, oral as well as written, is our most durable way of carrying on this continuance. By making literature, like the singers and storytellers of earlier times, we serve the people as well as ourselves in an abiding sense of remembrance.⁸

He goes on to say,

Land is people...Our land is our strength, our people the land, one and the same, as it always has been and always will be. Remembering is all.⁹

It was when things became forgotten and lost, when the chain of generations was broken by European influx that many Native Americans became lost and forgotten. The tribes, particularly those along the Atlantic Coast, were overwhelmed without having had much chance of learning how to live within the influx. Beginning with the landing of Columbus on its southern shores, Europeans came upon the Native peoples and rapidly undertook to deny them their land and religious freedom. As is typical of most invaders, the Europeans brought with them guns, horses, steel tools, alcohol and disease, but rarely do the history books discuss Christianity as the one element brought by the newcomers that caused the most irrevocable devastation to the Native ways, plowing under the tribal religions with a mission to make Christians out of them.

At the time of the Spanish conquest in 1521, the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan was among the largest in the world, having evolved from a small settlement into the powerful political, economic and religious center of the greatest empire of Pre-Columbian Mexico. This urban island city ruled by the Aztec king Cuahtemoc, fell to the Spaniards led by the conquistador, Hernan Cortez after having held strong for months together. The Europeans argued with the Pope, and fostered the notion

that the New World was populated by sub-human people fit to be enslaved. They were anxious to be rid of all evidence that these indigenous cultures were intellectually equal to their cultures. The Mixtec and Maya people used folding books which are actually screen-folds of animal skin or *amatl*, *agave* bark paper in a unique combination of painting and writing; the manuscripts complemented non-Western, non-linear thought, and served as murals when folded out. These rich visual languages of the Aztec and Maya codices were destroyed in 1540 by Bishop Landa, who burned the great libraries of the Americas. Of the many screen-fold books only eight Mixtec books and three Maya codices have survived the fires. Although Cortez razed the ancient city and built upon it the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Spain naming it Mexico City, his success can be attributed to a large number of his indigenous alliances without whose help he could not have regrouped his forces. Ironically, one is reminded of W. Durrant who said, "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within." This perhaps reduces the tribal cultures to just its primitive nature. It was however, a given that the indigenous peoples were expected to relinquish their religious beliefs, their way of life, and most importantly, their land.

In fact, Native peoples have always been figured as the 'other', as impediments, and threat to Euro-America's 'winning of the west' which

contributes its own conquering whiteness of prairie wagons, Indian fighting, homesteading, cavalry, cattle drive and the 1850s Gold Rush. This racialised victory also pervades the West's early pop culture. Such acts were justified by the theory of Manifest Destiny, which states that European descendants acting for the American government had a God-given right to take land from the Native Americans. In common with Manifest Destiny, the above phrase sharply suggests civilization over savagery. Each phase of US expansion, adds to the white nationalist mythology of frontier, America as essentially Euro-America. A symptomatic version of Manifest Destiny as whiteness is to be heard, in the 1830s with Sam Houston's plan for making the Mexican province of Tejas into the American state of Texas translates as:

The Anglo-Saxon race must pervade the whole southern extremity of this vast continent. The Mexicans are no better than the Indians and I see no reason why we should not take their land.¹⁰

In the sustained campaign of cultural genocide, the representation of Native Americans, to this day, remains an explosive political issue.

Such, for long, concealed the actual historic ravages and injustice, whether it be Columbus's enslavement of the 'gentle' Arowaks in the 1490s, Cortez's defeat of the Aztecs in 1521 with its subsequent *encomienda* slaveholding by the Spanish, or Anglo-Puritan settlement

and warfare in Algonquin-named Massachusetts from the 1630s onwards, the *westering* impulse has found a bureaucracy to sanction, and to perpetuate, colonization. Cotton Mather's The Wonders of the Invisible World (1693) saw appropriation of tribal land as mandated by Christian providence:

The New Englanders are a people of God settled in those which were once the Devil's territory.¹¹

The Euro-Americans divided Native Americans into two stereotype categories: the noble savage and the howling savage. The first is seen as the appealing but doomed victim of the inevitable evolution of humanity from primitive to post-industrial social orders. This noble savage is allowed by the Progressives, to be the guardian of the wilds and on occasion, the conscience of ecological responsibility. The end result of their view of Native Americans however, is the same as its corresponding one of these peoples as howling denizens of a terrifying wilderness.

Whether it is New England's treatment of the Pequots, or the forced removals of the Cherokee from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1835, known as the Trail of Tears, after the discovery of gold on their land, or the killing of five hundred Shoshone by Federal troops in 1863 at Idaho, or the murder of the Cheyenne in the Battle of Wazita in 1864, or the unprovoked army attack on the Blackfeet at Marias River in 1870, or the

culminatingly memorial massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890 which Gerald Vizenor has not been alone in calling the *My Lai of American history*, Native Americans have always been figured as the ‘other,’ a threat to the dominant population. In this respect, the ignominious role of Oklahoma, literally, “red people’s land”, more literally, ‘*ogula homma*’ in the Muskogean languages, particularly the Choctaw and Chickasaw tongues, as forcing-ground, both the Territory and the State as it became in 1907, requires emphasis. The words ‘people’ and ‘land’ are indistinguishable and inseparable, enveloped as they are in synonymity. Land is people. Oklahoma became the land of exile for a great many eastern tribes; Indian Country for more than thirty removed tribal groupings- Apache to Osage, Kiowa to Medoc. The Chickasaw poet Linda Hogan evokes a striking correlative and poignancy in *Land of Exile*:

So far from home
 It has been flying out of me
 like small birds
 escaping the chest, heartbeats who know their way home
 ...Someday the water will return
 as snow...
 I didn’t know how much I missed the dry earth,
 how I could sink into it
 and the voices at night of old people talking.¹²

The same is noticeable in *Houses*:

All our memories are torn up like the earth,

stories of loss,
 the slow trail our people followed
 to Oklahoma,
 the black pasture
 taken by the government...
 The tearing apart of land.¹³

‘Indian Country’ like the term ‘Indian’, has long been a phrase that arouses an immediate caveat. A. Robert Lee wonders in his Multicultural American Literature, ‘Whose naming is it- that of the conquering white frontier,’ as ‘feared *terra incognita*,’ and ‘so loaded up in savagist mystique, or that of the tribes, to whom, historically, landownership is an alien construct?’ To the Native-centered understanding, it represents an inhabitation of woodland, hill country, prairie, pueblo or coast in which several cultures had and still have their being. William Apess observes in A Son of the Forest (1829):

I could not find the word “Indian” in the Bible and therefore concluded that it was a word imported for the purpose of degrading us.¹⁴

He insisted upon the term Native American instead of Indians. Gerald Vizenor, one of the most prolific authors in Native American tradition, equally decries the representative status. He has boldly satirized mainstream reductions of America’s indigenous peoples into ‘the Indian’ as a hopeless conflation of diverse tribes, languages and tradition. In a

celebrated 1981 interview with Neal Bowers and Charles Silet, he observes,

I believe we're all invented as Indians.¹⁵

He amplifies in a 1995 autobiographical essay, *Visions, Scares, and Stories*,

Indian is a nominal simulation of racialism and colonialism, and invented name, unheard in native oral languages.¹⁶

Whatever the case maybe, the tribes became the object of intense acculturative efforts while negotiations and treaties led to more expropriation of their land.

The inexorability of the US expansion process is recalled in the 2000 millennial issue of *The Economist*, Millennial Special Edition, 31 December, 1999, that looks back to the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-06, and its Jeffersonian brief to explore the lands west of the Missouri River :

White America. The Corps of Discovery as the expedition styled itself, arrived half-dead in Indian villages. It was cared for. Its Indian hosts were offered 'the hand of unalterable friendship'; what they got was ruin. By 1900 whole nations had died of small pox and those that were left had been cheated or hunted off their ancestral lands...And today's United States was born; no longer a nervous ex-colonial fringe along the Atlantic sea-board, but a continental power.¹⁷

But despite this steady loss of rights, land, and cultural autonomy, the Native Americans slowly developed some effective literary spokesmen even though Native American history, having been originally transmitted through a strong, formalized oral tradition, has virtually no written accounts of the original tribal histories. As a consequence of the modern Indian experience, information on differing tribal cultures is relatively poor. The destruction of numerous tribes and their being forced to live together in reservations led to an erosion of varying traditions and lifestyles, but at the same time, it contributed to a growing awareness of being primarily Native American. This gave rise to a new prototype which had an undisturbed close relationship with the natural environment and a strong adherence to cultural values which had been distilled from different tribal traditions.

It may be mentioned that the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools were not interested in teaching the canon of Western classics like Shakespeare. But whatever literature they were taught formally, the tribes participated in communal storytelling. In the Native American Renaissance, Kenneth Lincoln states:

Indian narrative, old and new, portrays living history, an angle of truth, a belief in people telling their lives directly, with pride and beauty. To tell a story the Indian way, no less to write, means not so much to fictionalize as to inflect the truth of the old ways still with us...The Indian storyteller

enters the narrative less as a point of view, detached on the crosshairs of art, more as a human presence, attended by an audience taking part in the narrative.¹⁸

Though most native writers preferred non-fictional genres to communicate the impact of invasion, warfare and displacement, the outlines of a distinctive Native American poetry and fiction were also emerging, portending a literature of power and beauty that would emerge into fullness in the twentieth century.

Literature is a facet of a culture. Its importance can best be understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and its purpose is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumptions on which it is based. Traditional Native American literature is different from Western literary traditions because the basic assumptions and purposes they serve differ greatly. The purpose of traditional Native American literature is not purely self-expression. The 'private soul at any public wall' is an alien concept because the tribes do not celebrate the individual's ability to feel emotion, for they assume that all people are able to do so. Native Americans seek through song, ceremony, legend, myths and tales, to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalise the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths of being and experience that give to

humanity its greatest significance and dignity. In the light of this observation by Paula Gunn Allen, Native American literature, oral as well as written, directional and circular, serve the people in an abiding sense of remembrance. The whole body of Native American literature, from its traditional, ceremonial aspects to its formal literary ones, forms a field, or as Allen say, a hoop dance, and as such is a dynamic, vital whole whose different expressions refer to a tradition that is unified and coherent on its own terms.

Contemporary readers, forgetting the origins of Western epic, Beowulf for instance, and other ballads, lyric, and dramatic forms, are inclined to regard literature as something written. Yet literature is aesthetically valued, regardless of language, or mode of presentation, because some significant verbal achievement results from the struggle in words between tradition and talent. What one seeks, then is verbal art, the ability to shape out a compelling inner vision in some skillfully crafted public verbal form. In an interview with Laura Coltelli in her Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak, 1990, Momaday has this to say about the oral tradition and the American literary canon:

That whole oral tradition which goes back probably to beyond the invention of the alphabet; the storyteller was the man who was standing with a piece of charcoal in his hand, making, placing, the wonderful images in his mind's eye on the wall of the cave, that's probably one of the origins of

American literature. I have an idea that American literature really begins with the first human expression of man in the American landscape, and who knows how far back that goes; but it certainly antedates writing, and it probably goes back a thousand years or more. So we have to admit it now, and always think in terms of it. We cannot think of Melville without thinking of American Indian antecedents in the oral tradition, because the two things are not to be separated logically at all.¹⁹

The oral tradition is more than a record of a people's culture. It is the creative source of their collective and individual selves. When that wellspring of identity is tampered with, the sense of self is also tampered with. It is a living body, and is in continuous flux, enabling it to accommodate itself to real circumstances of a people's lives. By oral word history, traditions and instructions are transmitted which guarantee a continuation and survival of the tribe and enable man to come to terms with the universe. According to Momaday, language and religious vision are related, for as he says in The Way to Rainy Mountain, which is an abbreviated history of the Kiowas, 'the word is sacred.' Indeed, it gives man his only real power to 'deal with the world on equal terms.' Philip Beidler in his study of written texts of the 1960s avers that one of the consequences of the 1960s Generation of Youth's ability to synthesise different occult fascinations 'with the indigenous orientalism of Native American myth, ritual, and magic' resulted in:

a true people's priesthood...mixing their sacred texts...into a total myth of consciousness...'20

This generation truly envisioned itself as one looking for the Word. In a more provocative passage, Momaday adds that the white man's regard for language as an instrument of creation has diminished to the point of no return. Is it then possible to recapture the sacred power of language? He offers no simple solution but offers instead in a variety of genres an oeuvre that weaves strands from the oral tradition of his ancestors into the fabric of contemporary literature.

Where written literature provides us with a tradition of texts, oral literature offers a tradition of performances. The performer and the audience are mutually engaged. In the progress of the Native American sense of narrative time, the principal figures are a series of mediators who incarnate supernatural power and values in the present moment, thus communicating prototypical realities to each succeeding new world. In this way cultural institutions come to be understood as created, and historical realities, and yet images of eternal verities. The world did not always exist as we know it today, and the myths which describe its creation are associated with those about the rise of culture. The primordial environment is for almost all tribes a watery one, from which different beings bring up mud to make the earth. In Southwestern tales,

four or five worlds of different colors or elements are stacked one on top of the other, and people climb up a reed or stalk through a hole in the ceiling of one dying world into the next, newborn one. People in the Northwest tell of descending through a hole in the sky (associated with the smoke hole of a tipi) to emerge into the present world. Countless characters enter into the action—true gods and spirits; monsters and dragons; elks, bears, eagles and other birds.

The narrated past therefore, begins in the Origin Period. In some cultures the most remotely conceptualized being is an Asexual Spiritual Being like the Aztec *Ometeotl*, whose dynamic self-reflection creates through thought emanation either two Sky Parents Proper (Sun Father, Moon Mother) or Displaced (Sky Father, Earth Mother). Their intercourse creates two worlds (Mountain, Water; East, West; Zenith, Nadir) requiring reconciliation. This movement of mediation can be envisioned either as Ascent or Emergence or a Descent or Earth-Diver. At the point of Contact there appears a figure that mediates, like the Seneca Woman Who Fell from the Sky, whose incarnation begins the birthing of spiritual power into the present, earth-surface world, and whose body upon decease becomes the first plants and animals.

Thus narratives are a genre of oral literature where the characters are one dimensional and rarely express thought or emotion. Told for

thousands of years, they are still being retold, reshaped and refitted to meet the changing needs of the audience, even created anew out of a contemporary man's vision. The Emergence being an emergence into a precise cultural identity, these stories of Emergence as well as of Migration of the tribes, arise out of the earth- the natural springs which are not merely sources of water but of continuance of life, the plants, herbs and animals which are integral parts of the human realm. Consider some lines from this poem by Joseph Bruchac aptly titled *The Geysers*:

There is a story
some people tell
of how they came
from a world beneath
this world through a hole in the Earth.
And here, through a hole in the Earth,
there rises a fine clear plume
of mineral water, a Geysers
which lends its name to the brook
which flows about the red stone cone
that has formed from the iron
of its waters.²¹

The journey made by the people, of awareness and imagination in which the people emerged from being within the earth and all-included in the earth to the culture and people they became, differentiating themselves for the first time from all that had surrounded them, always aware that interior distances cannot be reckoned in physical miles or in calendar years. The narratives linked with prominent features of the landscape

delineate the complexities of the relationship that human beings must maintain with the surrounding natural world if they hope to survive. Thus the journey was an interior process of the imagination, a growing awareness that being human is somehow different from all other life—animal, plant, and inanimate. Yet the people are all from the same source. Only through interdependence could the human beings survive. Families belonged to clans, and it was by clan that the human being joined with the natural world. Not until they could find a viable relationship to the terrain— the physical landscape they found themselves in —could they *emerge*.

One of the purposes of these narratives is to show dramatically ‘the system of interdependent relationships which give basic structure to the universe’. This intersection of the physical and metaphysical, of which the centre is the prime symbol, provides a place, function, and significance for all elements of creation in a highly integrated system emphasizing what the Navajos call *hózhó* or “beauty”, a concept of wholeness, balance, and integrity of form or being, closely related to the Greek *harmonia* or the Hebrew *shalom*. The identity of the individual as a part of the group and the greater Whole is strengthened, and the terror of facing the world alone is extinguished. Cohesiveness was all that stood between extinction and survival, and while the individual certainly was

recognized, it was always as an individual bonded to family and clan by a complex bundle of custom and ritual. In keeping with this belief system, the two forms basic to Native American literature are the ceremony and the myth. The ceremony is the ritual enactment of a specialized perception of a cosmic relationship, while the myth is a prose record of that relationship. The purpose of a ceremony is to integrate the individual with the community of people, and restore his isolated personality to conscious harmony with the universe. Thus the narratives are imbedded in the ancient languages and flow according to the rhythms of the natural world- a different pace indeed from that of a technological, man-made environment, fragmented by the pressing problems of a split-second, microchip society, that has little time or inclination to speculate on the communal nature of the universe.

The Native American, following the pace of 'Indian time,' still lives connected to the nurturing womb of mythology. As Ernst Cassirer has written,

The mythical world is at a much more fluid and fluctuating stage than our theoretical world...The world of myth is a dramatical world-a world of actions, of forces, of conflicting powers. In every phenomenon of nature it sees the collision of these powers. Mythical perception is always impregnated with these emotional qualities.²²

The world of the Pueblo Indians is bounded mythically and geographically by four sacred mountains, where holy men go on pilgrimages to pray for rain and to gather medicines. The word *sacred*, like the words, *power* and *medicine*, has a very different meaning to tribal and other ancient cultures like the Tibetans and trans-Caucasus cultures than to members of technological societies. It is filled with an intangible but very real power or force, for good or bad. John Lame Deer says:

Four is the number that is most *wakan*, most sacred. Four stands for *Tatuye Tope*-the four quarters of the earth. One of its chief symbols is *Umane*...It represents the unused earth force. The *Umane* does not represent the power; it is the power.²³

The mountains of the Northwest, for example, were believed to have once been people who schemed, fought, loved, and were eventually given the present form by the all-powerful One, as punishment for making trouble. The links between the historic past and the present through myth are strong. Archaeologists' evidence shows that the Iroquois of the Northeast have possessed a viable material culture continuously for several thousand years, a chain reflected in the extant body of folklore which has survived despite the attempts of many generations of white society to eradicate (or negatively stereotype) Indian history and culture, warping whole bodies of native literature, in their contemporary representations. Hubert Howe Bancroft once wrote,

Language is thought incarnate; mythology soul incarnate. The one is the instrument of thought, the other the essence of thought. In mythology, language assumes personality and independence. Often the significance of the words becomes the essential idea.” Thus the word for “sun” becomes the name of the sun god, and the word for “moon”, of the moon goddess.²⁴

Where legends endure, they do so fiercely. *Tunka*, the stone god, is the Sioux’s oldest god, and men still carry oddly shaped pebbles, bits of flint, or lumps of fossil agate in their medicine bundles. They still pray to sacred rocks and tell legends about them. Rivers, waterfalls, and mountains are the abodes of spirits and often appear as living characters in stories. The ancient tokens and symbols still exist and are carefully preserved. To those used to the patterns of European fairytales and folktales, these legends often seem chaotic, inconsistent, or incomplete. To apply conventional Western logic is impossible and unnecessary; spinning out a single image or episode may be the salient feature of telling a tale, and stories are often told in chains, one word, character, or idea bringing to mind a related one, prompting another storyteller to offer a contribution. The howling wind, the bubbling brook, the shrieking magpie all suggest, in their vital immediacy, stories, out of which legends are created, and told as elements in solemn ceremonies and as spontaneous creations. Rather than being self-contained units, they are

often incomplete episodes in a progression that goes back deep into the tribe's traditions.

Legends vary according to a people's way of life, the geography and the climate in which they live, the food they eat and the way they obtain it. Legends and cultures overlap and influence each other when people of different tribes live in adjacent territory or when they encounter each other through migration or trade over long distances. For instance, an Aztec-like image of the male face of the sun, surrounded by rays, is found painted and chipped into rock walls of the Southwest US as well as in contemporary Pueblo art.

Yet with all their regional images and variations, a common theme binds these tales together—a universal concern with fundamental issues about the world in which humans live. The themes include the creation of the world, dealing with both how the physical world came to be and how the features of specific cultures originated. These legends of human creation and the bringing of culture reflect in myriad ways a common belief that we are a part of the natural world. As a Sioux leader says, all things are tied together with a common navel cord. That includes the tall mountains and streams, the corn and the grazing buffalo, the bravest hero and the deceitful Coyote, the trickster figure who is also attributed with

taking on the mysterious powers of a Creator, leaving aside his clowning ways for a while.

Some Great Lakes tribes recount how they were originally made by the Great Sun or [with the Ojibway] Great Mystery; others like the Cheyenne, refer to the creator as Great Medicine. According to others, the first woman was impregnated by [in the Southwest] a sunbeam, an evolution story that closely resembles Greek prototypes, in the Northwest] salmon, or as the Iroquois say, by the west wind, giving birth to twin heroes, the gentle *Tsentsa* and his cruel brother, *Taweskare*, who perform famous deeds. Both the Earth-Diver Myth and the Emergence Myth appear prominently in Native American literature. However, the underlying principles of these myths have been stated explicitly for the Navajo by Clyde Kluckhorn as:

The world is a cyclically ordered, living reality of fragile relationships among intelligent, volitional beings, to whom man is intimately related through his prior forms and history.

All things are complementary. Nothing is whole or sufficient in itself. Mind, body, spirit are interrelated.

Man's role is actively to maintain harmony and integration among the elements of creation through ritual.²⁵

These legends encounter in a fantastic spectrum of forms, the story of these children of the sun, the twin brothers who bring culture, of the sacred four directions, of worlds piled on top of each other, of primordial

waters, of perpetual destruction and recreation, of powerful cultural heroes and trickster/transformer figures with extraordinary powers that help them exchange their animal and human forms at will. The nature of this character conveniently called the Trickster is in fact, an elusive one. The ambiguity inherent in the nature and the source of his power are a mystery. The trickster figure is variously personified in regional cultural traditions: in the Far West as Coyote, in the Northwest and Arctic as Raven, in the East as Hare, in the North Woods as Canada Jay or Wolverine, on the Plains as Spider or Old Man. These figures, acknowledging the child or dreamer in each of us, are imagined as behaving like humans in thought as well as deed, and their outward appearance is predominantly anthropomorphic. They can exchange their animal and human forms at will, and frequently do so to evade or deceive others, but their motivations are recognizably human.

Tricksters may be used to introduce the Peyote cult, which makes use of the drug containing the hallucinogen mescaline that induces hallucinations and visions in religious rites, in the face of conservative opposition; yet the trickster cycles cannot be seen as merely tales of deception and corruption. The peyote or *pejuta* is a holy herb often used by the Sioux and Cheyenne in the rituals associated with such vision quests- the sweat lodge, a solitary vigil, a flesh offering. The plant is

often considered to be a human spirit and used as an equivalent of a sacrament in the Native American Church, founded by a Comanche chief. Centered in Oklahoma, it developed its inter-tribal nature and the religion was introduced to the Sioux in the 1920s. The origin of the Peyote cult is traced to the vision quests in which an individual trying to find the answer to a personal problem, seeks spiritual power through enlightenment. Its vital function perhaps, includes parodying shamanic practices like human-animal transformations, consulting spirit advisers, and leaving the body for soul-flights to other worlds.

While the strong desire for harmony is related to the deep reverence for land, rituals play an important part in Native American oral literature. Just as Greek tragedy rose from a religious background, so has Native American literature, and it continues to be sustained by a traditional religious fervor. The tribes define themselves and are defined by ritual understandings, that is, by spiritual or sacred ceremonial shapings. Every tribe has a responsibility to the workings of the universe. Human beings play an intrinsic role in the ongoing creation. This role is determined by the place where the tribe lives, and it changes when the tribe moves. For instance, the Zuni dance *Shalako* every winter at the solstice so that the sun will turn in its course and move once again toward

summer. Such cosmic cycles relate to life processes on earth by virtue of natural relationship within the universe. These are as Lane Deer says,

circles within circles with no beginning and no end.²⁶

Ritual, or ceremony, rather than politics or language, forms the basis of the tribal world, and contemporary novels by Native American writers reflect this grounding as the structural and symbolic elements are derived from certain rituals and myth. Vittorio Lanternari said,

If the indigenous way of life has been subjected to misery, persecution and other adversities, the people seek relief from their frustrations and sufferings in religious ways...²⁷

The experience and the traditions of the Native peoples being complex and diverse rather than simple and unitary, and because they are victims of colonization, the ritual life, the religion of the tribes, is a common binding factor. The tradition is earth-based and wilderness-centered; all are animistic, polytheistic, concerned with sacred and non-political power, and all incorporate patterns that the western world identifies as profane. Ritual provided Native Americans a means to bring the chaotic, disturbed, and accidental under control. To exercise this control over the power of the Sacred, Native Americans looked to the priest or the shaman or the medicine man. Solitude and physical ordeals induced visions and brought the shaman to an experience of near-death and resuscitation which transformed him. The priest acquires control over the sacred

mostly through formal training that moulded his knowledge and practice to the orthodoxy held by the class of priests to which he belonged. And central to both shamanic and priestly religious traditions, was the power of the word, especially sung or chanted word. The songs and sacred words were given to the shaman in the initiatory trance into which he had been cast by the visitation of his guardian spirit. Thus devices such as repetition, which has an entrancing effect and lengthy passages of meaningless syllables take on significance within the context of the dance. The hypnotic state of consciousness is the aim of the ceremony for it helps the participants to put the distractions of life to rest, and become literally one with the universe.

Religious poetry then is usually very formal in tone, befitting the dignity of the relationships enjoined upon both the human and supernatural parties in the mythic past. Shamanic poetry recreates a state rather than an event; the priest seeks to recreate a prototypical event. Although birth, the onset of puberty, sickness, and death are all transitory states, for their duration, they effectively alienate man from the equilibrium of his former, harmonious state of being. Consequently, these dangerous moments in life are generally shrouded in rites of passage. The primary purpose of these life-crisis rituals is to control the transition from one state to the other. This is accomplished by reestablishing his identity

and experience as part of the pattern of prototypical events that established for all times the model by which the alienating effects of any life crisis can be nullified. It is interesting to note that puberty songs may be *directional*, requiring that certain acts be performed; or *instructional*, communicating to the new adult the esoteric knowledge associated with tribal mythology and ritual practice; and a third type of puberty song is the *dawn* song, sung on the morning of the last day of the ritual. In these dawn songs, the young adult runs towards the eastern horizon thus affirming a link with the cosmic cycles. Dawn also signifies death and reunion with one's ancestors. Thus in *Autumn Morning*, Peter Blue Cloud says dawn is a praise of silence to be respected.

Through such ritual songs, Native Americans are able to restore harmony to personal lives disturbed by violent change and successfully reintegrate the individual into the social, natural, and supernatural orders from which he had been displaced. The individual returns to the Past for new power. These rituals are also called world-renewal rituals. Again the Zuni *Shalako* ceremony is a good example; it occurs just before the midwinter solstice to begin the Zuni ritual year. Without renewal and rebirth, the initially vitalized order of life sickens and dies; without harmony and order the generative dynamism of life leads to chaos and conflict.

Redemptive ritual is focused on individual change. The use of first-person point of view in this poetry illustrates the personal search for a new status. An important redemptive ritual was the *Wiwanyag Wachipi*, better known as the Sun Dance, a ceremony which reached its maximum elaboration among the Plains people. The Kiowa, a nomadic people of the Plains area, acquired this traditional sacred ceremony from the Crow tribe and it became the centre of their worship. Celebrated once every year, it served as a catalyst for a renewal of tribal connections, bringing together all of the Kiowa people who lived in autonomous bands. They incorporated into it a sacred aspect of their pre-Crow religion- the '*Ten Bundles*' or Medicine Bundles, each with its own *tipi* erected for the duration of the ceremony. The Kiowa also had a sacred medicine doll, a *katsina* or '*tai-me*', which featured prominently in the Sun Dance. The ritual was preceded by a tribal bison hunt. After the invocation and exchange of gifts, the sacred "sun-gazing" act takes place as the men lacerate themselves to demonstrate their courage and willingness to sacrifice; or the whole weight of their bodies are suspended from the centre pole on rawhide thongs skewered through their pectoral muscles. The piercing of the skin is a reminder that the person truly owes himself to Mother Earth. Dennis Banks, a Minnesota Chippewa leader of the

American Indian Movement, defends his membership of the traditional Oglala Sioux Sun Dance religion as a

very sacred religious event where men warriors offer themselves to the great spirit to seek a vision...We must prove to the Mother Earth and all the female objects...the men warriors would like to share some of the pain...that our mothers had when we were born.²⁸

Songs were sung expressing confidence that the sacred power, *Wakan Tanka* or the Great Spirit, would bring about goodness and prosperity, courage and victory. The ritual would be followed by marriage ceremonies, tribal councils and family reunions. Black Elk, the Oglala Lakota Holy Man says of such 'Making of Relatives' ritual that through these rites, a three-fold peace is established. The first peace which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the centre of the universe dwells *Wakan Tanka*, and that this centre is really everywhere. It is within each of us. This is the real Peace, and the others are but reflections of this. The second peace is made between two individuals and the third, is that which is made between two nations. But there can never be peace between nations until it is first known that true peace is within the souls of men.

Transformative rituals, having their origin in dreams, constitute a secret well of power from which one can draw strength and achieve spiritual renewal. They therefore appeal to a vision of the end-time to bring about imminent, radical change in the social order rather than in the individual only. Because the imminence of the change is often announced by a prophet, such movements have been called messianic. This 'nativistic' rite is a call to return to the ancient ways that existed prior to subjugation. The Ghost Dance religion which flourished during the 1880s, and was destroyed by the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, was a classic example of such a movement. Its immediate motivation came from the totality of the Indian experience with whites, ranging from initial acceptance to disillusionment, dispersal, and eventual defeat and exploitation. This experience precipitated a sense of despair during the Reservation period, which in turn gave birth to a messianic vision, announced by the *Paiute* prophet Wovoka, predicting the destruction of the whites and the restoration of the Native Americans' natural existence in all its former glory.

Ghost dancers performed a special round dance, holding hands and singing ghost dance songs. Their shirts, painted with the images of stars, the moon and the sun, and magpies, were supposed to make them bulletproof. Dancers swooned and fell down in a trance. On gaining

consciousness, they declared that they had been in a beautiful land teeming with buffalo, and that they had met their long-dead relatives. The followers of Wovoka believed that the white man would be exterminated and that tribal lands and sacred traditions would return. Its main element was the belief that the time will come when the whole 'Indian' race, living or dead, will be reunited upon a regenerated earth to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease and misery. Under the false impression that the Ghost Dance was the signal for a general Indian uprising, the white agent at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota called in the regular army to suppress the dancers. One band under Chief Big Foot surrendered to the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old command. Among its men and officers were many who were eager to avenge his death. Thus at Wounded Knee Creek, the army opened fire with many quick-firing Hotchkiss cannon upon Big Foot's people killing some two hundred fifty men, women and children. The mass grave in which they were buried is still there. The Ghost Dance was an example of a cultural pattern that responded to desperate situations through a belief in a necessary apocalypse followed by a restoration of the world to its original, uncorrupted order.

Ritual, thus, enabled Native Americans to externalize an inner vision of order and stability, and so to confront successfully the

apparently arbitrary exercise of power manifested in death, epidemic, famine, and catastrophic change, in order to escape “the terror of history.” And it is in ritual, where man exerts his greatest efforts to communicate with the sacred, that Native Americans exercise the major portion of their gift for oral poetry. As long as the ritual or the sacred centre of the community is secure, the tribe is secure. These centers vary from tribe to tribe: for the Lakota the ritual centre is the *Sacred Pipe* brought to them long ago by White Buffalo Woman. For the Cherokee it is the ceremonial fire and for the Kiowa it is the *Ten Grandmother* bundles. For many in the Pueblos, the ritual centre is the plaza, the *Middle* as Momaday terms it in his novel House Made of Dawn. It is not so much an idea of community as it is a tangible object seen as possessing supernatural powers to unite or bind diverse elements into a community, a psychic and spiritual whole. Thus a healing ritual changes a person from an isolated state to one of incorporation. This is what the solstice ritual of the Zunis strives at. The transformative process engenders the ritual cycle of birth, growth, ripening, dying, and rebirth.

Lyric poetry is essentially song. It is the result of an inner compulsion to articulate the space of man’s life on earth. This genre, while differing from ritual poetry, in that it is not exclusively chanted but sung on melodic line, may be religious, ceremonial, social, secular,

recreational or occasional, or all of these. The songs celebrate major events in human life like birth or naming, puberty, healing, death and burial. The personal lyrics reflect the emotional response of the singer; they include lullabies, women's work songs, songs of praise, hunting songs and elegies, more formal expressions of grief than the wailing lament and also death songs of power sung in the face of death. They are also part of the fertility rites which ensure survival of the group. The wind songs of the Kiowas are actually war songs which describe loneliness and longing on the vast open prairies where only 'the sweep of the wind broke the silence.' Many songs of leaving the wife and home to go to war reflect the sense of loss borne especially by women, for instance this one sung by a Sioux woman:

As the young men go by,
I was looking for him.
It surprises me anew
that he is gone.
It is something
to which I cannot
be reconciled.²⁹

The tales of love- tragic, ribald, earthy and poetic- deal with hair-raising trials of endurance, testing a vowed commitment, and the rewards are not always as the lovers might have anticipated.

Oratory, whether ceremonial or non-ceremonial, is used for settling political and legal questions, for initiation rites, or in council meetings,

welcome addresses and exhortation to warriors, calling for solidarity. Ritual oratory occurs within the tribal community, either between the people and one of the representatives of the *supernaturals*, or between the people and *supernaturals* who are not present. Every Iroquoi Longhouse ritual, for instance, opens and closes with an expression of gratitude directed to the hierarchically ordered powers of the cosmos. Secular oratory is situated within a tribal or inter-tribal setting. The most extensive collection of secular orations are the recorded speeches associated with treaty-making and the westward expansion of the United States into Indian lands. Native Americans value eloquence. The word is not merely a linguistic sign, purely instrumental, a mere means of communication. It is pronounced, 'a breathing out' of the life that is within, capable of providing a construction of reality that is unique to the speaker. Thus the art of speaking was considered to be charged with power, creative and not merely descriptive, and it is sacred. Although the speeches when read can hardly approximate the impact of their first utterance, their records preserve their art. This oratorical ability of Native Americans, their artful talent for persuasion, has been noted by the early European settlers. Thomas Jefferson in his "Query VI," Notes on the State of Virginia, 1787, has praised this ability and compared it to the classical style of Demosthenes or Cicero. However, such praise often

stemmed from ulterior motives; it was racist and based on the perception that because Native Americans were 'savages', they could produce nothing of worth. Thus the noble savage became the 'noble eloquent savage', and the ignoble savage, the ignoble, 'inarticulate Indian'.

Here, one may recall the 1855 address of Chief Seathl (Seattle), the Duwamish Salish leader, during the reception of Governor Stevens, Commissioner of Indian Affairs for Washington Territory. His deep-toned, sonorous voice rolled over the immense multitude as he commenced his memorable address in solemn and impressive eloquence:

Yonder sky that has wept tears of compassion on our fathers for centuries untold, and which to us, looks eternal, may change. Today it is fair, tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds...Our great father Washington...sends us word by his son...that if we do as he desires, he will protect us(The Native peoples were deceived into thinking that Washington as still alive and that King George was still England's monarch)...The great,...white chief sends us word that he wants to buy our lands but is willing to allow us to reserve enough to live on comfortably...should we accept it, I here and now make this the first condition : that we will not be denied the privilege...of visiting at will the graves of our ancestors and friends. Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hill-side, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe...the soil is rich with the life of our kindred...Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother...The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. All things are connected...What is it that the white man wishes to buy, my people ask me. The idea is strange to us. How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land?...Is the earth yours to do with it as you will, merely because the red man signs a

piece of paper and gives it to the white man?...But we will consider your offer...to go to the reservation...We will live apart and in peace...Even the white man, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We shall see.³⁰

Such eloquence, dignity, and grace, was not acquired. They were as native to his manhood as leaves and blossoms are to a flowering almond. The above was a fragment of his speech as Dr. Henry A. Smith reported it (Seattle Sunday Star, 29.October, 1887).

History enters the mythic world obliquely, but leaves its definite mark in characters and incidents. Many tales and cycles embody the collective experience of a particular tribe, perhaps compacting into a single dramatic myth of migrations, natural disasters, and other major events that occurred over generations and centuries, with mythically transformed references to 'historical' episodes- the creation and fall from power of the Iroquois League; first sightings and later encounters with Europeans, beginning from missionaries and traders, later with armed soldiers, the suppression of religion and forced christianisation by the Spanish. Also, the Pueblo uprisings of 1680, the displacement from traditional homelands and the accompanying deaths or devastations; the dramatic watershed encounters at Fort Stanwix and at Rosebud, Little Bighorn, and Wounded Knee- all became part of the myth. By incorporating such cataclysmic events in the realm of myth or folklore,

the storyteller can at once celebrate, mourn, and honour the past- and look ahead to a time when the great heroes may return to their people, bearing powerful medicine to restore former glory.

These legends are also magic lenses through which one can glimpse social orders and daily life: how families were organized, how political structures functioned, how religious ceremonies affected the participants, how power was divided between men and women, how food was prepared, how honour in war was celebrated. For instance, the conduct of war was a ceremonial affair, full of magic and ritual. The main object in any battle was to 'count coup', to reckon one's brave deeds; riding up on an unwounded and fully armed enemy, and touching him with the hand or with one's *coupstick*, was a great feat. A warrior's eagle feathers were notched, split, or dotted with paint to indicate what kind of coups he had counted, how many enemies he had slain, or how often and in what way he had been wounded. Coups were proudly boasted, their stories told and retold around campfires. The women were not to be left behind and sometimes, as in the case of the Sioux Brave Woman who supported her people by singing brave-heart songs and by making the shrill, trembling war cry with which Native American women encourage their men, they would be active participants in the battles. Another such young woman was the Cheyenne Buffalo-Calf-Road-Woman who fought

alongside the renowned Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull against the white soldiers in the Battle of the Rosebud in 1876, and whose contribution was acknowledged by the white general as well. When the people were reduced to living on reservations, these ancient deeds of valour became even more crucial to the preservation of a positive identity.

However, these legends are not told merely for amusement or education: they are believed. They are emblems of a living religion, giving concrete form to a set of beliefs and traditions that link people living today to ancestors from centuries and millennia past. As Bronislaw Malinowski said,

Myth in its living, primitive form is not merely a story told
but a reality lived.³¹

For all its complexity, Native American literature possesses a unity of symbol, structure and articulation, based on the essential harmony of the universe and on thousands of years of refinement:

I add my breath to your breath
That our days may be long on the Earth
That the days of our people may be long
That we may be one person
That we may finish our roads together
May our mother bless you with life
May our Life Paths be fulfilled.³²

- Old *Keres* song

Breath is life, and the intermingling of breath is the purpose of good living. All of life is living, partaking as it does in the life of the All-

Spirit. God is known as the All-Spirit; other beings are also spirit- more spirit than body, or intellect, or mind. The circle of being is what lives and moves and knows. The concept, based on the Plains tribes' idea of a medicine wheel or sacred hoop, is one of singular unity that is dynamic and encompassing, including all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life. Thus healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. It is acknowledgement of this that allows healing chants to heal:

Happily I recover.
 Happily my interior becomes cool.
 Happily I go forth.
 My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
 No longer sore, may I walk.
 As it used to be long ago, may I walk.
 Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
 Happily with abundant showers, may I walk.
 Happily with abundant plants, may I walk.
 Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
 Happily, may I walk.³³

- *Navajo Night Chant*

Consequently, the unity of the whole is preserved and reflected in language, literature, and thought. Literature takes on more meaning when considered in terms of some relevant whole. Yet though the oral form has been altered greatly under the impact of acculturative forces, this ancient pre-literate tradition is still alive and well in Native American

communities. Geary Hobson avers that many tribes had variants of written language long before the Cherokee syllabary was developed by Sequoyah who merely elaborated on the ancient system of communicative symbols, previously the domain of medicine-makers and keepers of the old ways. The *Walum Olum* or “Red Score” of the Delawares and the Book of Rites of the Great League of the Iroquois Confederacy were handed down orally for many generations but the people reproduced them in various written ways. Change is inevitable even as new genres that combine Native and Anglo influences have emerged. Yet the advent of writing has supplemented, not supplanted, the oral culture.

The transition has not at all been what one might call smooth. From the first sighting of the Europeans, painted in red on a peeled stick, the fortieth and final pictograph in the *Lenni Lenape* historical record known as the *Walam Olum*, showing a curved shoreline and a sailing ship, translated as:

Persons floating in from the East; the whites are coming.³⁴

The contact, principally for trade, preceded a disastrous relationship. The invaders meant to transform this vast and alien land into a ‘new’ England, or ‘nouveau’ France. But for a few exceptions like William Penn, the Father of Pennsylvania, English settlers were ambivalent toward Native

Americans, whom they feared as military equals but demeaned as cultural inferiors. As a result, once the military effectiveness of the Native peoples was considered to be neutralized, they became the object of acculturative efforts to transform them into the European's image of himself. This ambivalence was reflected in subsequent British and American Indian policy.

To replace the chaos of separate colonial initiatives, Britain adopted in 1755 a unified Indian policy, regarding all tribes as sovereign nations whose relationship with England was to set forth in treaties between representatives of the Crown and the tribes as heads of state. Following the American Revolution, the federal government assumed sole responsibility for dealing with Indians. After the War, settlers entered the British-created Indian Territory, inducing President Thomas Jefferson to adopt a policy of transforming Native Americans. Later Andrew Jackson viewed them as mere 'subjects of the United States' and despised treaty-making as 'an absurdity'. Under a weak pretence of saving the Native peoples from the onslaught of white settlers, he successfully manipulated the Congress into passing the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which herded entire nations, many in devastating forced winter marches, to Indian Territory, expropriating more Indian land than in any other period. Following the American Civil War, Congress

legislated the end of treaty-making in 1871, repudiating Indian sovereignty and subjugating the tribes. The army, meanwhile, following the pattern of Kit Carson's invasion of Navajo land, adopted a scorched-earth policy and executed a series of winter campaigns. Many tribes like the Kiowa and Comanche, witnessed their villages burned, their horses slaughtered, their guns taken away and their leaders sent off in chains to Pensacola, Florida, among them, Geronimo, without trial, even after their voluntary surrender, and the rest, removed to reservations elsewhere.

Cheryl Harleston's summarized version of an excerpt from the book, Neither Wolf nor Dog. On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder by Kent Nerburn reads:

Let me tell you how we lost the land. It wasn't our land like we earned it. It was the land where we hunted or where our ancestors were buried. It was the land that the creator had given us. It was the land where our sacred stories took place. It had sacred places on it. Our ceremonies were here... We had watched the seasons pass on this land. It was alive, like our grandparents. We were part of it. The land was part of us. We didn't even know about owning the land. It is like talking about owning your grandmother. For us, the earth was alive... There had to be respect. We saw no respect from these people. They chopped down trees and let animals lay where they were shot... Then these new people... wanted to give us money for the land. Our people didn't want this. Then these people said that we didn't belong here anymore. That there was a chief in Washington... and the land was his, and he said they could live here and we could not. We thought they were insane... They were talking about property. We were talking about the land... Everyone believed that whoever had a piece of paper saying they

owned the land could control everything that happened on it... We didn't even know what it meant. We just belonged to the land. They wanted to own it.³⁵

In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment or Dawes Act and Reservation land was then allotted, a parcel to each family, while the remaining land was put up for sale. Allotted Indians became US citizens and subject to state or territory laws, which however, was ended by the Burke Act in 1906. In the widespread corruption that followed, Indians were pauperized. When the first Europeans set foot in the Western Hemisphere, Native Americans held almost 3 billion acres of land. After the Dawes Act was repealed in 1934, they were left with just 1.5 percent of their original land. Interpretation of the politics, the imaging, within this history remains wholly ongoing. This is also seen in Korzack Ziolkowski's still-unfinished Black Hills rock sculpture of the Lakota-Sioux holy man Crazy Horse (Tashuncaitco). It may well have been a counter to Mt. Rushmore's Founding Fathers statuary. Yet to the Sioux, it is a double desecration, of the Black Hills or *Paha Sapa* meaning Sacred Land, of dramatically altering it without any respect, and of the singling out of self over community. Situated near Custer, South Dakota, and named after the US Cavalry's long-supposed martyr, General George Armstrong Custer who was defeated by a combined Sioux-Cheyenne

force led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull at Little Bighorn in 1876, the rock sculpture merely compounds the irony.

There were Jeffersonian humanitarians, who hoped that the assigned missionaries and agents' staff of teacher, doctor, farmer, would transform the Native Americans into their own image of literate and Christian agriculturists. Formal education, modeled on Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian School (1879), provided basic instruction and vocational training in a strict, pseudo-military boarding school regimen. Children on reservations were forced to attend federal schools away from their traditional homes. At the schools their hair was cut short, and they were given arbitrary names and forbidden to speak tribal languages. The federal government and institutions tried to force assimilation by invalidating tribal traditions and values. The director of mental-health programs for the Indian Health Service, and psychiatrist on the Navajo Reservation, Robert Bergman has testified that

Separating Indian children from their parents and tribes has been one of the major aims of governmental services for generations...Given the least excuse, substantial or rumored, children are removed from their homes and placed in the home of a white person.³⁶

Thus Native parents had no voice in the way their children were efficiently centralized, processed and alienated in a white school. In this regard, Karl Menninger, psychiatrist and chairman of the board,

Menninger Foundation, has, in testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education said,

You damage a child still more when you destroy his first stone of identity, when you tell him his language is no good, when you tell him that his color is not right or imply it by surrounding him with people of a different color, habits and status. You tell him that what his parents have taught him is no good, that he should not do so and so, or be what is.³⁷

But for many in Euro-America, the supposed want of word and text was to be situated within the social-Darwinian destiny, the inability of the tribes to evolve and adapt. It is a formula complicit in the deceitful loss of Native land-holdings, the impact of gun and Bible, the importation of disease, and the view of these peoples as both wayward and infantile. Such acculturative mechanisms having failed, Bonnie Kae Grover observed

white culture is built on stamping out culture that isn't white, or culture that isn't white enough, even culture that doesn't happen to be the correct shade of white.³⁸

Nevertheless, many of the Native Americans educated in the eighteenth century at Harvard Indian College have left their mark on history in many ways. Caleb Chaesahteamuk, a Natick and the first Native American college graduate, was fluent in English, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. In 1754, Eleazar Wheelock's Moor's Charity School opened in Connecticut. One of his students was Samson Occum, a semi-literate

Christian Mohegan whose talent lay in oratory. His address became quite a bestseller. But William Apess was an even more vocal Native American advocate of his people's rights. Apess authored the first Native American autobiography.

All fiction is autobiographical in nature. Momaday construes autobiography as 'an act of imagination' like the dictum 'We are what we imagine' in his essay *The Man Made of Words*. Autobiography is, to an extent, the weave of fiction into fact; the emphasis on imagination is one way of telling a story, and this provides a sightline for Native autobiography. The founding autobiographies by Native American writers include A Short Narrative of My Life (1762) by Samson Occum, and William Apess's A Son of The Forest :The Experience of William Apess (1829). Apess, a mixed blood Pequot, saw himself a convert to Christian piety and yet an unyielding Native dissenter. His work, while telling a story of brutality and hardship, established a pattern of personal history in which Christianity and education cooperated to free the Indian from his tribal past thus displacing him from the very culture to which he seeks to testify. The appearance of these autobiographies as a genre coincided with the emergence of American autobiography. But as Arnold Krupat has observed, while American works were "old-world oriented

and self-consciously literary,” the Native American narratives derived from oral tradition.

The Life And Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit (1854) by the Cherokee John Rollin Ridge may be the first known Native novel. He is also credited with being the first to publish a volume of poetry. This novel, while not about Native Americans *per se*, is about native response to invasion and conquest. Joaquin Murieta, the folk hero is motivated by his experience of prejudice to avenge the murders of his people that occur as a result of the Gold Rush, the Mexican-American War, and the take-over of California by the United States. It contributed to Chicano/Latino protest lore more than a hundred years later.

But it is believed that Elias Boudinot’s small book, Poor Sarah, or Religion Exemplified in the life of an Indian Woman, which was published in pamphlet form in 1823, was the first work of fiction but with religious overtones, by a Native American. The sketch is narrated by an educated white woman, that tell of her relationship with Sarah, an impoverished Indian, whose simple faith, spoken in very credible broken English, convicts the sophisticated narrator of hypocrisy. Boudinot later became more famous as the founding editor of *The Cherokee Phoenix*, the first native, bilingual newspaper founded in 21st February, 1828.

The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of Native American poets whose works were based on the models to which they had been exposed in their formal education. The sense of the connectedness of all things, of their spirit, and of their intelligent consciousness, is the identifying characteristic of Native American tribal poetry. These features link the literary work of all tribally inspired poetry around the world. John Rollin Ridge is the first Native poet to publish a volume of poetry that concerns his romantic relationships, part of which seems to be a generalized expression of the Muse theme imbued with Romantic conceits. The Creek poet, Alex Posey, shows the experience of a tension derived from the attempt to accommodate native conceptions to an alien language and verse forms. He believed that ‘the Indian talks in poetry’ but in attempting to write in English he is handicapped, and sought for himself his tribal poetry’s ‘power and ability to express in sonorous musical phrases...gorgeous word-pictures.’

Posey differed from his contemporaries in attempting to endow the landscape with some of its Indian history. He addressed the natural elements and took pride in his people and celebrated illustrious figures in verse. Less gifted and less political than Posey, E. Pauline Johnson was a poet who exceeded the previous two poets as a master of narrative poetry, romanticizing the woodland Indian, especially in her ‘canoe songs.’

In the period following the reservation system from 1880 to 1940- the Era of the Vanishing American to many scholars and historians of Native culture, many autobiographies were issued thus making the genre an important constituent of the body of Native American literature. Simon Pokagon's Queen of the Woods (1899) is a disturbing combination of the autobiographical and apocalyptic. When Simon first sees Lonidaw the future queen, she is accompanied by a white deer wearing a red, white and blue wreath. The two marry and raise two children, Olondaw and Hazeleye. Olondaw is sent away to school even after his mother dreams of him being eaten by a snake. Vision becomes prophecy when the boy returns home an alcoholic and dies. The tale culminates with Simon's promise to Lonidaw to fight for temperance, and there follows an apocalyptic vision of King Alcohol, robed in the Stars and Stripes, out of which come the snake and ravens to stalk the land in a terrible parody of John Gast's painting, *American Progress*. The annihilation is complete when Indians begin to die of spontaneous combustion. Pokagon also had the distinction of meeting President Abraham Lincoln to negotiate the sale of the land which later became Chicago. Thus the growth and development of prose fiction authored by Native American writers found a firm footing in the nineteenth century.

By the early twentieth century, autobiographies written by native writers became very popular as a result of three volumes published by Charles Eastman. Though he referred to Indian Boyhood as the preliminary volume of his autobiography, The Soul of the Indian was also autobiographical in nature. Deeply convinced of the value of tribal religion, he contrasted it with the 'professionalism of the pulpit.' He regarded Native religion as more natural because it was universal, nonsectarian, and had a prior existence in time. His works generated a popular audience and spurred similar works.

The 1930s has been credited with the record number of 'as-told-to' autobiographies, and the single most influential one which languished for thirty years until it was resurrected in the more receptive climate of the 1960s, was Black Elk Speaks, Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, as told to his son who in turn translated it into English and John Neihardt rewrote the same. Neihardt, a poet with an epic vision of the West, shaped the narrative around the issue that Black Elk himself emphasized: his failure to live up to the vision that had been entrusted to him, of leading his nation through four difficult periods until, in the face of starvation and cultural disintegration, he found the four-coloured herb that would revitalize his people. Black Elk's ultimate despair is assured when he aligns himself with the Ghost Dancers, witnesses the massacre at

Wounded Knee and the starvation of the refugees, and is himself wounded in the aftermath. Neihardt represented Black Elk when he added:

A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.³⁹

Early novels by Native American writers leaned on the Native-white culture conflict theme with the dying savage partly because it was most acceptable to potential publishers. In the novels that use the story of conquest, devastation, and genocide as their major theme, white civilization plays the antagonist and becomes imbued with demonic power reserved in classic literature to fate and the gods. With such multitudinous traditions and themes, Native writers deal with themes that characterize and define tribal and urban life in Native American terms. These works are mostly ritualistic in approach, structure, theme, symbol, and significance, even though they use an overlay of western narrative plotting. Traditional tribal narratives are circular in structure, incorporating event within event, piling meaning upon meaning until the organic growth is complete in a story. Unlike western genres where the structure is tied to any particular time line, main character, or event, Native works are tied to a particular point of view- that of the tribe's tradition, and to a specific idea- that of the ritual tradition and accompanying perspective that inform the narrative. Ritual provides

coherence and significance to traditional narrative as it does to traditional life, founded as they are, on the primary assumption that the universe is alive and that it is supernaturally ordered. These ritual-based cultures do not regard economic, social, or political elements as central; rather they organize their lives around a sacred, metaphysical principle. The universe is not blind or mechanical, but aware and organic. Literature, which includes ceremony, myth, tale, and song, is the primary mode of the ritual tradition. And these conventions rely on native forms, and so are not colonial or exploitative. They carry on the oral tradition at many levels, furthering and nourishing it, and being furthered and nourished by it.

The twentieth century produced more sophisticated novelists like the Okanogan-born Mourning Dove (Christal Quintasket). Her book, Cogewea, the Half Blood (1927) is the first novel by a woman which dwells on relations between the natives and the whites and on their attitudes to sexual morality. The novel is more typical of the popular romantic fiction with its flaws but the domestic melodrama has been infused with the burdens of the historical tragedy set against the background of the Allotment, when the marriage compact had replaced the treaty, and was treated with the same lack of respect. But in focusing on the plight of the half-breed it introduced a theme which dominated Native American fiction of the 30s and of the last decade. The resolution

of Cogewea's dilemma rests on her acceptance of spirit and ritual approaches as having real significance in her life. Much more accomplished than Mourning Dove's writing is that of John Milton Oskison who published short stories with the Indian Territory as the setting. Unfortunately, his works are mass-market fiction with its stock characters and stereotyped expressions and offer little insight into Native life or concerns.

During that period, Native American writers reared in the oral tradition, were however, experimenting with accepted conventions, writing chronological narratives centered on Native themes and adapting ritual structures to the western convention of conflict resolution based on the unities of time, location, and action. The stories therefore dealt with loss of identity, loss of cultural self-determination, genocide or deicide, and culture clash with mixed-blood and half-breed protagonists, treating the conflict by incorporating it into the psyche of the characters. But the protagonists are also participants in a ritual tradition, symbolizing the essential unity of the human psyche in spite of conflict, integrating it in the midst of fragmentation and destruction, and providing literary shapings of the process of nativistic renewal, that characterizes Native public life in the last quarter of the twentieth century. As a result, they have been able to resist colonization effectively.

John Joseph Mathews' Sundown has the oil boom in the late nineteenth century Osage region as its background. Mathews' protagonist Chal Windzer presents the first thoroughly developed example of a character that will become all too familiar, described frequently but mistakenly as 'caught between two worlds' and is a victim of that clash. Like Momaday's later and much better known character Abel, Windzer is a bicultural protagonist, dealing with an identity crisis, trapped in a world that was fast giving way to a more expropriative cultural assimilation, with only his own traditional culture as a support system; he returns home from the war unmotivated, inactive, alienated from the traditionalists, yet not caught up in the progressive frenzy for material success. Inarticulate, he expresses himself only in occasional spasms of violent action. Alienated, he seeks solace in drink and a sense of community in the company of the cynical and despairing. Attempts to get in touch with the life of the tribal community by attending dances stir him inwardly. He realizes what he cannot express during one such assertive act:

that he was a glorious male...a brother to the wind, the lightning and the forces that came out of the earth. (297)

In such novels therefore, the protagonists are in some sense bicultural, and must deal with the effects of colonization and an attendant sense of loss of self, while still being a participant in a ritual tradition that

gives their individual lives shape and significance. Another writer of note was the administrator, historian, and anthropologist D'Arcy McNickle who believed in the multiplicity of tribal cultures and was against assimilation. He focuses on tribal perspectives, pitting traditional values and customs against those of the alien invaders. His novel Surrounded (1936) brings out clearly the sense of entrapment felt by the Indians in the midst of alien laws, religion and exploitation by the whites. His protagonist Archilde Leon is a half-breed like Cogewea, who returns from school in Oregon to his reservation. The valley in which the reservation is located, is called '*Sniel-emen* (mountains of the surrounded) because there they had been set upon and destroyed.' Most of the characters find themselves trapped in a life of compromise, victimized by the system they perpetuate or co-opted by that they oppose. McNickle illustrates painfully the walls erected by assimilationist education. The only victory is a private one, the interior peace and solidarity that come with returning to tribal values. According to Charles Larson, the ending of Sundown resolves nothing. The only resolution for his novel is the colonial solution to the Indian dilemma: resignation to inevitable extinction.

Many of the more than 25,000 Native American veterans of World War 11 did not remain on the reservations after their tour of duty ended,

but returned to cities where they joined a growing urban population attracted by wartime economic opportunities. The federal government responded to the public debt incurred during the war and to the clamour of post-war growth by adopting policies to 'terminate' the federal-Indian trust relationship, effectively freeing the timber, water, mineral and energy resources for private developers. After a long period under New Deal principles of self-determination, the country's mood turned against 'overprivileged' Indians, and sounded the call for more expropriative assimilation. Senator Arthur Watkins and others pressured the Secretary of the Interior to remove restrictions on sale of Indian lands, which eventually cost the tribes the loss of 4.1 million acres. Congress also authorized several states to extend criminal and civil jurisdiction over reservations. Soon the tribes lost their federal status and were not allowed to vote on the specifics of the termination plan designed for them, only on the concept of exchanging land and federal status for a cash award. Termination proved a disaster. The Menomoni reservation was converted into a Wisconsin county. Throughout the mid-1960s, Congress extorted termination plans from tribes in exchange for further federal actions such as dam building (Seneca) or settling claims (Colville).

A key element of the termination policy was the relocation program designed to encourage migration to the cities. Begun in 1952, it

provided 'vocational training, travel money, moving expenses, and assistance in finding jobs and housing, in addition to one year of medical care and a month's subsistence allowance.' But vocational training did not always suit the job market and, in an alien environment, no real support systems were in place to sustain a sense of community and identity. About 30 percent of the 35,000 Natives relocated to Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle and other cities, returned to their reservation homes. Nevertheless, by 1980 the urban Indian population neared half a million.

The 1960s and 1970s, like the 1930s, were an era of investigation and reform, accompanied by visible Indian activism. President Johnson included Native Americans in his Great Society legislation, and President Nixon, in a 1970 Special Message to Congress, reiterated and strengthened the commitment of the federal government to 'self-determination without termination.' Congress also repealed the Menomoni termination legislation, restoring the tribe to federal status with its own land.

Ironically, the millennia-old oral narratives, ceremonial liturgies, autobiographical accounts, histories, poetry and fiction were hardly recognized despite the rich and varied tradition. The delay reflects the power of cultural blinders and a disciplinary territorialism that placed

Indians within the anthropologist's and historian's camp. Alan R. Velie is of the opinion that many people are aware that Native American culture was preliterate, and they erroneously assume that it could not have produced much of what we call literature. Accustomed to thinking of Native Americans as a people in a plight, they imagined that a full schedule of suffering had not permitted them to write much. But anyone familiar with the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* should know that poetry and narration transmitted orally are by no means inferior to written language.

Another misconception is the tendency of white Americans to read a book by a Native American about Native Americans as protest literature- as essentially a political work championing their cause. Readers seldom expect novels by Jewish authors like Saul Bellow or Philip Roth to be protest novels but accept them on the authors' own terms. Yet the same readers expect rather condescendingly, minority writers to be militant protesters. Blackfeet poet and novelist James Welch concurs:

I have seen poems about Indians written by whites and they are either sentimental or outraged over the condition of the Indian...for the most part only an Indian knows who he is – an individual who just happens to be Indian...And hopefully he will have the toughness and fairness to present his material in a way that is not manufactured by a conventional stance.⁴⁰

Contemporary writers who occupy pride of place in the American Indian literary scene like N. Scott Momaday, James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko have avoided this 'conventional stance.' They have drawn on their tribal heritage, and captured the inner realities of displacement from the land and cultural alienation resulting from wartime experiences, relocation and urbanization and offered hope of renewal. Native fiction's current writers resort to histories both indigenous and European, and in their fusion examine the complexity of personal cross-history. Momaday's breakthrough novel, House Made of Dawn, by winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969, finally found acceptance and legitimacy of the 'ethnic' voice, and ushered in the Native American Renaissance.

The 'Native American Renaissance' is a term coined by critic Kenneth Lincoln in his 1983 book of the same title. His goal was to explore the production of literary works by Native Americans in the decade and a half since N. Scott Momaday had won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968. Before that time, few Native Americans had published fiction. Writers such as William Apess and Simon Pokagon in the nineteenth century, and John Joseph Matthews and D'Arcy McNickle in the years before World War II had not inspired other Native writers to follow in their footsteps.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, generations of Native Americans were coming of age, and they were the first of their tribe to receive a substantial education. Though the times were still harsh, they had moved beyond the survival conditions of the early half of the century. Moreover, the beginnings of a project of revisionist history, which attempted to document from a Native perspective the history of the invasion and colonization of the North American continent (particularly the period referred to as the Wild West), had inspired a great deal of public interest in Native culture.

From these suddenly favourable conditions, a group of Native writers emerged, both poets and novelists, who in only a few years expanded the Native American canon hugely. At the same time, the sudden increase in materials, and the setting up of Native American Studies departments at several universities, led to the foundations of scholarly journals such as SAIL (Studies in American Indian Literature) and *Wicazo Sa*, and publishing imprints such as the Native American Publishing Programme (Harper and Row), all of which further increased the interest in new Native American voices: N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Duane Niatum, Paula Gunn Allen, Simon Ortiz and many more.

The main focus of this thesis rests on the works of N. Scott Momaday and his literary attempts to preserve Native American culture. It examines his use of his own Kiowa tradition as a narrative form and 'a measured angle of vision' through which to view the world. Most significantly, it studies the 'sense of place', the spirit of the land which lies rooted in the history of the Native American people. This land ethic is traceable to the philosophy of Native Americans and remains the essence of their identity.

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Chapter II

The Aesthetics of Momaday's Writings

Throughout history different cultures have embraced different aesthetics, and expressed these aesthetics through art-work that is unique to a particular culture both in form and style. While aesthetics pertain to a study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, also called judgements of sentiment and taste, scholars define it as a critical reflection on art, culture and nature. Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy which studies new ways of seeing and perceiving the world. Modern Western aesthetics had thinkers who laid great emphasis on beauty as the key component of art and of the aesthetic experience. Aesthetics therefore, is the philosophical notion of beauty. Baumgarten regarded aesthetics as a science of the sense experiences and beauty is the most perfect kind of knowledge that sense experience can have. According to Kant, beauty is objective and universal; thus certain things are beautiful to everyone. But in The Critique of Judgement, he says that judging something to be 'beautiful' must also give rise to pleasure by engaging our capacities of reflective contemplation. For Hegel all culture is a matter of 'absolute spirit' coming to manifest itself, stage by stage. Post-modern artists and

poets of the 20th century challenged that beauty was central to art and aesthetics thus reiterating the older theory of aesthetics.

Aristotle was the first philosopher in the Western tradition to classify 'beauty' into types as is shown in his theory of drama. In Poetics he says,

Whatever is beautiful, whether it be a living creature or an object made up of various parts, must necessarily not only have its parts properly ordered, but also of an appropriate size, for beauty is bound up with size and order...in just the same way...plots must be of a reasonable length so that they may be easily held in memory.¹

The comparison of the unity of a literary work with that of a living organism implies growth in that literature. Along with Aristotle, his mentor Plato regarded music, poetry, architecture and drama as fundamental institutions within the body politic. Plato's more mystical writings in Timaeus contain hints of another approach to aesthetics, one based on the Pythagorean theory of the cosmos that exerted a decisive influence on the Neo-Platonists. Through the works of St. Augustine, Boethius and Macrobius, the Pythagorean cosmology and its associated aesthetic of harmony were passed on to thinkers of the Middle Ages. Beauty is seen as a kind of divine order conforming to mathematical laws of number which are also laws of harmony. Music, poetry and architecture exhibit the same conformity to a cosmic order, and in

experiencing their beauty we are really experiencing the same order in ourselves and resonating to it as one string to another. Though little is known of Horace and his treatise On the Sublime, the key word *hypsos* or sublimity as Longinus defines it, signifies a certain distinction and excellence of expression, by which authors have been enabled to win immortal fame. An English alternative to the word could be 'grandeur' or the 'Grand Style'. Sublimity is an inborn gift which must be cultivated among other ways, by imitation or emulation of writers who have shown themselves capable of achieving sublimity.

The concept of sublime has been a pre-dominant aesthetic theory in Western art and philosophy, receiving its more explicit formulation in early 18th century philosophy. Its presence as a concept in Native American aesthetics is not as explicitly stated as it is in Western thought, but there are strong indications that the sublime as an aesthetic property of Native American culture has been in evidence for centuries. One only needs to examine for instance, the notions of ugliness, exaltation, greatness and beauty, in the comedy and tragedy, the rituals of the clowns and the dances of the modern Pueblos to realize this. In Zuni art and culture, the notion of the sublime as appreciation through aesthetic non-verbal judgement is evident in the relationship of the beautiful (*tso'ya*) and the dangerous (*attanni*).

However, as Sidney Larson states in his Native American Aesthetics: An Attitude of Relationship, Native American people are still in the process of identifying or re-identifying features that distinguish themselves as individuals and in relationship to others. In doing so, they are tied to elements of history, property, and identity. They are dependent on notions of identity developed by others but this is in opposition to their former historical, place-oriented notion of themselves. A sense of place is very traditional in Native American culture and ironically is related to European concepts of property that figure critically in their present circumstances.

Robert Dale Parker adds that Native American literature is involved in an ongoing process of self-definition, one with a deeper, more extensive history than most contemporary criticism seems to recognize. Such criticism concentrates on material published since the late 1960s and affords 'little sense of the history of Native literature or the scholarship about it, let alone the culture it comes from.' He rectified this oversight by providing an interpretative history of the ways that Indian writers drew on Indian and literary traditions to invent a Native American literature. Native American writers tell the stories that constitute the collective memory of their people and document those participatory practices that express commitment to the community. Native media is at

the forefront of the struggle for Native American cultural self-determination.

Like the Sub-Saharan African aesthetics, the Native American sensory realm followed traditional forms and the aesthetic norms were handed down orally as well as in the written form. This phenomenon is in contemporary times, manifesting itself in a new way with regard to the use of photography. The culture of the various facets of Native America has its roots in the art of oral tradition which has been a mainstay of the tribes' cultural heritage. But modern writers like Leslie Marmon Silko are of the opinion that with oral story-telling, there is no guarantee that a given tale will remain unchanged though the general theme is retained. There are different versions in orally transmitted literature. Stories morph from one generation to the next with different interpretations. In photography, the photographer becomes the representative storyteller; what he/she chooses to depict in a photograph is likened to the words he/she would speak if a story were being told. Silko makes interesting comparisons between the oral tradition and the art of photography as a form of the New Aesthetic.

N. Scott Momaday's memoir The Names, a combination of prose and photography however, opposes this theory. The pictures prove to be integral to the power of his work and each photograph reveals a story in

its own right yet they are adequate replacements for the story as told through his words. Although photography is a fascinating means by which to conserve some facets of Native American culture, technological advancement does not always equate with progress. Modern Native Americans, if they are to preserve their cultural heritage, they cannot afford to sever ties to their oral tradition.

All narrative is inherently a search for identity through story, and writers draw from their lives and their experiences in creating their fictions, some to a much greater degree than others. A salutary approach to the study of the work of any literary artist is to consider the multiplicity of biographical, cultural, literary and other factors to ensure a fuller and better understanding of his work. Thus it is important to examine the influences that have shaped N. Scott Momaday as a writer, more specifically as a novelist. His racial and cultural legacy provides a better perspective for the appreciation of his work, and the variety and fullness of his artistic expressions. His writings, paintings and drawings along with his conversations with other scholars, demonstrate the variety and relevance of his art. His life has been a long process of imagining who he is, and this process of self-discovery is ongoing. Through this he has attained a measure of self-control, which he illustrates in his worldview. From early childhood, his parents inculcated in him the value of

education and the development of bi-cultural skills, as also a physical and emotional understanding of his cultural and spiritual origins. He was exposed to various kinds of schooling such as one-room reservation day schools, church schools, and a military academy. This experience, juxtaposed with the family living among various cultures and peoples of the South-western tribes and the dominant white society in towns, has certainly been most enriching for him.

Out of the many stories the young Momaday heard in his childhood, two remain especially important. One is the legend of the arrow-maker, the man who saves himself through language. The arrow-maker is a man who takes recourse to words in order to overcome an enemy. Momaday learned from that story the importance of words in human interaction. He came to believe that human beings are made of words and that he could realize himself, and communicate through language. He believed that he could create his world in words and that through words he might even transcend time and have perpetual being.

The other story that is essential to understand Momaday is the story of Devil's Tower, what used to be the *rock tree* of the Kiowa people. He remembers his grandmother telling him that the tree came into being because a boy turned into a bear and pursued his sisters, who climbed a stump, which suddenly grew and carried them into the sky to become the

stars of the Big Dipper, a constellation of seven bright stars in Ursa Major in the shape of a dipper:

Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws, and his body was covered with fur. There was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified; they ran, and the bear after them. They came to the stump of a great tree, and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were just beyond its reach. It reared against the tree and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper.²

From this story, the boy acquired the essential words of his being. In the aftermath of visiting this crucially important cultural and sacred place in Kiowa tradition, Momaday acquired, ceremonially, his Kiowa name, *Tsoai-talee*, which means ‘Rock Tree Boy’. He imagined that he was the boy featured in the story and that it forever connects him and his people to each other and to the seamless, intricately related physical world, and also, that it identifies his being and his circumstance within that world. He adds, “I have struggled with my bear power” and “I think I have come to terms with it.” In his second novel, The Ancient Child written much later in 1989, the character Set Lockeman, a successful San Francisco artist going through mid-life crisis is really someone who

...turns into a bear, and in a sense I (Momaday) am writing about myself. I’m not writing an autobiography, but I am

imagining a story that proceeds out of my own experience of the bear power. It is full of magic. But sometimes the bear is very difficult...He is hard to control...They (bears) don't give themselves easily to any domination...They are equal to man's dominance.³

Set's primary healer is Grey, one of Momaday's finest multicultural creations, who nurtures him toward an understanding of his Kiowa identity and encounter with the bear power in him:

It was *his* bear power, but he did not yet have real knowledge of it, only a vague, instinctive awareness, a sense he could neither own or dispel. [p.213]

Through these examples, Momaday can be seen as a traditional man with a bi-cultural identity. According to Charles L. Woodard, one of the best examples of this cultural duality is his enthusiasm for the legend of Billy the Kid, a legend he has been celebrating and exploring for years through his writing and painting. He is the Indian looking into that story, and he is the white gun-fighter looking out. He appreciates the irony of that juxtaposition, and he enjoys the comedy of it. His clearly defined identity permits him to make such leaps without fear of seeming to contradict his self. Nor does he believe that there is a contradiction in his refusal to be cause-oriented. One advantage he has is his dual vision, his familiarity with both the Native and the white worlds even if his views on identity are strongly existential. When asked how he felt about the term 'Indian', and if he preferred 'Native American' or 'American Indian', he says,

“Most Indian people I know think of themselves first as Indian.” But he attempts to explore his identity and self-realization through the medium of language when he says that we, meaning the Native American people do not really begin to exist until we convert ourselves into language. Momaday chooses not to be political, and has refused to accept the role of spokesman for the Native American people, a position that was thrust upon him after the success of his ground-breaking novel, House Made of

Dawn:

When I was asked if I was speaking for the American Indian...I was quick to say, “No, I’m not.” What I’m doing is mine. It’s my voice and my ideas, and I don’t want you to think that I’m the political spokesman of a people...I can write about the Indian world with authority because I grew up in it...but I would be the last person to say that my opinions are anybody else’s- Indian or not. I don’t write in that vein out of any sort of conviction of that kind.⁴

He reiterates the same in another interview with Louis Owens in 1990:

I don’t think of (my writing) as political at all. That’s not my disposition somehow. I’m not a political person. A lot of people I know will read my work as a political statement, and it can be read that way I suppose, but so can anything.⁵

Yet, the irony is that in many ways he is a spokesman, implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, as he recreates the traditional Native American world and the values of that world:

It’s not that I want people to derive moral or social or political lessons from what I write...I’ve encountered people

who were very disappointed and upset because they thought that I was presenting the Indian world too positively.⁶

On one occasion in Hamburg, a woman was almost incensed that he had painted an optimistic view of the Indian world, its beauty and the Indian's appreciation of that beauty and his 'happy childhood as an Indian'.

Charles L. Woodard clarifies this as a misunderstanding of what he means by the word 'Indian.' That in his essays about land ethics, he talks about the evolution of an environmental attitude- the creation of a value system. Perhaps Momaday was dramatizing philosophically and figuratively, the great moral, ethical and environmental values of imagining the Kiowa culture and values that are at the centre of his being while that woman was taking him specifically and literally as most white people do. Maybe 'she needed the Indian as an example of persecution for her own value system.' Nevertheless, Momaday has talked about the negative aspects in House Made of Dawn, and he has summarized them in his personal odyssey in the prose-poem, The Way to Rainy Mountain. They are acknowledged, identified, defined as Woodard pointed out.

His fiction relies on his imaginative recreation of a history of people and events. In his perception, imagination is the ultimate form of existence for as he says, "I saw with my own eyes and with the eyes of my mind." Imagining or 'reflections' as he calls them, holds as to lineage

and landscape. In his introduction to The Way to Rainy Mountain, written in 1969, he refers to the losses and sufferings of his Kiowa ancestors as “the idle recollections, the mean and ordinary agonies of human history.” However, in his conversation with Woodard, he prefers not to dwell on them, choosing instead to celebrate the positive things:

For my people the journey ended in sadness. In loss. But it has been a very pleasant experience for me, because it has filled my imagination.⁷

Robert Skidelski has said that the only way biography can recover its main function of good storytelling is to go back to its roots. These roots lie in ancestor worship. Momaday, who stands out as the voice of quest, seems to agree:

We have such things as roots, after all, and there seems to be a great hunger to discover and understand those roots, those origins, in many people these days.⁸

In order to recreate the past to discover the cultural legacies, people must ‘imagine who they are and where they come from.’ When he talks about his notion of appropriation, Momaday says it is primarily a matter of the imagination. Thus he prefers to attach some mystery to his heritage by imagining parts of it because he sees ‘infinite possibility’ in it.

The Way to Rainy Mountain offers a first portrait of origins, his own personal odyssey or life-journey highlighted against the migration of the Kiowa people, a nomadic group of the Plains, whose language is

thought to form a branch of the Aztec-Tanoan linguistic stock, from their old Rocky Mountain home in central Montana to Indian Territory, what later became known as Oklahoma. They call themselves *Kawi-gu* meaning 'principal people,' and today the tribe has about 12000 members living in Southwest Oklahoma. In 1837, they were forced to sign their first treaty, providing passage for the whites through Kiowa-Comanche land. By 1879, most of them were removed to, and confined in the reservations in Oklahoma as arbitrarily assigned homeland. Momaday followed the route of the Kiowas, starting at the headwaters of the Yellowstone River and ending at his grandmother's grave, at Rainy Mountain Cemetery, near Mountain View, Oklahoma.

Momaday's narrative is told as a series of 24 triads of personal and family history, calendar history and tribal mythic-history. The three sections of the memoir, with the headings *The Setting Out*, *The Going On* and *The Closing In*, alternating between three types of narrative, as Kenneth Fields has noted, allows Momaday to achieve a density and concentration approaching that of poetry. He published the prologue and several of the myths as The Journey of Tai-me in 1967. The introduction first appeared in the Reporter in 1967, and later as part of Tosamah's life story in House Made Of Dawn in 1968. Circularity is a characteristic of all Native American cultures; Momaday's works, whether it is House

Made of Dawn, or The Way to Rainy Mountain or The Names, exhibit the cyclical structure in a non-linear form. The journey is not linear and permanent but continuous and it is complete only when the return is made to the native landscape. The Kiowa journey like that recounted in the emergence narratives of other tribes is seen as a movement from chaos to order, from discord to harmony, with the cultural landscape symbolizing the conception of order. He regards the migration of his Kiowa people as a symbolic expression of all adversity, defining it in terms of landscape, route and time. Momaday published the book as a whole in 1969. He clarifies the theme in the prologue, regarding the work pre-eminently as the history of man's idea of himself, with an essential being in language, and the journey is infused with motion and meaning:

...the journey is an evocation of three things in particular: a landscape that is incomparable, a time that is gone forever, and the human spirit, which endures.⁹

In the introduction he recalls his grandmother Aho through whom he had learnt about the Golden Age of the Kiowas- the horse, the buffalo, the Sun Dance, the expression of religious belief and cultural pride. By the end of the work, the tone of nostalgia and sadness at the virtual destruction of Kiowa culture intensifies. It is clear that Aho is the source of the constantly threatened unity of Kiowa past and present, of myth and reality. She continues to inspire this modern Kiowa, Momaday who

attempts to restore life to the myths and the language of his people. Standing by her grave at Rainy Mountain Cemetery, he is infused with the knowledge of his origins and discovers himself anew. For the legends and stories, particularly in the first section, Momaday illustrates how the power of language lives on the mythic, cultural and personal levels. He uses a colloquial tone appropriate to oral delivery while the historical sections are more formal. By merging time and space he has added another dimension to his existence- his native belief in the metaphoric force of a particular landscape, or what he terms “the sense of place”. Like him, Eudora Welty says this sense of place is essential to good writing. It is by knowing where one stands that one is able to judge where one is:

Place... bestows on us our original awareness; and our critical powers spring up from the study of it and the growth of experience inside it...sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is sense of direction too...¹⁰

The structure outlined in the book is in keeping with the conventional division of a beginning, middle, and end, more precisely, the origins, the golden age, and the final decline of the Kiowas as a proud, independent people. The three sections reveal a movement from myth, through legend to history. As Robert L. Berner describes it in his 1979 essay, *N. Scott Momaday: Beyond Rainy Mountain*, in *American*

Indian Culture and Research Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1, the journey is a process in which the myth arises out of a people's need to define their relationship to the world, making it through frequent re-telling, a legend which loses its original significance, and declines under the weight of history. Accompanying this story is that of Momaday's own discovery of himself as a Kiowa; it parallels his journey through memory, from his first sight of the Great Plains, to the final vision of the Rainy Mountain toward which the Kiowas were inevitably and tragically destined to find their way.

The same holds for The Names: A Memoir, an account of the family genealogy- the Momaday born of Kiowa father and part Cherokee, part Anglo-English and French mother, raised on Kiowa, Navajo and Jemez Pueblo reservations where his parents were teachers, and the eventual Stanford Ph.D. with a dissertation written under the direction of Yvor Winters. Using his mother's language, he tells his story in the manner of his father's people, again merging time and space, interweaving legend, myth, and history, exploring the minds of many remarkable personages, in a most elegiac tone. His prose is formal and symbolic, and his words achieve his purpose- an inner view of what it might have meant to be a part of the high plains 'horse culture' which flourished briefly but gloriously. Similar to his people's manner of

recording events by painting images, he tells his story by evoking images, and fusing the fragments from the historical and legendary past of the Kiowas with a 'personal calendar history'. Using the technique of repetition, a characteristic device of the oral tradition, Momaday construes his account as:

In general my narrative is an autobiographical account. Specifically it is an act of imagination. When I turn my mind to my early life, it is the imaginative part of it that comes first and irresistibly into reach, and of that part I take hold. This is one way to tell a story. In this instance it is my way and it is the way of my people.¹¹

The memoir begins thus:

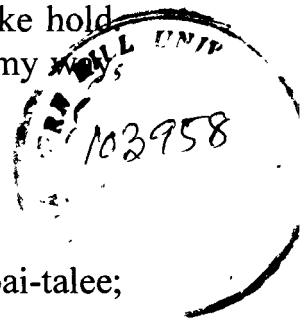
My name is Tsoai-talee. I am, therefore, Tsoai-talee; therefore I am.

The storyteller Pohd-lohk gave me the name Tsoai-talee.¹²

He believed that a man's life proceeds from his name, in the way that a river flows from its source. He points out that names determine who we are, and that such an identity is a matter of imagination:

I meant to indicate how important names are to me...I wanted to tie all kinds of varied experiences together, and the common denominators of those experiences were the names of the people who were important to me, growing up. And the names of places.¹³

When Pohd-lohk, his step-great-grandfather and one-time member of the Seventh Cavalry bestowed on him the Kiowa name Tsoai-Talee, after the 1200-foot volcanic protrusion in Wyoming which Americans call Devil's



Tower, it was regarded as nothing short of a high honour for the mystic rock was a place of great significance. For Native Americans, a name was never just an identifying tag but a kind of emblem and ideal, the determining source of one's character and course of life. Naming is, as Momaday says, a 'complicated, and a sacred business':

When you name something you confer being upon it at the same time...Language is essentially a process of naming.¹⁴

Momaday 'imagines himself' back into the life of his Kiowa forebears, and recalls his childhood sense of query as to 'how to be a Kiowa Indian'; the life of Mammedaty, his horseman grandfather buried at Rainy Mountain Cemetery; his father Huan-toa or Alfred Morris Mammedaty, caught on the cusp of prior tribal and modern 1920s life, wanderer, artist, teacher; or his first horse with stress on the Kiowa as a horse culture. Such references provoke a reach into fact and a call to imagination when he says, "I lay the page aside, I imagine."

Or what he said later in *The Man Made of Words*:

We are what we imagine. Our very existence insists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, *who* and *what* and that *we are*.¹⁶

He depicts the Kiowas' antecedents from their creation-myth as the *Kwuda* –'the coming out people'- who emerged from the hollow log into

the world through the tribal self-naming. In the prologue he begins with a Kiowa folk tale:

*You know, everything had to begin, and this is how it was: the Kiowas came one by one into the world through a hollow log. They were many more than now, but not all of them got out. There was a woman whose body was swollen up with child, and she got stuck in the log. After that, no one could get through, and that is why the Kiowas are a small tribe in number. They looked all and saw the world. It made them glad to see so many things. They called themselves **Kwuda**, "coming out".¹⁶*

Momaday goes on to say that for them:

Loss was in the order of things, then, from the beginning. Their emergence was a small thing in itself, and unfinished. But it gave them to know that they were and who they were. They could at last say to themselves, "We are, and our name is Kwuda".¹⁷

Going back to the days when the Native Americans, believed to have crossed from Asia through the Bering land-bridge, Momaday accounts for his knowledge about it as part of his "racial memory":

I think that each of us bears in his genes or in his blood or wherever a recollection of the past...I've seen it in a lot of old people...my Kiowa relatives. I'm sure it exists in every culture. I've known old people who bear what one of my friends calls "the burden of memory", and it's not simply memory of what happened in their lifetimes. It goes far beyond that. In the case of the Kiowa, it's a remembering of the migration. A remembering of coming out of the log. A remembering of crossing the Bering land-bridge.¹⁸

Thus he drew not only from his personal memory but also from his racial memory. He simply corroborates Geary Hobson's notion that in the

remembering of heritage is strength, and continuance and renewal throughout the generations. As for that place of emergence, that hollow log, Momaday says,

I don't know where it is. It could be in Asia. I have a sense of the Kiowas' existence as a people from the time they lived in Asia to the present day...It's important to me, and I'm fortunate that it defines me as it does.¹⁹

About his mother, Natachee Scott, descended from her grandmother Natachee and the marriage into the Galyan-Scott-McMillan dynasty with its different roots in Anglo and Celtic Appalachia and Cajun Louisiana, Momaday described how she imagined herself Indian, having grown up white, with a rebellious streak that vaguely identified a Cherokee grandmother:

In 1929 my mother was a Southern belle; she was about to embark upon an extraordinary life. It was about this time that she began to see herself as an Indian. That dim native heritage became a fascination and a cause for her, inasmuch, perhaps as it enabled her to assume an attitude of defiance, an attitude which she assumed with particular style and satisfaction; it became her. She imagined who she was. This act of imagination was, I believe, among the most important events of my mother's early life, as later the same essential act was to be among the most important of my own. [pp. 23-25]

Momaday as Tsoai-Talee, achieves his individual quest for identity in the same way that Abel (House Made of Dawn) and his nameless traveler to Rainy Mountain (The Way to Rainy Mountain) did, by reintegrating

himself into the spiritual community of his people when he arrives where his journey began in the cultural landscape. Choosing not to write about the indignities suffered by his ancestors, Momaday's work is testimony that there are Native Americans who lived what he describes as the "pastoral time of my growing up" both on reservations, and in towns amidst white populations. In this work he has paid some attention to his mixed family genealogy but reiterates his strong and exotic Kiowa heritage, "I'm Kiowa, and I'm going to die Kiowa."

He attributes his sense of cultural identity to his parents, despite the assimilation of different cultures. He was convinced that the constant traveling was an important part of his education. And being an only child, he spent much of his time alone but his solitude encouraged him to develop his imagination, and that was a good thing for his writing. Recalling an occasion when he was taken ill, he had asked his father to bring him a book. Smoky, the Cowhorse by Will James was his 'first insight into the miracle of reading'. He could identify himself with the character because he was 'a boy with a horse' and because he was living in the Wild West, he was greatly 'enamoured of Billy the Kid legends and stories of cowboys and horses'. Having grown up in New Mexico, he was greatly fascinated by these legends, because they were a reflection of the world he loved even if the stories of the exploits of this white outlaw hero

is antithetical to the traditional Native world. He was inspired, ironically, to write about the legendary figure, though the man was diametrically opposed to his Indian side. In his later work, The Ancient Child, one of his characters, Grey, fantasizes about riding with Billy the Kid. In this regard, he has written about the death of the outlaw, who is as much a marginal character living on the periphery of society as Native Americans are, in the following poem, titled *Wide Empty Landscape with Death in the Foreground*:

Here are weeds about his mouth;
 His teeth are ashes.
 It is this which succeeds him:
 This huge, barren plain.
 For him there is no question
 Of elsewhere. His place
 Is just this reality,
 This deep
 element.
 Now that he is dead he bears
 Upon the vision
 Merely, without resistance.
 Death displaces him
 No more than life displaced him;
 He was always here.²⁰

Giving further biographical information on his exposure to both the Catholic and the Native religions, Momaday agrees that ‘there was always a religious tension in the pueblos’ at Jemez, which was reflected in House Made of Dawn. Having received a Pan-Indian experience in the reservation schools, Momaday later enrolled in the University of New

Mexico. It was there that he began writing poetry, and in 1959, published his first poem, *Earth and I Give You Turquoise*, in the *New Mexico Quarterly*. This is one of the most moving elegies in modern poetry, an evocation of what he loved the most in the past, the laughter and the old stories of his people:

Tonight they dance near Chinle
by the seven elms
There your loom whispered beauty
They will eat mutton
and drink coffee till morning
You and I will not be there.

When he submitted some poems to a creative writing contest sponsored by Stanford University, Yvor Winters, the celebrated critic and poet who judged the entries, not only awarded Momaday a fellowship, but also took him under his wing, teaching him the finer points of the genre of post-symbolist poetry. In post-symbolist poetry, imagery is used in such a way that descriptions of sensory details are charged with abstract meaning. With the symbolists, image and sensory description replace abstract meaning. Momaday's poems like *The Bear*, or *Angle of Geese* show how a post-symbolist merges abstract meaning and sensory detail. The latter is regarded as one of the best examples of his importance in contemporary literature:

How shall we adorn
 Recognition with our speech?-
 Now the dead firstborn
 Will lag in the wake of words.

Custom intervenes;
 We are civil, something more:
 More than language means,
 The mute presence mulls and marks.

Almost of a mind,
 We take measure of the loss;
 I am slow to find
 The mere margin of repose.

And one November
 It was longer in the watch,
 As if forever,
 Of the huge ancestral goose.

So much symmetry!
 Like the pale angle of time
 And eternity.
 The great shape labored and fell.

Quit of hope and hurt,
 It held a motionless gaze,
 Wide of time, alert,
 On the dark distant flurry.²¹

The poem is obscure until we understand the circumstances Momaday is describing. The first three stanzas are his reflections on the death of a friend's child, and they describe the inadequacy of language to encompass such grief. The last three stanzas turn to an incident that happened on a hunting trip the poet took as a teenager: he had retrieved a goose that had been shot by one of the hunters. The speaker is slow to

realize what is wild in him when he says 'We are civil'. Alan R. Velie explains that Indian mourning is a violent release and purgation of grief as opposed to the Anglo custom of repressing grief. Thus expressing condolence to someone who is in mourning would not have a hollow ring as words have more force in Native mourning ceremonies.

In the second half of the poem there is a link between the dead child and the dying goose of his boyhood expedition. What remains in his mind as an adult is a memory of the pathos of the dying bird, yearning to take its place in the 'bright angle' with rest of the flock. The poem is post-symbolist in technique because Momaday imbues the childhood experience with an abstract significance. The goose, which is essentially wild, becomes the 'huge ancestral goose', a prototype of the species rather than one bird. Momaday compares the formation of the flock to the angle of time and eternity, infusing their flight with a metaphysical or transcendental dimension. The wounded goose struggling between life and death, is still alive and alert, yet it is 'wide of time' in the sense that its impending death has released it from the bondage of time. The poem recalls Yvor Winters in its solemn tone and stately rhythm as also its abstract diction.

Being a strong believer in destiny, he regards his meeting with his mentor, Winters as a 'destined meeting':

You meet someone in your life who sees you for what you are and who advises you, who stands in a position to change your life.²²

He parallels this relationship with that of Billy the Kid, the outlaw, and Pat Garrett, the sheriff. These things seemed to him to be arranged ‘like the pattern of the universe’ in quite the same way that “it was no accident that the boy (in the Kiowa story) turned into a bear at Devil’s Tower, or that the girls became the stars in the Big Dipper.” *The Bear* is a signature poem- a personal testament to Kiowa storytelling traditions, and respect for Winters’ symbolist poetry. It is modeled on Old Ben in William Faulkner’s work of the same name for he borrows from Faulkner’s diction:

Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon’s hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him.²³

To Faulkner, Old Ben was not only a bear, but also a symbol of the vanishing wilderness. Momaday incorporates a sense of this into his poem:

What ruse of vision,
 escarping the wall of leaves,
 rending incision
 into countless surfaces,
 would cull and color
 his somnolence, whose old age
 has outworn valor,

all but the fact of courage?
 Seen, he does not come,
 move, but seems forever there,
 dimensionless, dumb,
 in the windless noon's hot glare.
 More scarred than others
 these years since the trap maimed him,
 pain slants his withers,
 drawing up the crooked limb.
 Then he is gone, whole,
 without urgency, from sight,
 as buzzards control,
 imperceptibly, their flight.²⁴

The bear in his poem is also the incarnation of some primeval, fundamental truth about the wilderness. The identity of the creature, worn down to the mere 'fact of courage', holds itself together in the wilderness through an attitude of self-sufficient stoicism, a sort of expert indifference to the dangers always lurking behind the 'countless surfaces' of the leaves. The poem offers a moment of insight, in which we understand something of the age and mystery of the land. As Winters puts it in Forms of Discovery, "It seems rather a perception of the 'discrete' wilderness, the essential wilderness." Going back to the ancient story, Momaday says that nobody knows what happened to the bear or the boy. His notion is that the boy and the bear are "indivisible." He is convinced that he is the reincarnation of the bear, and so he deals with it by imagining it and by writing a story about it in the same way that the Kiowas did when they encountered that mysterious rock formation. They incorporated it into

their experience by telling a story about it. Shedding more light on his bear power, he says that whenever it surfaces, “there is an energy, an agitation, an anger, perhaps” but then he also becomes very spiritual and feels “a greater kinship with the animal world and with the wilderness.” Under its influence, his work and life acquire an intensity that makes him “accelerate” his creativity in a great burst of vitality. In fact, he adds that it ‘enables me to raise my imagination to a higher level than I ordinarily can. It is very creative.’ In Winters’ words, Momaday’s works are also ‘forms of discovery.’ And indeed, learning and writing about the bear is a process of self-discovery as Woodard also puts it. Momaday could not agree more for he feels that his name proceeds from that ancient Kiowa story in which his being is intrinsically involved.

Momaday’s doctoral thesis was on another favourite of Winters, Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, the earliest of the post-symbolists, whose poetry combined subtle and detailed descriptions of nature with symbolism, a practice Momaday has emulated. Both are naturalists. Momaday describes Tuckerman’s poems as ‘remarkable, point-blank descriptions of nature’; they are filled with small, precise and whole things. Tuckerman sees the world of nature clearly and distinctly, rather than through a romantic blur. And he sees the invasion of the natural

world by the probing mind as similar to the original sin of eating of the tree of knowledge.

Momaday writes in his conservative, Wintersian mode. But he has also experimented with a more fluid form, the prose-poem, which is usually about Native subjects. In fact, most of them are short narratives that have the stately oral cadence of the Indian teller of tales and, although strongly rhythmical, have shed the last formal regular strictures of verse. Consider *The Fear of Bo-Talee*, which has appeared in The Way to Rainy Mountain as a chapter:

Bo-talee rode easily among his enemies, once, twice, three- and four times. And all who saw him were amazed, for he was utterly without fear; so it seemed. But afterwards he said:

Certainly I was afraid. I was afraid of the fear in the eyes of my enemies.²⁵

Momaday is a fine poet but he excels in his prose, both fiction and non-fiction, which are more evident of his ethnic antecedents. Yet, both his verse and prose conjoin to create a single and powerful voice. Further, his study of Emily Dickinson's poems gave him an insight into "the mystery and miracle of language." For instance, Dickinson's *Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant* makes him remark that

...what she has in mind is that the truth as most people perceive it is rather boring much of the time. In order to get at it in an interesting way you have to apply the imagination.

So telling the truth “slant” is really the business of a storyteller.²⁶

In oration, song and prayer, the voices therein tell the truth directly; in storytelling, you approach it in “a more intricate way.” Momaday has approached truth in an indirect way in his works like the poem *Angle of Geese* where he explains:

Language itself is metaphorical. Words are not real. Words are reflections of reality... You want to get at something, but you don't run head-on into it. You skirt a bit and construct something that can be digested more easily.²⁷

Thus what he has learnt from Dickinson are ‘economy and precision’. She can present a great idea in a few words, and therein lay her greatest gift. Her poems are “impenetrable” to him though he is moved by the expressions. He cites the example of *The Moon upon Her Fluent Root* in which he finds a “profundity” but he could not tell ‘what the poem means.’ He concludes that

...poetry is not necessarily easy to understand, and it is not particularly necessary to understand it...If you don't grasp the whole meaning of something, that does not mean that the literary experience has been frustrated.²⁸

What he has imbibed from Dickinson is evident in his series of poems- *Plainview: 1* to *Plainview: 4* from *The Gourd Dancer* called *Plainview: 1* in which we get a glimpse of his attitudes about language and literature:

There in the hollow of the hills I see,
 Eleven magpies stand away from me.
 Low light upon the rim; a wind informs
 This distance with a gathering of storms
 And drifts in silver crescents on the grass,
 Configurations that appear, and pass.
 There falls a final shadow on the glare,
 A stillness on the dark, erratic air.
 I do not hear the longer wind that lows
 Among the magpies. Silences disclose,
 Until no rhythms of unrest remain,
 Eleven magpies standing on the plain.
 They are illusion-wind and rain revolve-
 And they recede in darkness, and dissolve.

First there is the storytelling voice. The teller is nameless, but strongly revealed through his sensitivity to his physical environment, and through his meditative attitude toward the birds he sees, and through his uses of sound and silence. The teller is aware of the slightest implications of what he is experiencing- the quality of light, the effects of the wind upon the grass, the “longer wind” beyond his hearing, and the uncertain quality of the air. He is a physical being, traditional in his close relationship with the objects of the earth. He is literally reading the wind. And as he reads he reflects. That is evident in his concentration upon the magpies, and in the measured pace of their description. He studies them patiently, and carefully recounts what he sees.

And he accentuates his voice. Word and sound repetitions and parallel structures intensify his statement at regular intervals, and silences

punctuate it. These devices are essential elements of Native American oral tradition. They are ways of sending a voice. One repeats sound and sense to dramatise one's story and to cast a storytelling spell. And one pauses for effect. Momaday avers that storytelling is the modulation of sound and silence, and in this poem, silences literally 'disclose'. They are creative pauses that reveal meaning. The storytelling poet is thus revealed through the manner of his telling. He achieves an identity through his voice. He is 'the man made of words'; as is Momaday himself as he tells and retells his ongoing story in his writings. One's voice is individual, but as it communicates shared cultural experience, it is also ancestral and capable of transcending time. In words there is eternity.

The poem, the purpose of which is to offer an almost mystical insight into nature-a 'plainview', and is essentially, a description of the slow advance of a storm, reveals his sense of play in that his subjects are magpies which are cantankerous, meddlesome birds. Yet here they are stilled, in a silent environment heavy with implications. Word, sound and being contrasts to the rest of the poem in which they exist. It reveals the poet's enthusiasm for descriptive writing for it is intensely multi-sensory, an intricate intertwining of sights and sounds, and it is a detailed juxtaposition of distances and foreground particulars. *Plainview: 2* is a powerful elegy on the death of the horse culture, of a way of life. The

psychological destruction caused by the ultimate end of this culture lends the poem an overwhelming sense of sorrow and loss:

A horse is one thing
 An Indian another
 An old horse is old
 An old Indian sad.

Plainview: 3 returns to the impersonal view of the land of the first poem, which suggests eternal quality of nature behind the human pathos. It is a joyous celebration of the spirit of renewal represented by the dawn. A prayer of praise to the sun, highlighting the Sun Dance culture, it is a poem of spiritual regeneration through the land. *Plainview: 4* moves from the golden age of the Kiowas to its death. The killing of the buffalo marked the extinction of the old, nomadic life of the plains, giving a profoundly pathetic note to the poem's subject.

Then there is another poem entitled *Buteo Regalis* that reveals his stylistic achievement:

His frailty discrete, the rodent turns, looks.
 What sense first warns? The winging is unheard,
 Unseen but as distant motion made whole,
 Singular, slow, unbroken in its glide.
 It veers, and veering, tilts board-surfaced wings.
 Aligned, the span bends to begin the dive
 And falls, alternately white and russet,
 Angle and curve, gathering momentum.²⁹

In this brief but startlingly vivid insight into a totally different aspect of nature, we have a concise descriptive statement of a creature that knows

its aim and lets nothing interfere with itself as it goes straight to the object. The poem seeks to give a potent sense of the raw wild strength in nature. The intense concentration and power of the bird as it swoops down, “gathering momentum”, upon the unprotected rodent is unforgettable as John Finlay puts it in his description of the volume, *Angle of Geese*. The poem meets Momaday’s own requirement for descriptive writing as outlined in an interview appearing in the March 1973 issue of *Puerto del Sol*:

I’m interested in the description and when I describe something in writing I always ask myself if I have described what it is I set to describe; of course, you can write beautiful description which is inaccurate but still beautiful. But my idea of writing good description is writing something accurately.³⁰

Momaday also reveals his commitment to well-ordered language. He is a methodical stylist who slowly sculpts his prose until it is resonant and symmetrical, and who employs traditional versification in much of his poetry. These devices demonstrate his commitment to precision and economy of expression, the concise and economical naming of the world. It is his belief, as he has Tosamah say in the section, *The Priest of the Sun* in House Made of Dawn, that in the modern world man, more specifically, the white man has ‘diluted and multiplied the Word’ and in so doing has devalued language. The word as an instrument of creation

has diminished nearly to the point of no return and it may be that we will ‘perish by the Word’. The precise language is heightened by regular measure and emphatically rhymed couplets. Besides, there are simple ingredients and complex meaning. In The Way to Rainy Mountain, he states, ‘A word has power in and of itself. He adds, ‘it comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things.’

In *Plainview: 1*, the storyteller has spoken; we are informed by his sounds, transported by his images, and, finally, moved to contemplate the implications of what we have been told. His words are powerful and persuasive. They are creations that create listeners in the process of the telling. They are the carrying on of an ancient oral tradition in letters across the page. There is however, the human compulsion to fill the silences but ‘while silence reminds us of our isolation’ it also provides us ‘comfort in the knowledge that we are an infinitesimal part of something very grand’ like the universe.

Momaday attributes his creativity also to the period of his life when he had gone for a teaching assignment to Russia:

One of the effects of having so much time was the sense of isolation. The sense of being very far from my native land. So there grew up in me in Russia a loneliness such as I have not known at other times or places in my life. And that turned out to be creative, I wrote...There is a loneliness in such isolation that sparks creativity.”³¹

Thus silence is ‘a great restorative,’ that leads to a ‘creative condition.’ The great poets write their poems ‘out of that context of silence’ and incorporate it into their words.

In the Native American oral tradition, expression, rather than communication, is given more importance. In their understanding, breath, speech and verbal art are closely connected and are often signified by the same word. To Native Americans, words are a source of magical power. As Natachee Scott puts it, “the Indian has always used words with reverence and awe, weaving them into chants and songs to create beauty and to express his daily needs and aspirations.” Native Americans have always believed in the symbolic power of the word to change the world for better or worse. Momaday reiterates in his essay, *The Native Voice* that even silence is described as the sanctuary of sound:

Words are wholly alive in the hold of silence; there they are sacred.

He continues in the same essay,

In the Indian world a word is spoken or a song is sung, not against, but within the silence. In the telling of a story there are silences in which words are anticipated or held on to, heard to echo in the still depths of the imagination.³²

One may turn one’s attention to this ritual formula from the Navajo healing ceremony:

Reared within the Mountains!
 Lord of the Mountains!
 Young Man!
 Chieftain!
 I have made your sacrifice.
 I have prepared a smoke for you.
 My feet restore for me.
 My legs restore for me.
 My body restore for me.
 My mind restore for me.
 My voice thou restore for me.
 Restore all for me in beauty.
 Make beautiful all that is before me.
 Make beautiful all that is behind me.
 It is done in beauty.
 It is done in beauty.
 It is done in beauty.
 It is done in beauty.³³

This has the formality of prayer and the measure of poetry, where the words are fitted into the context of religious ceremony. Momaday adds that:

It is significant that in this rich, ceremonial song the singer should end upon the notion of beauty, of beauty in the physical world, of man in the immediate presence and full awareness of that beauty. And it is significant, indeed necessary, that this whole and aesthetic and spiritual sense should be expressed in language...The singer affirms that he has a whole and irrevocable investment in the world...He aspires to the restoration of his body, mind, and soul, which in his cultural and religious frame of reference is preeminently an aesthetic consideration, a perception of well ordered being and beauty, a design of which he is the human centre.³⁴

The sacred power of the word is one of Momaday's favourite themes. Thus in House Made of Dawn, through the character of Tosamah, he focuses on the Gospel of John because John equates the word with God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [p.83]

In the same work, for the old Kiowa woman, his grandmother,

...words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning, [p.85]

Attempting to explore his identity through his writings, Momaday states in *The Man Made of Words*:

It seems to me that in a certain sense we are all made of words; that our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives. There is no way in which we can exist apart from the morality of a verbal dimension.³⁵

In the same essay, he explains that only when man is embodied in an idea and the idea is realized in language, can he take possession of himself. Thus The Way to Rainy Mountain is 'pre-eminently the history of man's idea of himself, and it has old and essential being in language.' He adds that the Kiowas know that "as long as the story of their journey is told, they exist as a distinct people and culture."

While reconciling his Indian heritage and contemporary American society, he keeps his traditions alive for he understood how language,

reality and imagination are related by his study of the Kiowa oral tradition. That explains his being a member of the *Taimpe* or Gourd Dance Society though he admits that it is not something that he feels the need to do 'religiously'. Yet he takes pride in his membership for

it's a way of restoring myself in the spiritual dimension of the tribe...I become irresistibly aware of my Indianness when I dance, and I perceive the power of that identity, that belonging, as I do not perceive it in other situations...When I'm dancing, I get caught up in it and am transported, in some sense...that's the great attraction of it to the Indian...he can place himself in that current of sound and motion and by means of that –that affirmation- he can be really close to the centre of his cultural world. It's an ineffable experience, finally.³⁶

The third section of the prose-poem, *The Gourd Dancer*, titled *The Dance* offers a description of the dance:

It is an ineffable music, low like thunder, and hypnotic. You become caught up in it, dancing, and it carries you away to the centre of the world. For a time there is no reality but that, the pure celebration of your being in relation to the singing and the drums and the dance. It is the most profound experience of music that I have ever known.³⁷

The dance is the living evidence as well as the symbol of the strength and vitality of the culture, with particular stress on the horse, as the final section of the poem, *The Giveaway* reveals. After each song there is a 'giveaway' ceremony in which people are honoured through the gifting of gifts, and the gift of a horse is an honour of the highest magnitude.

By the same token, he regards oral literature as that process by which the myths, legends, tales, and lore of a people are formulated, communicated, and preserved in language by word of mouth, in contrast to writing. Oral literature is living speech. Writing is recorded speech. When oral literature is reduced to writing it loses its vitality. Momaday is aware that when the spoken word is translated to the written word, we 'freeze' it and 'paralyze' it, and it loses some of its vitality and flexibility. Hence in his conversation with Charles L. Woodard, Momaday characterizes his deepest voice as "lyrical and reverent and it bears close relationship to Indian oral tradition." It "proceeds out of an ancient voice" and is "anchored in that ancient tradition."

To experience the inner vitality of a song or a story, the reader has to look upon words as events. Much of the vitality of language as a medium is lost in a passive reading of written texts. In Momaday's view, man's existence is ordered, controlled and preserved through language. Native Americans thought of language as creative and imperishable and as a vehicle for the continuance of human existence across time and space. Matthias Schubnell says that this idea is important for understanding Momaday's work in which the dividing lines between reality and imagination, between past, present and future, and between individual and racial experience are blurred. Momaday thinks that oral

and written literatures are stages in an evolutionary process. He endeavored to blend both as the same principles can be applied to each tradition in order to bring them closer together.

In order to understand the nature of the Native American oral *tradition and its place in American literature*, we must first understand something about the storyteller and his art. Stories are composed of words and of such implications as the storyteller places upon the words. The storyteller exercises control over the storytelling experience for it is he who determines the choice of words, their arrangement and their effect. The basic story is one that centers upon an event. In the Native American oral tradition, stories range from origin myths through trickster and culture hero tales to prophecy. The stories in this case are told not merely to entertain and instruct; they are told to be believed. Momaday is of the opinion that 'the storyteller thus creates the storytelling experience and himself and his audience in the process.' He says in effect:

On this occasion I am, for I imagine that I am; and on this occasion you are, for I imagine that you are. And this imagining is the burden of the story, and indeed it is the story.³⁸

To drive home the point, Momaday recalls the Kiowa story of the arrow-maker which he admits he has related many times, and set down in writing but still has not been able to comprehend its whole meaning:

If an arrow is well made, it will have tooth marks upon it. That is how you know. The Kiowas made fine arrows and straightened them to the bow to see if they were straight. Once there was a man and his wife. They were alone in their tipi. By the light of the fire the man was making arrows. After a while he caught sight of something. There was a small opening in the tipi where two hides were sewn together. Someone was there on the outside, looking in. The man went on with his work, but said to his wife: "Someone is standing outside. Do not be afraid. Let us talk easily, as of ordinary things." He took up an arrow and straightened it in his teeth; then, as it was right for him to do, he drew it to the bow and took aim, first in this direction and then in that. And all the while he was talking, as if to his wife. But this is how he spoke: "I know that you are there on the outside, for I can feel your eyes upon me. If you are a Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak your name." But there was no answer, and the man went on in the same way, pointing the arrow all around. At last his aim fell upon the place where his enemy stood, and he let go of the string. The arrow went straight to the enemy's heart.³⁹

Momaday says that until very recently:

the story has been the private possession of a few, a tenuous link in that most ancient chain of language that we call the oral tradition; tenuous because the tradition itself is so; for as many times as the story has been told, it was always but one generation removed from extinction. But it was held dear, too, on that same account. That is to say, it has been neither more or less durable than the human voice, and neither more or less concerned to express the meaning of the human condition...The point of the story lies, not so much in what the arrow-maker does, but in what he says- and indeed that he says it. The principal fact is that he speaks, and in so doing he places his very life in the balance. It is this aspect of the story that interests me most, for it is here that the language becomes most conscious of itself; here we are very close to the origin and object of literature...Implicit in his (the arrow-maker) speech is all of his definition and all of his destiny, and by implication, all of ours. He ventures to speak

because he must; language is the repository of his whole knowledge and experience, and it represents the only chance he has for survival...The arrow-maker is preeminently the man made of words. He has consummate being in language; it is the world of his origin and of his posterity...We can imagine him, as he imagines himself, whole and vital, going on into the unknown darkness and beyond...Language determines the arrow-maker, and his story determines our literary experience.⁴⁰

Thus the native voice in American literature may have gone largely unheard but it is and always has been pervasive. That oral tradition is so deeply rooted in the landscape of the New World that it cannot be denied. Consider this poem, *Carriers of the Dream Wheel* in which he pays tribute to the ancient voices that carry the tradition forward:

This is the Wheel of Dreams
 Which is carried on their voices,
 By means of which their voices turn
 And center upon being.
 It encircles the First World,
 This powerful wheel.
 They shape their songs upon the wheel
 And spin the names of the earth and sky,
 The aboriginal names.
 They are old men, or men
 Who are old in their voices,
 And they carry the wheel among the camps,
 Saying: Come, come,
 Let us tell the old stories,
 Let us sing the sacred songs.⁴¹

The contemporary relevance of this poem is that it states how the oral tradition which is 'only a generation away from extinction,' sustained and renewed itself and gave life to the people. The 'dream wheel' shapes his

existence and his perception of the world around him. Contemporary Native poets are the current 'carriers of the Dream Wheel,' and it is through their poems that modern Native Americans can define their reality and 'center upon being'. The imaginary realm of histories and *myths, visions and songs survives in their voices, and the keepers of oral tradition* have existence in and through it. The fundamental tenet of Native American thought is that the world came into existence through language; as long as this tradition is kept alive in their communal experience, the people will continue to know who they are and what their destiny is. Perhaps that explains why Duane Niatum chose the same title for his anthology of contemporary Native poetry.

The study of oral tradition makes Momaday believe that life is a story, story is a real experience and a name is the concentration and preserver of personal being. In such a perception imagination is the ultimate form of existence. He concludes:

Man achieves the fullest realization of his humanity in such an art and product of the imagination as literature and here I use the term 'literature' in its broadest sense. This is admittedly a moral view of the question, but literature is itself a moral view, and it is a view of morality.⁴²

Such views on the verbal dimension have special relevance to Momaday who describes himself as a man made of words. He further elaborates:

The continuity is unbroken. It extends from prehistoric times to the present, and it is the very integrity of American literature.⁴³

Momaday finds corroboration of his views in the work of Joyce, Melville, Proust, Dickinson and Stevens. About Faulkner, Momaday says that he is a 'legitimate genius', one of 'the really accomplished writers of modern American literature' but adds that he can be 'exasperating and transparent':

He often states the obvious...He frequently loses sight of his objective and becomes so deeply engrossed in his language that he becomes trapped in his own devices. Where he is best is in his mythic imagining. When he begins talking about the South and its romantic ideals, and when he writes about the bear, which is a mythic evocation of the South and the southern landscape, that's great. But when he writes those interminable sentences which one has to go through with a comb in order to glean meanings, I become exasperated. I have a complicated idea of Faulkner...I don't think Faulkner is a man to emulate. I wouldn't want to try and write like Faulkner, though maybe I do in some small ways because I have read him. His voice, no matter how complicated it might be, is very much a part of my hearing. My experience. But I hope my writing is less convoluted than his...more controlled.⁴⁴

Speaking about the "resonances" one finds of one's thoughts and themes in the work of others with whom one has a natural affinity, whether it is Faulkner or Dinesen or D.H. Lawrence, Momaday regards such 'discoveries as confirmations, but not necessarily influences'. Momaday agrees:

As to influences, I make that shift in gears every time I'm asked who influences my writing. I say truthfully that I don't know, but I can tell you who I like and admire. And it's not the same thing. There's a distinction to be made, as you say, between an influence and sharing of an impulse.⁴⁵

The writings of Shakespeare and Dickinson, Herman Melville and Isak Dinesen have affected him and given him 'deep insights into life'.

Momaday also gives due importance to the legacy of cultural humour in his works. While oral traditions as a whole are exclusive, the humorous element is one of the chief manifestations of a defensive attitude. Whether it is the *Saynday* stories about the Kiowa trickster figures who are comic in spite of being invested with supernatural and creative powers and who represent both the good and evil elements of human life, or the songs of Black slaves which were full of meaning, Momaday says, "humour is really where the language lives" for it is "very close to the centre, and very important". Referring to the 'feeling of play' in the last lines of The Way to Rainy Mountain, he says:

Much of my work is a play upon words and play in the element of words. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, the old woman Ko-Sahn talks to me about the Sun Dance. She tells me that it began with an old woman who brought dirt in to place on the dance ground in the Sun Dance lodge, and then sang. And a part of her song had to do with play. She sang, "As old as I am, I still have the feeling of play." And I was greatly taken with that, and decided that it's really a central part of the Native American attitude towards life. One doesn't ordinarily think of the Sun Dance as play, but if you observe Indian ceremony, there is a lot of play in it. A lot of

laughter and joking and an attitude of playfulness, and it was there in that one-hundred year-old woman, Ko-Sahn. I think that's what she was talking about when she was talking about the old, old woman of the Sun Dance. That's an important thing, and I think I deal in it. Not always consciously, necessarily, but it's part of my attitude. It shows up in my work.⁴⁶

Momaday goes on to say there is a lot of wordplay in The Ancient Child and in The Names:

In that book, I wrote about Lupe Lucero, the little boy at Jemez Day School. One day the governor of the village comes up and speaks to Lupe in his native dialect and asks for my father. Lupe considers for a moment, and then he looks up at the governor and he says, "I'm sorry, my friend, but we speak only English here." I appreciate that little story. There's a lot of that sort of thing in *The Names*. To some extent, there's that sort of thing in *House Made of Dawn*. When Abel's horse lies down in the river and Abel has to get up and walk out with his shoes creaking and swishing water, that's funny. Indians would read that and find it very funny." Again in the same novel, there is the whole court business where there is such a play upon words and words are the dangerous element:

The narrator comments that the white men are trying to enclose him in words. Disarm him with words. There are words all around him. And of course, Tosamah makes a lot of puns. Not puns in the ordinary sense, but he plays with language a lot. He says things like, "Due process is a hell of a remedy for snakebite" or "Be kind to a white man today." Where Tosamah remarks upon the court scene- I think Indians would find that funny. When he tells what happened to Abel- this poor longhair who gets himself into trouble. "Look what they did for him," he says. "They deloused him. They gave him an education and free room and board, and how does he pay them back?" I think that an Indian would find that funny.⁴⁷

Language and nationality are central determinants of culture. Referring to his cultural duality, which is sometimes a disadvantage, Momaday gives the example of the two ways of explaining the existence of Devil's Tower. One is the geologist's explanation of its formation which is a logical explanation; the other, from a Native American perspective, also has a grain of truth in it. That explains the "rift between the mythological truth and the scientific truth." This he interprets as Tosamah's narrative in House Made of Dawn, a passage that also occurs in the introduction to The Way to Rainy Mountain, which invests mythic proportions on the formation of the ancient rock structure:

A dark mist lay over the Black Hills, and the land was like iron. At the top of a ridge I caught sight of Devils Tower- the uppermost extremity of it, like a file's end on the gray sky- and then it fell away behind the land. I was a long time then in coming upon it, and I did not see it again until I saw it whole, suddenly there across the valley, as if in birth of time the core of the earth had broken through its crust and the motion of the world was begun. It stands in motion, like certain timeless trees that aspire too much into the sky, and imposes an illusion on the land. There are things in nature which engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devils Tower is one of them. Man must account for it. He must never fail to explain such a thing to himself, or else he is estranged forever from the universe. Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock. [p.115]

That legend is of course the one about the *Rock Tree* of the Kiowas.

What shaped Momaday's sensibilities in this regard is perhaps the mobile nature of his family and his people. There are many journeys in the writings of Momaday. In House Made of Dawn there are restless displacements from villages to cities, and questing movements across the surfaces of the earth, and long ritualistic runs, and migration memories. In The Names there are frequent references to nomadic experiences and impulses, and the book concludes dramatically with factual and imaginative descriptions of journeys:

Nomads, they had come upon the Southern Plains at about the time of the Revolutionary War, having migrated from the area of the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, in what is now western Montana, by way of the Black Hills and the High Plains. Along the way they had become a people of the deep interior, the mid-continent- hunters, warriors, keepers of the sacred earth. When at long last they drew within sight of the Wichita Mountains, they had conceived a new notion of themselves and their destiny.

There are many levels to the land, and many colors. You are drawn into it, down and away. You see the skyline, and you are there at once in your mind, and you have never been there before. There is no confinement, only wonder and beauty. [p. 28]

The Kiowas could not remember a time of glory in their racial life; they knew only that they were the 'coming out' people, according to the name which they gave to themselves, *Kwuda*, who in their origin myth had entered the world through a hollow log. Now it must have seemed to them that in the Southern Plains of 1800, they had reached the time and

place of their fulfillment; and so it was indeed. In the course of their long journey they had acquired horses, the Sun Dance religion, and a certain love and possession of the prairies. They had become centaurs in their spirit. For a hundred years, more or less, they ruled an area that extended from the Arkansas River to the Staked Plains, from the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico, and in them was realized the culmination of a culture that was peculiarly vital, native, and distinct, however vulnerable and ill-fated.

In The Ancient Child, he talks about ancient times when the Kiowas roamed free across a 'land of innumerable long distances,' but always returned to their roots to regenerate themselves. Locke Setman, a Native raised far from the reservations by his foster father, is an accomplished artist, but he cannot quiet the strange aching he feels in his soul. Returning to the land of his ancestors for the funeral of his grandmother, he is irresistibly drawn to the fable of a boy who turned into a bear. Then he meets Grey, a young Navajo medicine-woman who presents him with a medicine bundle which used to belong to his father. What evolves is the force of tradition, embodied in the medicine bundle for once Set acknowledges its presence and opens it up he is unable to escape his destiny which is bound to the Kiowa legend of the Rock Tree Boy. In the process of describing this symbolic metamorphosis,

Momaday's writing touches the heights of poetic beauty especially when he exhibits his naturalist's eye for detail. For instance, Grey marvels at the vast expanse of the plains over which her ancestors had journeyed:

The richness of the plains was a good thing to Grey. The landscape was unending, and there were times, in the early morning or in the sunset, when she felt free of the earth, so great was the space in which she stood. It was as if she had taken place in the sky, among the sun and moon and stars. And when she rode out on Dog (her horse), she sometimes lost the sense of distance altogether. There was no such thing as distance; there was space without definition, here peculiarly accessible to the eye. She could see to the horizon, however far away it was, and she knew that she could not reach it, that if she rode to the farthest end of her vision, the skyline would still be that far away. In this landscape the skyline would always recede before her. That was the great mystery and strength of the Plains. What it must have been for her Kiowa ancestors, this land, this great ocean of grain, when they owned a thousand horses and there were a million buffalo on the range! For a people who had been for many thousand years nomadic hunters, to be on horseback in this landscape must have been the realization of their most ancient and daring dreams. She was glad for them, and for herself in them. She looked with scorn on the fences and roads and townships. They were mean and ugly and unworthy of the Wild Plains. But it did not matter. The moment had come and gone, but it had been. The great glory had been achieved; that is what mattered. For a moment in the history of the world, the Great Plains of North America shone as the center of highest human experience. Never was there a greater realization of honor, nobility, courage, and moral conduct as there was here, just here. That is truly something, Grey thought, almost enough. And she was satisfied, inasmuch as enough and too much come so often simultaneously.

Grey had a hard, uncompromising notion of the Kiowa side of her heritage. The Kiowas were an exclusive people, lordly, tyrannical, domineering. They took advantage of their

opportunities; that is how they survived, how they had survived from the time they entered the world through a hollow log. One had to meet them on their own terms or not at all. They could negate you with their stoicism. Not very long ago the Kiowas, along with their allies the Comanches, were warriors, horse thieves, and slave traders. They had been invincible for a hundred years, and they had conceived a large idea of themselves. It was Grey's idea, too. [p.221]

Momaday brings together the primordial vision quest and the immediacy of the modern world with breath-taking effect making this work yet another quintessentially American novel.

In The Way to Rainy Mountain too, the central focus is on movement across time and space. In this multi-voiced response to the question of personal and cultural creation through imagination and language, with emphasis on the cultural landscape, Momaday retraces the Kiowa migration route from the headwaters of the Yellowstone to Rainy Mountain, a knoll on the Southern Plains. The introduction is repeated in the account that Tosamah gives in House Made of Dawn:

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita range. For my people it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. There, in the south of the continental trough, is the hardest weather in the world. In winter there are blizzards, which come down the Williston corridor, bearing hail and sleet. Hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil's edge...Loneliness is there as an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. At the slightest elevation you can see to the end of the world. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun

at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun. [pp. 112-113]

By the time Momaday's grandfather Mammedaty, the peyote man was born, the Kiowas had been routed in the Indian wars, the great herds of buffalo had been destroyed, and the Sun Dance prohibited by law. Momaday had heard the legends from his grandmother Aho and in the introduction he says that he wanted to see in reality what she 'had seen more perfectly in the mind's eye.' And he does acknowledge the negative events that took place in her time:

When she was born, the Kiowas were living the last great moment of their history...In alliance with the Comanches, they had ruled the whole of the Southern Plains. War was their sacred business, and they were the finest horsemen the world has ever known. But warfare for the Kiowas was pre-eminently a matter of disposition rather than survival, and they never understood the grim, unrelenting advance of the US Cavalry. When at last, divided and ill-provisioned, they were driven onto the Staked Plain in the cold of autumn, they fell into panic. In Palo Duro Canyon they abandoned their crucial stores to pillage and had nothing then but their lives. In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum. My grandmother was spared the humiliation of those high gray walls by eight or ten years, but she must have known from birth the affliction of defeat, the dark brooding of old warriors. [p.113]

From Aho, Momaday learned about the Golden Age- the horse, the buffalo, and the Sun Dance, all of which he echoes with great remorse, in

his poems, *Plainview: 1* through *Plainview: 4*- a movement from the golden age of the Plains Indian culture to its death, a loss that transcends the personal and becomes a moral failure for all Americans. She was about seven years old when the last Kiowa sun dance was held in 1887. By then the buffalo were gone, and in order to consummate the ancient sacrifice- to impale the head of the buffalo bull upon the *Tai-me* tree- the old men journeyed into Texas to beg and barter but still finding none, they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree.

That summer was known to my grandmother as A'poto Etoda-de K 'ado, Sun Dance When the Forked Poles Were Left Standing, and it is entered in the Kiowa calendars as the figure of a tree standing outside the unfinished framework of a medicine lodge. [p.117]

Momaday makes consistent reference to the *Tai-me*, a *katsina* which is a sacred figure of the Kiowas, and its central place in Kiowa understanding of the world. In House Made of Dawn he tells us how the *Tai-me* came to his people:

Long ago there were bad times. The Kiowas were hungry and there was no food. There was a man who heard his children cry from hunger, and he began to search for food. He walked four days and became very weak. On the fourth day he came to a great canyon. Suddenly there was thunder and lightning. A Voice spoke to him and said, "Why are you following me? What do you want?" The man was afraid. The thing standing before him had the feet of a deer, and its body was covered with feathers. The man answered that the Kiowas were hungry. "Take me with you," the Voice said,

“and I will give you whatever you want.” From that day *Tai-me* has belonged to the Kiowas. [p.85]

In The Way to Rainy Mountain the *Tai-me* is described and brought within a personal memory:

The great central figure of the *kedo*, or Sun Dance, ceremony is the *tai-me*. This is a small image, less than 2 feet in length, representing a human figure dressed in a robe of white feathers, with a headdress consisting of a single upright feather and pendants of ermine skin, with numerous strands of blue beads around its neck, and painted upon the face, breast and back with designs symbolic of the sun and moon. The image itself is of dark green stone, in form rudely resembling a human head and bust, probably shaped by art like the stone fetishes of the Pueblo tribes. It is preserved in a rawhide box in charge of the hereditary keeper, and is never under any circumstances exposed to view except at the annual Sun Dance, when it is fastened to a short upright stick planted within the medicine lodge, near the western side. It was last exposed in 1888. – Mooney [Section X]

Finally the *Tai-me* is referred to in terms of the imagination in The Ancient Child. Here the Sacred Sun Dance doll is regarded as the ‘most powerful medicine’ the presence of which was ‘palpable; it was as if she had walked into a warm, slow-moving stream; the presence lay against her like water.’ Momaday places the *Tai-me* and its specific context in relation to the earth and sky. This place is in southwest Oklahoma on and around Rainy Mountain, which becomes in The Ancient Child, ‘the center of the world, the sacred ground of sacred grounds.’

Before the Sun Dance could begin however, the US Cavalry put an end to it in July 1890, at the bend of the Washita River:

Forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith, having seen the wild herds slaughtered and left to rot upon the ground, the Kiowas backed away forever from the tree. That was July 20, 1890, at the great bend of the Washita. My grandmother was there. Without bitterness, and for as long as she lived, she bore a vision of deicide. [p.117]

Talking about the extinction of the old way of life in *The Morality of Indian Hating*, Ramparts 3, No.1 (Summer, 1969) Momaday says that

Perhaps the most immoral act ever committed against the land is the senseless killing of the buffalo. The loss of the sun dance was the blow that killed the Kiowa culture. The Kiowas might have endured every privation but that, the destruction of their faith. Without their religion there was nothing to sustain them.⁴⁸

The last section of The Way to Rainy Mountain has Momaday restating his method and subject- to imagine from the many angles of vision the remembered earth:

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk. [Section XXIV]

Unless we understand the land and its power, we are at odds with everything we touch. The journey recalled through personal and racial

memory, has ended in a remarkable destination- Rainy Mountain Cemetery.

There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother's grave. She had at last succeeded to that holy ground. Here and there on the dark stones were the dear ancestral names. Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away. [p.120]

The same sensibility is elaborated in the poem of the same name,

Rainy Mountain Cemetery:

Most is your name the name of this dark stone.
 Deranged in death, the mind to be inheres
 Forever in the nominal unknown,
 The wake of nothing audible he hears
 Who listens here and now to hear your name.
 The early sun, red as a hunter's moon,
 Runs in the plain. The mountain burns and shines;
 And silence is the long approach of noon
 Upon the shadow that your name defines-
 And death this cold, black density of stone.⁴⁹

The poem is a searching meditation on death. Aho's name no longer stands as a symbol of herself, but of the dark stone. The last lines reveal the pathetic position of the living, who, in trying to confront and understand the personal significance of a death, hear only 'the wake of nothing audible'. The eternal land is contrasted with personal loss of death.

That movement is again a strong element in The Ancient Child, and his essays discuss migration experience and explore the implications

of movement. Such elements of movement obviously stem from the frequent journeys the family made in his formative years, and they centered themselves on several southwestern landscapes across which he could move in imaginative play. As an adult too Momaday has traversed across the country and Europe, delivering lectures and exhibiting his paintings. All of this would seem to be consistent with modern restlessness and the frequent displacements of modern life. The typical response to the idea of return is, as Thomas Wolfe asserts, one cannot 'go home again'. That sense of loss, of irreversible movement forward, of the price of movement, of the price of linear "progress", is dramatized by Robert Frost in *The Road Not Taken*. The speaker is stopped at a crossroads and must choose one "way". Though he forlornly hopes to return to that physical and emotional place, he will not. One sacrifices where one has been for where one is going. Severing one's "roots" is simply the price one must pay.

Yet Momaday, and indeed the Kiowa people, pay no such price, traditionally. That is because he has a strong sense of place and an intense belief in the sustaining permanence of origins. And throughout his life and art, he has emphasized the importance of having an intimate knowledge of one's own landscape. The idea is especially eloquently

presented in The Way to Rainy Mountain, where he declares that a person:

...ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. [Section XXIV]

This idea is therefore not contradicted by his nomadism for in the traditional Native world one departs and returns. The journey is not linear and permanent, as is often true of modern displacements, but circular and continuous. And no version of the essential journey is complete until the return is made. Often the return is physical, as it was with the tribes that moved with the seasons, spiritually and in pursuit of game, returning always to their origin places, to their native grounds. One returns to one's native landscape to renew oneself. But the return is essentially spiritual, and can be accomplished through the oral tradition. One can circle back imaginatively, and actualize those origins through storytelling. That is the 'way' of Momaday's The Way to Rainy Mountain. In the book, his grandmother's grave is 'where it ought to be'; 'at the end of a long and legendary way' - a phrase that is, in many ways, a summary statement of the book. Rainy Mountain is where he returned to seek his roots, where the Kiowas made their way, where Aho is buried, and it represents the localized source and end of the readers' collective seeking. In an important sense, Momaday and his people have never left the seventeenth

century Yellowstone area from which they began their long migration. In a very real sense, through tribal memory, they have not left the mouth of that hollow log out of which they emerged to begin their journey.

Such origins are actualized in a manner which, towards the end of The Names, its creator declares,

The events of one's life take place, *take place*. How often have I used this expression, and how often have I stopped to think what it means? Events do indeed take place; they have meaning in relation to the things around them. And a part of my life happened to take place at Jemez. I existed in that landscape, and then my existence was indivisible with it. I placed my shadow there in the hills, my voice in the wind that ran there, in those old mornings and afternoons and evenings. It may be that the old people there watch for me in the streets; it may be so. [p.142]

That is, human experience has definition and permanence only within the larger context of the physical world. One understands one's past, retains it, through recollections of symbolic physical events. One recalls the world with all of its implications and attendant meanings. One is connected through these recollections. That idea finds a beautiful summary in House Made of Dawn when Momaday concludes the story of Devil's Tower by speaking of the seven sisters who became the stars of the Big Dipper:

From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky. [p.116]

Momaday is therefore a physical and philosophical traveler, a nomad whose life is movement and whose art is a steady progression through time and place to the origins that define him and his people. Beginning with the contemporary House Made of Dawn, he has journeyed steadily back through his writings in a creative and definitive celebration of origins. In doing so, he has demonstrated the power of those origins, as well as the power of place.

In 1946, when Momaday's family, arrived at Jemez Pueblo, in Central Mexico, the Walatowa of House Made of Dawn, they were exposed to an interesting mix of cultures and a religion that is a blend of Spanish Catholicism and Tanoan beliefs of the Tanoan Pueblos who were related distantly to the Aztecs. Momaday loved the land and the people of Jemez, where a part of his life 'happened to take place' and which he calls the 'last, best home of my childhood.'

But however much he loved the land and the people, his family were outsiders and they kept to themselves, in the reservation of their day school, and through this "tender of our respect and our belief, we earned the trust of the Jemez people, and were at home there." Later, when he went away to school, he encountered people who were much more willing to exchange information and traditions, which 'leads to a sense of being Indian first.' For instance, there are similarities between the Kiowa

and the Lakota accounts of the Devil's Tower story. These comparative mythologies evolved and were probably retold by different tribes, each in its own way but where it originated no one will probably know.

Though he loved to travel, being descended from the nomadic people who 'have always loved to roam over the earth', their 'old free life' on the plains, 'the deep impulse to run and rove upon the wild earth, cannot be given up easily' and because the Kiowas did not have reservations and he was not born on a land base with which he had to identify, there is a strong sense of place in him. And it was in the Navajo reservation, Navajo country or *Dine bikeya* at Shiprock, New Mexico, and later at Chinle, Arizona, that Momaday became greatly attached to this stretch of land:

I feel that I have some investment in that community and that landscape, and I love the Navajo spirit. They have a great generosity of spirit...They are in great possession of themselves...Isak Dinesen found great nobility in some African people, and I feel that way about the Navajo.⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that in Native American languages the words 'people' and 'land' are indistinguishable and inseparable. In the name of 'Oklahoma', literally, '*ogula homma*' in the Muskogean languages, the words synonymously mean 'red people's land.' Thus land is people, and by remembering the relationships to the people, the land and the past, Native Americans, according to Geary Hobson, 'renew in

strength our continuance as a people'. Referring to the Wichita Mountains in the Southern Plains as a consecrated landscape, in *The Man Made of Words*, Momaday recounts 'the Kiowas and Comanches journeyed outward from the Wichitas in every direction, going away for years, but they always returned, for the land had got hold of them.'

The mythic culture heroes who leave come back after many trials and adventures thus completing a circular journey. Momaday adds:

I am interested in the way that a man looks at a given landscape and takes possession of it in his blood and brain...None of us lives apart from the land entirely; such an isolation is unimaginable. We have...to come to terms with the world around us...for our humanity must consist in part in the ethical as well as the practical ideal of preservation'.⁵¹

This is what the Native American can contribute- the notion of 'the earth as living matter.' One cannot help but marvel at this account of Monument Valley, which gives *The Names* its distinction:

Monument Valley: red to blue; great violent shadows, planes and prisms of light...

The valley is vast. When you look out over it, it does not occur to you that there is an end to it. You see the monoliths that stand in space, and you imagine that you have come upon eternity. They do not appear to exist in time. You think: I see that time comes to an end on this side of the rock, and on the other side there is nothing forever. I believe that only in *dine bizaad*, the Navajo language, which is endless, can this place be described, or even indicated in its true character. Just there is the centre of an intricate geology, a whole and unique landscape which includes Utah,

Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. The most brilliant colours in the earth are there, I believe, and the most extraordinary land forms- and surely the coldest, clearest air, which is run through with pure light. [p. 68]

For him, the sustained imagining of the southwest's geology, time, air and light, and the lineages it hosts, and this understanding of the relationship between man and the landscape, man and nature, proceeds from a racial or cultural experience.

And in the racial memory, *Ko-sahn*, one of the most venerable people Momaday has known, who, as he 'imagined' had 'stepped out of the language', had emerged from the page and revealed herself as if she had "existence, whole being," in his imagination when he was writing. He saw no distinction between the individual and the racial experience for both were realized in the one memory, that of the land. One 'angle of vision', to use Momaday's favorite term, is to see the sacred in an object; it moves invariably towards the primitive or fundamental or wild. In *Ko-Sahn*, there is an aspect of wildness. It is something primitive that lies very deep in the blood.

It suggests a continuum that goes back in time a long way.
Her wildness proceeds from the real wilderness.⁵²

Her roots ran deep into the earth, and from those depths she drew strength enough to hold still against all the forces of change and disorder. The land is a link between innumerable generations of the tribe. The land is at once

the place of origin, source of sustenance, and it provides for and protects future generations. Interpreting the relationship of his people with the land as “reciprocal appropriation”, he expressed the opinion:

If there is anything American about American literature, it has to be that (the focus upon a unique landscape). The awareness of this landscape. The response to the shape of this continent. That's its uniqueness...I would venture to guess that American literature is probably more closely focused upon the landscape than is British or French literature.⁵³

He adds that the Native American conceives of himself in terms of the land and his imagination of himself is associated with that of the physical world from which he sets out and to which he returns in the journey of his life.

Further, laying emphasis on the Kiowas as a horse culture, Momaday tells of his own experiences on horseback:

In New Mexico the land is made of many colors. When I was a boy I rode out over the red and yellow and purple earth to the west of Jemez Pueblo. My horse was a small red roan, fast and easy-riding. I rode among the dunes, along the bases of mesas and cliffs, into canyons and arroyos. I came to know that country, not in the way a traveler knows the landmarks he sees in the distances, but more truly and intimately, in every season, from a thousand points of view. I know the living motion of a horse, and the sound of hooves. I know what it is, on a hot day in August or September, to ride into a bank of cold, fresh rain.⁵⁴

He goes on to say,

I realized that I had penetrated that landscape and that I knew more about it than it ever occurred to me that I would...You have to spend time in a place, and come to know it as it changes in the hours of the day and in the seasons of the year. And if you put yourself into it, it absorbs you and you come to know it and depend upon it in numerous ways. In spiritual as well as physical ways.⁵⁵

How involved he was in the landscape is evident when he says,

The plains area (where he was born) is a sea of grasses and it is vast. The vastness is what interests me most. You know, when the Kiowas migrated down onto the plains, that must have been one of the great psychological adaptations that man has made to the land. The Kiowas had to learn how to live on those plains, and that could not have been easy. That landscape was completely different from what they had experienced, and they had to commit themselves to it...I like the plains area for that reason. I think it is a demanding, challenging landscape. It requires a great deal of strength...the Kiowa were nomadic people...yet when they came upon the plains, that sense of much greater distance than they had known must have nearly overwhelmed them.⁵⁶

But perhaps the Kiowas had a racial memory of long distances of an earlier migration from central Asia, and maybe it was destiny that made them move down from the mountains to the plains in some kind of a vision quest. And interestingly, “of all the places on the plains, they finally settled in view of the Wichita Mountains.” The Kiowa migration is like a “symbolic expression of all adversity, of all such adventures of man pitting himself against the world.”

Examining the Kiowa identity as lordly hunters, Momaday talks about his “deep, ethnic respect” for the buffalo. It holds “a special place

in my heritage, my racial memory, and so I care about it...I am concerned that it should survive.” One cannot help but recall a visually graphic scene in Kevin Costner’s film adaptation of Michael Blake’s Dances with Wolves, where a vast expanse of grassland is strewn with the carcasses of buffalo – a telling remark on the white man’s disrespect for nature and the natural order as opposed to the Native American’s reliance on it. An excerpt from Louise Erdrich’s Tracks (1988) has an account given by Pauline Lamartine about a prophetic early moment in the life of Nanapush, Chippewa tribal chairman:

As a young man, he had guided a buffalo expedition for whites. He said the animals understood what was happening, how they were dwindling. He said that when the smoke cleared and hulks lay scattered everywhere, a day’s worth of shooting for only the tongues and hides, the beasts that survived grew strange and unusual. They lost their minds. They bucked, screamed and stamped, tossed the carcasses and grazed on flesh. They tried their best to cripple one another, to fall or die. They tried suicide. They tried to do away with their young. They knew they were going, saw their end. He said while the whites slept through the terrible night he kept watch, that the groaning never stopped, that the plain below him was alive, a sea turned against itself, and when the thunder came, then and only then, did the madness cease. He saw their spirits slip between the lightning sheets.
[pp. 139-140]

The disappearance of the buffalo and the closing in of the US Cavalry meant the end of the old way of life for the Kiowas, and, along with everything they held sacred, they lost their horses. Momaday regards such

an ending of the cavalry's massacre of the Kiowa horses as a poignant symbol:

After the fight at Palo Duro canyon, the Kiowas came in, a few at a time, to surrender at Fort Sill. Their horses and weapons were confiscated, and they were imprisoned. In a field just west of the post, the Indian ponies were destroyed. Nearly 800 horses were killed outright; two thousand more were sold, stolen, given away.⁵⁷

This is the most painful moment in the book. But as already pointed out, Momaday chooses instead a more idyllic mood:

I have walked in a mountain meadow bright with Indian paintbrush, lupine, and wild buckwheat, and I have seen high in the branches of a lodgepole pine the male pine grosbeak, round and rose-colored, its dark striped wings nearly invisible in the soft, mottled. And the uppermost branches of the tree seemed very slowly to ride across the blue sky.⁵⁸

Condemning the desecration of the American wilderness Faulkner says the Anglo-Saxon pioneer turned "the earth into a howling waste from which he would be the first to vanish" because "only the wilderness could feed and nourish him."

In The Names and many other works, Momaday lays emphasis on 'the sense of place' which is extremely important to most writers, and indeed to him:

I identify very strongly with places where I have lived, where I have been, where I have invested some part of my being. That equation between man and nature or between writer and place- I don't think there is a relationship that is more important than that. I don't think one can write without

a certain sense of space or place... You create an impression of place. It precedes the experience whatever it may be. The earth was here before I was. When I came, I simply identified place by living in it or looking at it. One does create place in the same way that the storyteller creates himself, creates his listener. The writer creates a place. An excellent example of that is Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, in which the sense of place is so important. I suspect that the Africa of *Out of Africa* never really existed outside of Isak Dinesen's mind. She went there and she invested herself in the actual African landscape, but when she wrote about it, she created a place that probably doesn't exist outside the pages of that book. Dinesen sees everything in Africa as expressions of the same theme: they are all Africa in flesh and blood.⁵⁹

And this may also be true of The Way to Rainy Mountain. One might argue that Momaday has given us his impression of the place. But it may not be as he has described it to someone who plants his feet on the mountain. Therefore, one of the writer's responsibilities is to create place.

Such places are truer than the 'reality,' they are mythic landscapes with unaccountable things beneath the surface which as Woodard says, really symbolize the earth and her potential. He points out what he regards as a summary of the earth's implications, or more broadly, the energy in origins, in Momaday's poem, *Headwaters* at the beginning of The Way to Rainy Mountain where he introduces the Kiowa creation myth in which the people emerge through a 'log, hollow and weather-stained.' The poem indicates the idea of creation as something with a

specific origin, a source that can be identified by the “roots.” In describing a seemingly stagnant pool, Momaday says,

What moves on this archaic force / was wild and welling at
the source.⁶⁰

Obviously he means the powerful that lies beneath the contemporary surfaces. Momaday completely agrees with Woodard’s observation that this place of emergence signifies the source of not only the Kiowas but of the history, cultural energy and traditions of Native Americans as a whole.

Like D. H. Lawrence, Momaday pleads for a code of honour that is based on the ‘deep, aboriginal intelligence in the soil.’ Lawrence felt that the devitalisation of modern civilization was due to man’s alienation from the Natural environment:

We are bleeding at the roots, because we are cut off from the earth and sun and stars, and love is a grinning mockery, because poor blossom, we plucked it off from its stem on the tree of life and expected to keep blooming in our civilized vase on the table.⁶¹

The title of Lawrence’s essay on the subject of man-land relationship is *The Spirit of Place*. Following Lawrence, Momaday terms this a ‘sense of place’ in his *A Special Sense of Place*, which appeared in *Viva, Santa Fe New Mexican*, (7 May 1972). A sense of place derives from the

perception of a culturally imposed symbolic order on a particular physical topography. Momaday has emphasized many times in his *Viva* columns his feeling of unity with and fulfillment in the land:

I came to know the land by going out upon it in all seasons, getting into it until it became the very element in which I lived my daily life. [25 June 1972]

And I too, happen to take place, each day of my life, in my environment. I exist in a landscape and my existence is indivisible with the land. [30 July 1972]

Lawrence J. Evers finds a similar delineation of such an order which is offered by the Tewa anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz in his study, The Tewa World from which the following prayer is taken:

Within and around the earth, within and around the hills, within and around the mountains, your authority returns to you.⁶²

The Tewa singer finds in the landscape which surrounds him validation for his own song, and that particular topography becomes a cultural landscape, at once physical and symbolic. The Kiowa journey, like that recounted in emergence narratives, may be seen as a movement from chaos to order, from disharmony to harmony, the very same destination that Abel arrives at in House Made of Dawn. Like Ko-sahn, the Native American draws from the cultural landscape ‘strength enough to hold still against all the forces of chance and disorder.’

In Momaday's depiction of the sexual relationship between Abel and Angela in House Made of Dawn, we can see that he is in tune with Lawrence's diagnosis of the malaise affecting modern civilization and his prescription to cure it, to revive a dying civilization. Thus both writers emphasise the need for harmony between man and land, and the reciprocal influences between the two. Reverence for land brings about a communion between man and soil. Thus landscape plays an important role, for it is created by the imaginative interaction of societies of men and particular geographies.

The manner in which cultural landscapes are created interests Momaday and the whole of The Way to Rainy Mountain is an account of that process. Rainy Mountain in Southwestern Oklahoma is a sacred place for Momaday. The 'knoll' represents the homeland of the Kiowas; it is where Momaday's ancestors are buried; it is from here that one can 'see to the end of the world' (112). It is also the place from where Momaday can see 'to the center of the world's being' (120). In an essay, *The Homestead on Rainy Mountain Creek*, Momaday recalls his childhood:

I can still hear the singing and the laughter and the lively talk floating on the plain, reaching away to the dark river and the pecan grove, reaching perhaps to Rainy Mountain and the old school and cemetery.

"Home. Homestead. Ancestral home."⁶³

Similarly, Devil's Tower is of fundamental importance to him as it is associated with the legend of Tsoai-Talee which gave him his Kiowa name, and is a place through which he and his ancestors have 'kinsmen in the night sky.' The Kiowas

dared to imagine and determine who they were...The journey recalled is the revelation of one way in which these traditions are conceived, developed and interfused in the human mind.⁶⁴

The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee is Momaday's own song of joy, and it is particularly expressive of his Plains Indian heritage. Although in form the poem makes a playful glance at Walt Whitman's catalogues, it really reflects the oral tradition. It is about the imaginative integration of the self into the land. Momaday has identified his spirit with the land, and shown the beauty and psychic sanity that identification promises. That this integration is peculiarly an act of imagination is revealed in the last line of the first stanza: I am the whole dream of these things. What really emerges from the poem is his perception of the beauty of the land, and of its vitality. In *A First American Views His Land*, he wonders if the Native American concept of the land derives from this 'recognition of beauty, the realization that the physical world *is* beautiful.' The poem thus sings of the beauty in the union of man and land.

Reverence for land also influences Native art. Momaday subscribes to the view ‘the land itself seems to inspire artistic expression.’ But interestingly enough, for an artist who writes just as well as he paints, Momaday does not paint landscapes even though the dramatic landscapes in his writings are descriptions which are very visual- “prose-paintings” as Woodard calls them. His response to that is:

...landscape is not generally the information of Indian painting. And I think that my painting, more than my writing, derives in certain ways from Indian traditions. My father did not paint landscapes .Very few Indians paint landscapes...But describing landscapes in words comes quite naturally to me. I love to do that, and landscape descriptions inform much of my writing...when I describe a landscape in writing, I can be extremely precise. I can describe it in great detail. I don’t think you can paint a landscape in the same detail...You can take a detail in the landscape and define it as a precise image.⁶⁵

Giving the example of a mountain, he says,

With words, I can make that mountain extremely definite. but if I were to paint it, it would be vague...If you look closely at most landscape paintings, the precision in them is illusion...Whereas with a paragraph of description, you can come almost as close as you want and be almost absolutely precise.⁶⁶

One of the things that strike him about any landscape is the play of light on it and he admits he had never seen light such as one sees in Northern New Mexico, anywhere else. And despite having lived for most part of his early life in Santa Fe, he says, “it is wonderful to wake up there and to

observe the light filtering down through the leaves of the trees.” Even the thought of it fills with him with nostalgia as he misses that environment and feels the need to go there periodically just to restore and regenerate himself.

In the essay entitled *A First American Views His Land*, Momaday summarizes the matter of *appropriate* relationships, an idea that is central to his philosophy of life, in many ways, a summary of his worldview:

One afternoon an old Kiowa woman talked to me, telling me of the place in Oklahoma in which she had lived for a hundred years. It was the place in which my grandparents, too, lived; and it is the place where I was born. And she told me of a time even further back, when the Kiowas came down from the north and centred their culture in the red earth of the southern plains. She told wonderful stories, and I listened, I began to feel more and more sure that her voice proceeded from the land itself. I asked her many things concerning the Kiowas, for I wanted to understand all that I could of my heritage. I told the old woman that I had come there to learn from her, from people like her, those in whom the old ways were preserved. And she said simply: “It is good that you have come here.” I believe that her word “good” meant many things; for one thing it meant right, or appropriate. And indeed it was appropriate that she should speak of the land, and an ancient perception of it, a perception that is acquired only in the course of many generations.⁶⁷

It is this notion of the appropriate, along with that of the beautiful, that forms the Native American perspective on the land. In a sense these considerations are indivisible; Native American oral tradition is rich with songs and tales that celebrate natural beauty, the beauty of the natural

world. What is more appropriate to our world than that which is beautiful? He says, “Perhaps it begins with the recognition of beauty, the realization that the physical world is beautiful.”

This appreciation of beauty has its moral aspects too. Momaday explains the Native view of the land and how it is achieved again in the same essay:

Very old in the Native American view is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, a dimension in which man rightly exists. It follows logically that there are ethical imperatives in this matter. I think: Inasmuch as I am in the land, it is appropriate that I should affirm myself in the spirit of the land. I shall celebrate my life in the world and the world in my life. In the natural order man invests himself in the landscape and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. The trust is sacred.

The process of investment and appropriation is, I believe, pre-eminently a function of the imagination. It is accomplished by means of an act of the imagination that is especially ethical in kind.⁶⁸

In this same essay, he divides the four sections of the poem, *New World* which tells of primal man’s first view of his pristine new world on earth. It illustrates what he says is the ‘first truth’ of the Native American: The first truth is that I love the land; I see that it is beautiful; I delight in it; I am alive in it. Momaday condenses this philosophy, in the poem, *I Am Alive*, into ‘a number of equations’ which he calls ‘the idea of the self’:

You see, I am alive.
 You see, I stand in good relation to the earth.
 You see, I stand in good relation to the gods.
 You see, I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful.
 You see, I am alive, I am alive.⁶⁹

It is this investment in the land, this celebratory affirmation of the spirit of the land that is the purpose and subject of this poem. The repetition of 'You see, I am alive, I am alive', lays emphasis on the fact that it is in making this imaginative investment in the land that man fully realizes himself as a living creature. In this sequence, being alive is both cause and effect. Because one is alive, one has these relationships, and when one lives appropriately in response to these relationships, one is most fully alive. Standing in good relationship is right action.

Another poem that sums up his ideas about the land is *Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu*, a poem that is not only a joyful meditation on the beauty of the earth but which also highlights the special bond between two artists who might well be Georgia O'Keeffe and Momaday himself. In the *Viva* column [10 December 1972] he describes her as a kindred spirit:

In her the sense of place is definitive of her great, artistic spirit. She perceives in the landscape of New Mexico an essence and quality of life that enables her to express her genius, and she too, is a native in her soul.

Like Momaday, O’Keeffe finds her inspiration and sustenance in the land, and is identified with it. Both are open to the beauty of the earth, appreciating even the bones and skulls and the stones. The poet wishes ‘to feel the sun in the stones,’ the life source and principle. He gives the artist a stone and she ‘[knows] at once that it [is] beautiful,’ just as she knows the greater forms of the earth at Abiquiu. Thus he echoes what he had once heard:

The writer is the intelligence of his soil...only by being supremely regional can one be truly universal.⁷⁰

Momaday contrasts between appropriate and inappropriate attitudes and behavior throughout his work. For example, it is central to House Made of Dawn. One of the characters, Father Olguin, the priest of the village, is alienated from the realities of his environment at the beginning of the narrative by his peculiarly limited theology and by his white arrogance and pride. His insensitivity to traditional Indian culture is dramatized by his enthusiasm for the journal of his predecessor, Fray Nicholas. Momaday concedes that there is a fanaticism which remarks a lot of religious experience:

Think of the Puritans, who came into New England and simply made no concession whatsoever. I suppose they believed that as Puritans, as Christians, as enlightened, chosen people of God, they could not compromise their faith at all. And so it became purely destructive. It destroyed people...I think something of that same thing is true of Fray

Nicholas. He's a Franciscan. He's on God's side, and he's in a pagan world, and compromise is dangerous. Adaptation. Concession. Any accommodation would be an admission of failure, and a repudiation of one's ideals. So he's blind.⁷¹

The journal reveals the old priest as almost incredibly selfish and self-serving, yet Olguin believes that in the journal he has discovered a model for his own behaviour:

Father Olguin was consoled now that he had seen to the saint's heart. This was what he had been waiting for, a particular glimpse of his own ghost, a small innocuous ecstasy. He was troubled, too, of course; he had that obligation. But he had made the gift, as it were of another man's sanctity, and it would accommodate him very well. He replaced the letter and closed the book. He could sleep now, and tomorrow he would become a figure, an example in the town. In among them, he would provide the townspeople with an order of industry and repose. He closed his good eye; the other was cracked open and dull in the yellow light; the ball was hard and opaque, like the lump of frozen marrow in the bone. [p. 47]

The inappropriateness of Olguin's attitude is summarized in the terrible image of the blind eye, with the concluding reference to deadened life, 'the lump of frozen marrow in the bone'. At the end of the narrative, Olguin feels that he has, after considerable turmoil through the years, 'come to terms with the town'. He is proud of his accomplishments and confident that he has at last achieved an almost total understanding of his circumstances. But then Abel comes to him in the predawn darkness to announce the death of his grandfather:

“What in God’s name-?” he said.

“My grandfather is dead,” Abel said. “You must bury him”.

“Dead? Oh....yes-yes, of course. But, good heavens, couldn’t you have waited until –”

“My grandfather is dead,” Abel repeated. His voice was low and even. There was no emotion, nothing.

“Yes. Yes. I heard you,” said the priest, rubbing his good eye. “Good Lord, what time is it, anyway? Do you know what time it is? I can understand how you must feel, but-”

But Abel was gone. Father Olguin shivered with cold and peered out into the darkness. “I can understand,” he said. “I can understand, do you hear?” And he began to shout, “I understand! Oh God! I understand- I understand!” [p.184]

But of course he does not. Blinded by his ethnocentric clock-time conditioning, Olguin does not understand at all. The opportunity to behave appropriately, feelingly, has been lost. Dramatically opposed to that is Abel’s rediscovery of his native sense of the appropriate through the experience of his grandfather’s death. After years of inappropriate behaviour precipitated by the disorienting experience of war, Abel finds his way back through the spiritual legacy of his grandfather. In the end he is running sacrificially in the dawn, investing himself in the natural world to become one with it, as it is right for him to do.

Just as appropriate is Momaday’s description of himself as a “*Wordwalker*”. The term is suggestive of a person who ‘makes his way on the basis of words’ and has the connotation of ‘the migrant and migration, which is an important part of the Kiowa tradition.’

Further, emphasizing on the notion of the appropriate in an essay entitled *Singing about the Beauty of the Earth*, Momaday says that in order to know instinctively, that which is truly appropriate, or fitting or worthy, and to act accordingly, is 'to exist in the full realization of our humanity.'

Such a realization perhaps comes from the belief in 'the spirit of place'. To Native Americans, their understanding of the world is shaped by the mythology and history of their homelands. They are more attached to place, and have found it hard to escape the shattered, unproductive landscape created by the mobile 'settlers' as is reflected today in life on many reservations. People whose collective memory reaches back to once beautiful and productive land now live amid its devastations, and suffer from the knowledge of what the land had been. Focusing on the possibility of reconciling Indian-White conflicts, and on a rediscovery of the lost unity of the natural world and the self, Momaday commented that one of the things that concern him deeply is the way we have treated the environment. Obviously we have failed to protect the planet or recognize the 'spiritual life of the earth.' A reiteration of the sense of this 'spiritual life of the earth' remains one of Momaday's pressing objectives. And he knows that this relationship between man and the land does not end with death as he returns to the earth.

In his study, Words and Place: A Reading of House Made of Dawn, Lawrence J. Evers emphasizes on two important Native American traditions: the relationship with the land and the special regard for language. He says, "It is only through words that a man is able to express his relation to place." The word has fundamental importance in perceiving the landscape; indeed, "where words and place come together, there is the sacred" as Momaday writes in *The Man Made of Words*. While language is routinely used on a day-to-day basis to convey personal meanings and messages, it is also the repository of a common system of cultural meanings and a common narrative heritage as is evident in its general fund of myths, legends and tales. This provides a reliable and objective method for a recovery of its common beliefs, attitudes and values including the environmental concerns. Stories have, as it were, a life of their own. They persist with only incidental changes, through radically changed cultural circumstances. The Euro-American oral heritage of fairy tales about princes and princesses living in castles, knights, witches and sorcerers, hark back to another physical and psychic world. Yet they live on and continue to be told, relatively unchanged in the re-telling, in today's world of modern technology. The Native American, on his part, "is someone who thinks of himself in a particular way and his idea comprehends his relationship to the physical world."

Momaday admits that modern civilization in its relentless pursuit of the 'American Dream' and of the 'Almighty Dollar' has rejected the moral issues with regard to the environment. But on a more positive note he adds

I hope that we two-leggeds will come to an understanding of the spiritual realities of the world and universe...I don't delude myself into thinking that the human race is destined to outlive nature...I think that the spirit which informs the landscape is more important than the rise of civilization...My relationship to the world is something apart from procreating my own species. Of greater importance is that part of me which will survive in the mountain in a thousand years or a million years.⁷²

In an essay entitled *A Garment of Brightness* Momaday explains that writing requires one to have a dual vision, to see things in a way that enables one to express them. His prose-paintings are a consequence of his exceptional ability to visualize images that inform him:

There is a remarkable aesthetic perception in the Indian world, I believe, a sense of beauty, of proportion and design. Perhaps this quality is most apparent in children, where it seems especially precocious. An Indian child, by virtue of his whole experience, hereditary as well as environmental, sees the world in terms of this aesthetic sense. His view of the landscape is sure to be incisive and precisely composed; he is sure to perceive an order in the object he beholds, an arrangement that his native intelligence superimposes upon the world...He sees with both his physical eye and the eye of his mind; he sees what is really there to be seen, including the aesthetic effect of his own observation upon the scene, the shadow of his own imagination. It is the kind of vision that is cultivated in poets and painters and photographers... Perhaps this quality of abstraction, this understanding of order and spatial relationships, proportion and design, is most fully realized in language.⁷³

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Chapter III

House Made of Dawn: A Study of the Land Ethic and the Regeneration of the Spirit of Man

Where language touches the earth there is the holy.¹

Koyaanisqatsi is a Native American concept for life out of balance. Its opposite, *hozho nahasdlii* refers to harmony restored. The absence of a bond to land threatens the very fabric of the 'principle of harmony in the universe'. The Native American land ethic bases moral consideration for earth's complement of animals, plants, soil, rocks, waters, upon evolutionary kinship and ecological community. This symbiosis of earth's biota, because of its holistic value orientation, generates ethical duties and obligations to the ecosystem as a whole. Indeed Louis Owens declares in the introduction to Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel, Native American writers are offering a way of looking at the world that is new to Western culture. It is a holistic, ecological perspective, one that places essential value upon the totality of existence, making humanity equal to elements but superior to none and giving humankind crucial responsibility for the care of the world we inhabit. J. Baird Callicott states emphatically in defense of the Native American land ethic that

the world view typical of American Indian peoples has included and supported an environmental ethic, while that of Europeans has encouraged human alienation from the natural environment and an exploitative practical relationship with it.²

Momaday insists that with regard to the preservation of the American wilderness and its natural resources, the Native American aesthetic principle upholds its pristine beauty while non-Natives perceive it as useful and that it can be exploited for its economic value. Conservationists too have a use-oriented motive rather than the aesthetic ‘first truth’ of the Native peoples:

in Ko-Sahn and in her people we have always had the example of a deep, ethical regard for the land...We had better learn from it. Surely that ethic is merely latent in ourselves. It must now be activated...We Americans must come again to a moral comprehension of the earth and air. We must live according to the principle of a land ethic. The alternative is that we shall not live at all.³

Such a relationship between man and land, or between man and the physical world of nature, proceeds from a “racial or cultural experience.” The Native American heritage has always been closely focused and centered upon the landscape as a particular reality.

Momaday’s breakthrough novel, House Made of Dawn reflects this holistic view of the need for harmony between man and land. The novel received the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1969, the first by a Native

American writer. Vernon E. Lattin, has pointed out in *American Literature* that it is both

a return to the sacred art of storytelling and myth-making that is part of Indian oral tradition

and a bid

to push the secular mode of modern fiction into the sacred mode, a faith and recognition in the power of the word

as also

a new romanticism, with a reverence for the land, a transcendent optimism, and a sense of mythic wholeness.⁴

Enclosed between two Jemez formula words, *Dypaloh* and *Qtsedaba*, which are conventionally used for opening and closing a Native American story, Momaday suggests that House Made of Dawn has the potential of a tribal myth set in a mythic landscape. The Prologue has the ritualistic race as the central dominating theme which Momaday himself has suggested in an interview in *Puerto del Sol* 12 (1973):

I see [*House Made of Dawn*] as a circle. It ends where it begins and it's informed with a kind of thread that runs through it and holds everything together. The book itself is a race.⁵

Dypaloh. There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the plain was bright with different-colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. The land was still and strong. It was beautiful all around.

Abel was running. He was alone and running, hard at first, heavily, but then easily and well. The road curved out in front of him and rose away in the distance. He could not see the town. The valley was gray with rain, and snow lay out upon the dunes. It was dawn. The first light had been deep and vague in the mist, and then the sun flashed and a great yellow glare fell under the cloud. The road verged upon clusters of juniper and mesquite, and he could see the black angles and twists of wood beneath the hard crust; there was a shine and glitter on the ice. He was running, running. He could see the horses in the fields and the crooked line of the river below.

For a time the sun was whole beneath the cloud; then it rose into eclipse, and a dark and certain shadow came upon the land. And Abel was running. He was naked to the waist, and his arms and shoulders had been marked with burnt wood and ashes. The cold rain slanted down upon him and left his skin mottled and streaked. The road curved out and lay into the bank of rain and beyond, and Abel was running. Against the winter sky and the long, light landscape of the valley at dawn, he seemed almost to be standing still, very little and alone. [p.1]

The Prologue anticipates the closing and thus presents the circular structure of the novel which is divided into four parts, *The Longhair*, *The Priest of the Sun*, *The Night Chanter* and *The Dawn Runner*, an obvious reference to the sacred number four- the quadrants, the directions, with corresponding colors, symbols and animal motifs- carefully woven like a Navajo handicraft. House Made of Dawn articulates through specific detail these traditional premises:

Life and power reside in the Circle.
 All creatures / All forces / co-exist equally.
 Man is powerful and is capable of affecting, and
 being affected by, the forces of the universe.

He sees signs and through word and ritual
participates in the Sacred.⁶

Lawrence J. Evers infers that in the Navajo emergence narrative, First Man and First Woman accompanied by Coyote and other animal figures journey upward through four underworlds into the present Fifth World. The journey advances in a series of movements from chaos to order, and each movement takes the People toward greater social and symbolic definition. The cloud pillars of the First World defined only by color and direction become in the Fifth World the sacred mountains of the four directions, the most important coordinates in an intricate cultural geography. As with the Tewa and the Kiowa, that cultural landscape symbolizes the Navajo conception of order, the endpoint of their emergence journey. Through the emergence journey, a collective imaginative endeavor, the Navajos determined who and what they were in relation to the land. The pattern of the emergence narrative- a journey toward harmony symbolized by a cultural landscape- is repeated in Navajo *chantway* rituals. A patient requires a *chantway* ritual when his life is in some way out of order. In order for that harmony to be restored he must be taken through a ritual re-emergence journey paralleling that of the People. Significantly, it is through the power of the chanter's words,

his song, the patient's life is brought under ritual control, and he is regenerated.

Momaday's novel is a complex and skillful juxtaposition of flashbacks in which the telling of the story is as important as the story itself. Containing the specific incidents and characters modeled on life at Jemez are two overarching motifs. Identifying the first of these, Baine Kerr in *Southwest Review*, has characterized the novel as

a creation myth- rife with fabulous imagery, ending with Abel's rebirth in the old ways at the old man's death- but an ironic one, suffused with violence and telling a story of culture loss.⁷

That culture loss links the creation myth motif with the conflict between Native American and non-Native cultures, which to Momaday, was one of his 'central concerns' in the novel, and both are focused in the person of Abel. The protagonist's dis-equilibrium, and his slow recovery, is given in terms that borders on the cyclical, spatial and Native-ceremonial, and which avail themselves of Laguna, Navajo and Kiowa traditions. In this respect, the opening and final scenes of running, the 'house of dawn' mythology itself, the linked pollen, *kiva*, *katsina* and corn allusion, hold a lot of importance, the signatures of a predominantly Native world.

A third important motif, and the primary focus of this research, is the sacredness of the land and the traditional Native perception of the

sacred bond between the people and the land. The novel reflects Momaday's belief that 'the whole world view of the Indian is predicated upon the principle of harmony in the universe,' and that it has the 'look of an absolute.' The haunting descriptions of the always acutely present landscape spring from his 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.⁸

He adds,

Every writer is forced to rely, at some point, on the imagination. The skill with which he can do that determines his success as a writer.⁹

House Made of Dawn is an 'act of imagination' designed to heal as Paula Gunn Allen has so rightly said. It is the relationship between good and evil, and the proper place of a certain human being within that relationship. It is not about redemption, for redemption is not Pueblo, indeed, not a Native American notion; it is not about a fall from grace. It is rather about sickness and disharmony, and about health and harmony. The title itself provides the clue: *House Made of Dawn* is the first line of the chant sung on the third day of the Navajo healing ceremony called the

Night Chant. It is the first prayer of the third morning ritual; the third day is designated the *Day of the West*. The prayer appears in the third chapter of Momaday's novel. Narrated by the Navajo friend of Abel, Ben Benally, the chapter is concerned with the chief protagonist's sojourn in Los Angeles, the major relocation centre for southwestern Native Americans on the west coast. The prayer is sung in the *Night Chant* as part of the *Purification* section of the ceremony. It is accompanied by a rite in which a set of eight prayer offerings, sacred to the gods of the shrine known as the *House Made of Dawn* in the distant canyon of *Tsegihi* meaning 'place among the rocks', are used to bless or purify the patient and then the prayers are 'sacrificed' or offered to the sun. *Tsegihi* is an ancient Pueblo ruin, and the controlling metaphor of the novel is perhaps the relationship of the sun which forms the central issue of life at Walatowa, to Abel. The race which is performed each year at spring equinox is an offering of the strength of the people to the sun – the source of strength and power among them for the coming planting season which frames the book. The *peyote* ceremony in Los Angeles is a sun rite, and so is one of the purification rituals which Abel must go through. It is also significant that a patient participating in a *Night Chant* offers himself on the last morning of his healing to the rising sun, singing these words:

Thus will it be beautiful.
 Thus walk in beauty, my grandchild.¹⁰

As these words are sung, the patient faces east and breathes in the breath of dawn.

House Made of Dawn traces its genesis in Momaday's 1963 short story, *The Well*, in *Ramparts*, Vol. 2.1. Matthias Schubnell has pointed out that the early story

contains a number of the themes and prototypes of some of the characters which were to reappear in the novel.¹¹

Like the character Hobson in the short story, House Made of Dawn is about a young man Abel, who returns home to his reservation and attempts to find a meaningful place for himself. He searches unsuccessfully both the cultural and physical landscapes for something he can recognize and feel a sense of connection with. But he fails to express himself, and gives in to bouts of drunkenness and violence that culminates in the murder of a person he regards as a witch. In the novel, we never learn the protagonist's last name though it is an obvious allusion to the first victim in the Bible but Momaday makes it quite clear that, he did not "choose the name on that account."

Abel is the illegitimate son of a Tanoan mother and an unknown father, probably a Navajo or a Sia, or an Isleta, which rendered him an outsider on the periphery of Jemez community. He traces his antecedents

to the Bahkyush, and like them, is on 'a journey along the edge of oblivion'. The story begins with Abel's return from World War II to his native village of Walatowa, a fictionalized version of the Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, where Momaday grew up. In his interview with Charles Woodard in November 1974, Momaday said,

I knew an Abel at Jemez who was a close neighbor...I was thinking of him; he's one of the people who adds to the composite of Abel.¹²

Abel is so drunk when he arrives that he fails to recognize his grandfather Francisco, who has come to pick him up:

He was drunk, and he fell against his grandfather and did not know him. His wet lips hung loose and his eyes were half closed and rolling. Francisco's crippled leg nearly gave way. His good straw hat fell off and he braced himself against the weight of his grandson. Tears came to his eyes, and he knew only that he must laugh and turn away from the faces in the windows of the bus. He held Abel upright and led him to the wagon, listening as the bus moved away at last and its tires began to sing upon the road. On the way back to town, Abel lay ill in the bed of the wagon and Francisco sat bent to the lines.

Abel slept through the day and night in his grandfather's house. With the first light of dawn he arose and went out. He walked swiftly through the dark streets of the town and all the dogs began to bark. He passed through the maze of corrals and crossed the highway and climbed the steep escarpment of the hill. Then he was high above the town and he could see the whole of the valley growing light and the far mesas and the sunlight on the crest of the mountain. In the early morning the land lay huge and sluggish, discernible only as a whole, with nothing in relief except its own sheer, brilliant margin as far away as the eye could see, and beyond that the nothingness of the sky.

Silence lay like water on the land, and even the frenzy of the dogs below was feeble and a long time in finding the ear.
[pp. 8-10]

As he stands there, a number of episodes from his boyhood and the war flash by in his mind's eye. These series of flashbacks make the reader aware of the protagonist's past, and draw parallels with Momaday's own youth as an outsider in Jemez. In a lecture Momaday gave in the University of New Mexico campus in 1972, he asserted that 'Humanness' waits on the individual's ability to 'imagine himself into existence,' to leap with racial memory, personal wit, and faith to the point of wholeness. Man's birth, then, is by his own power of imagination; his life is atemporal, neither time nor space bound; and the word- sacred and creative- is the vehicle of articulation. In reliving central episodes of his past, Abel tries to reintegrate himself into his environment, to imagine himself into an existence he can understand and with which he can identify:

He did not know who his father was. His father was a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal (his brother) somehow foreign and strange. Francisco was the man of the family, but even then he was old and going lame...His mother died in October, (of tuberculosis) and for a long time afterward he would not go near her grave, and he remembered that she had been beautiful in a way that he as well as others could see and her voice had been as soft as water. [p.11]

He and his brother Vidal had been taught by Francisco to observe the tribal traditions:

...they must know the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years, and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were, in time...These things he told to his grandsons carefully, slowly and at length, because they were old and true, and they could be lost forever as easily as one generation is lost to the next, as easily as one old man might lose his voice, having spoken not enough or not at all. [p.173]

Such teachings are central to their development as well as the perpetuation of Jemez tradition; herein lay the importance of the oral tradition in transmitting an entire culture through the generations. Abel was at the centre of the Walatowa life until he lost his mother and brother. The lack of family ties perhaps prevented his full integration into the Native community. Pueblo traditionalists maintain that in an age of growing pressure from outside the tribal culture can only survive in isolation and the village has indeed succeeded in keeping their traditional customs intact despite the pressures of Spanish and Anglo-American cultural encroachment due to its geographical isolation. Momaday portrays this sheltered life in Walatowa, Canyon de San Diego thus:

Man came down the ladder to the plain a long time ago. It was a slow migration, though he came only from the caves in the canyons and the tops of the mesas nearby. There are low, broken walls on the tabletops and smoke-blackened caves in the cliffs, where still there are metates and broken

bowls and ancient ears of corn, as if the prehistoric civilization had gone out among the hills for a little while and would return; and everything would be restored to an older age, and time would have returned upon itself and a bad dream of invasion and change would have been dissolved in an hour before the dawn. For man, too, has tenure in the land; he dwelt upon the land twenty-five thousand years ago, and his gods before him.

The people of the town have little need. They do not hanker after progress and have never changed their essential way of life. Their invaders were a long time in conquering them; and now after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky and make their living from the things that are and have always been within their reach; while in the discrimination of pride they acquire from their conquerors only the luxury of example. They have assumed the names and gestures of *their enemies*, but have held on to their own, secret souls; and in this there is resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting. [p.52]

Abel's decision to leave the Pueblo community grows out of the realization that he cannot find an identity simply by adopting the teachings of his grandfather. By means of a few central events, Momaday shows that Abel has no choice but to step out of the limiting realm of his native village in order to remain true to his self. He stresses the young Native's position between two cultures by means of Abel's shoes. These shoes are typical of the white man's fashion in the city and therefore conspicuous to a traditional community. In Pueblo societies tribal rules demand that shoes or boots can be worn only if the heel is cut off, to avoid injury to the sacred earth on which the community's existence

depends. Abel however, defies this in favour of the skilled craftsmanship of the shoes, like the

work of a good potter or painter or silversmith. [p.93]

As he steps out of his native village, he is wearing these shoes, having waited

a long time for the occasion to wear them. [p.93]

This signifies the world he is about to enter, and as he realizes this he grows anxious and afraid:

But now and beyond his former frame of reference, the shoes called attention to Abel...they clattered and creaked. And they were nailed to his feet. There were enemies all around, and he knew that he was ridiculous in their eyes. [p.94]

He recreates past experiences in his mind, in order to come to grips with his confused state. His recollections become a psychological process of searching for the roots of his confusion.

A significant experience during his adolescence is his vision of an eagle which carries a snake in its talons:

He had seen a strange thing, an eagle overhead with its talons closed upon a snake. It was an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning. [p.14]

Both eagle and snake have deeply religious meanings for the Natives of the Southwest. The snake is associated with the coming of water and is worshipped in ceremonies such as the snake dance of the Hopis. The

eagle is believed to attain supernatural powers on its flights and is revered in the eagle dance. For Abel the eagle symbolizes freedom, beauty and life:

They were golden eagles, a male and a female, in their mating flight. They were cavorting, spinning and spiraling on the cold, clear columns of air, and they were beautiful. [p.16]

When he first sees them, he is

...on the rim of the Valle Grande, a great volcanic crater that lay high up on the western slope of the range. It was the right eye of the earth, held open to the sun. Of all places that he knew, this valley alone could reflect the great spatial majesty of the sky. It was scooped out of the dark peaks like the well of a great, gathering storm, deep umber and blue and smoke-colored. The view across the diameter was magnificent; it was an unbelievably great expanse. As many times as he had been there in the past, each new sight of it always brought him up short, and he had to catch his breath. Just there, it seemed, a strange and brilliant light lay upon the world, and all the objects in the landscape were washed clean and set away in the distance. In the morning sunlight the Valle Grande was dappled with the shadows of clouds and vibrant with rolling winter grass. The clouds were always there, huge, sharply described, and shining in the pure air. But the great feature of the valley was its size. It was almost too great for the eye to hold, strangely beautiful and full of distance. Such vastness makes for illusion, a kind of illusion that comprehends reality, and where it exists there is always wonder and exhilaration. He looked at the facets of a boulder that lay balanced on the edge of the land, and the first thing beyond, the vague misty field out of which it stood, was the floor of the valley itself, pale and blue-green, miles away. He shifted the focus of his gaze, and he could just make out the clusters of dots that were cattle grazing along the river in the faraway plain. [p.15]

Perhaps amidst that evocative landscape, it is in this vision that Abel realizes the limitations of his life under the rules of his tribal community.

His observation of the eagles and the snake gains him the permission of the Eagle Watchers Society to participate in the eagle hunt:

It was an important society...The Eagle Watchers Society was the principal ceremonial organization of the Bahkyush. Its chief, Patiestewa, and all its members were direct descendants of those old men and women who had made the journey along the edge of oblivion. There was a look about these men, even now. It was as if, conscious of having come so close to extinction, they had got a keener sense of humility than their benefactors, and paradoxically a greater sense of pride...In their uttermost peril long ago, the Bahkyush had been fashioned into seers and soothsayers. They had acquired a tragic sense, which gave to them as a race so much dignity and bearing. They were medicine men; they were rain-makers and eagle hunters. [p.15]

Again he sees the two eagles and succeeds in catching the female bird. He returns to the other hunters in the plain who fete him in much the same way as Francisco was celebrated after his successful bear hunt. Abel, however, cannot enjoy this honor. He cannot accept that his respect for the animal can be reconciled with his act of depriving it of its freedom for the benefit of the community. The closeness of the captive eagle's spirit to the village is regarded as a beneficial influence on the life at Jemez. When his peers free the male eagle, Abel is overcome by a feeling of longing to follow the bird:

It leveled off and sailed. Then it was gone from sight, but he looked after it for a long time. He could see it still in his mind's eye and hear in his memory the awful whisper of its flight on the wind. It filled him with longing. He felt the great weight of the bird which he held in the sack. The dusk was fading quickly into night, and the others could not see that his eyes were filled with tears. [p.20]

Instead of feeling victorious, in keeping with the tribal tradition, Abel is sad and disgusted and decides to kill the bird rather than let it live in captivity. This is an act of rebellion against a custom that he cannot comprehend.

These emotional reactions reflect a deep respect for the well-being of other life forms, an attitude that defines the Native peoples. However, Abel fails to see the wider implications of the man-animal relationship in his religion. As Frank Speck observed, in the Native American world view, the hunter's virtue lies in respecting the souls of the animals 'necessarily' killed, in treating their remains in prescribed manner and in particular, in making use of as much of the carcass as is possible. These observances constitute religious obedience because it was believed that the slain animals return to life again. Thus the hunting and killing of animals does not constitute a breach of the spiritual bond between man and animal if it is performed in the appropriate traditional way. Momaday dramatized this concept in Francisco's bear hunt in which he adheres to the code:

And he did not want to break the stillness of the night, for it was holy and profound; it was rest and restoration, the hunter's offering of death and the sad watch of the hunted, waiting somewhere away in the cold darkness and breathing easily of its life, brooding around at last to forgiveness and consent; the silence was essential to them both, and it lay out like a bond between them, ancient and inviolable. [p.176]

The bear's knowledge of Francisco's approach, the absence of fear and hurry, and the hunter's following 'in the bear's tracks' suggest an old intimacy between the two. The ritual blessing of the bear with pollen is an expression of gratitude and respect, making him the medicine man of his people, a plea for propitiation.

Without the knowledge of these ancient practices, Abel reacts emotionally rather than ritualistically which is an inappropriate response. He is not only unable to comprehend these aspects of his native tradition but has also lost respect for his grandfather as the representative of the ancient ways. This, compounded by Francisco's inability to cure Abel's injured back through his prayers and herbal applications, makes Abel decide to leave. His leaving is a departure in dread, accompanied by fear of an un-known future in an un-familiar world. While he is capable of comprehending his Indian boyhood in these sequences of flashbacks, he is unable to come to terms with the time spent away from his native pueblo:

This- everything in advance of his going- he could remember whole and in detail. It was the recent past, the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not put together in his mind. There was one sharp fragment of recall, recurrent and distinct:

He awoke on the side of the wooded hill. It was afternoon and there were bright, slanting shafts of light on all sides; the ground was covered with damp, matted leaves. He didn't know where he was, and he was alone. No, there were men about, the bodies of men; he could barely see them strewn among the pits, their limbs sprawling away into the litter of leaves, and leaves were falling in the shafts of light, hundreds of leaves, rocking and spiraling down without sound. But there was sound: something low and incessant, almost distant, full of slow steady motion and approach...And across the crease of the land there was silence; a thin layer of smoke held still in the distance. The mortar fire had stopped; there someone, some human force far away and out of sight, was making way for the machine that was coming. The silence had awakened him- and the low, even mutter of the machine coming....He reached for something, but he had no notion of what it was; his hand closed upon earth and the cold, wet leaves. [pp. 21-22]

The shock of war is the determining factor in Abel's early manhood, as the vision of the eagles' flight was a central event in his adolescence. In the alien world he becomes subject to a dehumanizing military conflict. The dehumanization comes across forcefully in his recollection of his war experience through the recurrent reference to the tank as 'the machine'. The tank symbolizes the deadening force of an aggressive, technological society. The atmosphere of death and destruction is reinforced by another recurrent image pattern; damp,

matted, wet, cold, and falling leaves intensify the scene's implications of decay and annihilation:

Then, through the falling leaves, he saw the machine. It rose up behind the hill, black and massive, looming there in front of the sun. He saw it swell, deepen, and take shape on the skyline, as if it were some upheaval of the earth, the eruption of stone and eclipse, and all about it the glare, the cold perimeter of light, throbbing with leaves. For a moment it seemed apart from the land; its great iron hull lay out against the timber and the sky, and the centre of its weight hung away from the ridge. Then it came crashing down to the grade, slow as a waterfall, thunderous, surpassing impact, nestling almost into the splash and boil of debris. He was shaking violently, and the machine bore down upon him, came close, and passed him by. A wind arose and ran along the slope, scattering the leaves. [p.22]

The image of the machine as the embodiment of destruction and denial of life stands in sharp contrast to the crucial experience in Abel's youth when the eagles appeared to him as symbols of life and freedom.

Abel's inner stability is further disturbed by the traumatic events of the war. Responding to the tank as an evil presence, he is so disoriented that he temporarily loses his sense of identity and connection with land, as he breaks into a dance. As a Native among the white soldiers he is denied a personal identity by his comrades. He is the 'chief' who is 'giving it to the tank in Sioux or Algonquin or something'. Thus he cannot be assimilated for the dominant Anglocentric environment has stereotyped him as an 'Indian' without regard for his individuality. In

such a mis-construed role, his peers not only shut him out from their culture but also deny his identity as a Jemez man. This representative status is exactly what Gerald Vizenor decries as 'bankable simulation'.

Matthias Schubnell's reading of the novel focuses on the identity crisis, a modern idiom, and he quotes from one of Momaday's letters after deleting the names of the victims to protect their privacy:

Abel is a composite of the boys I knew at Jemez. I wanted to say something about them. An appalling number of them are dead; they died young, and they died violent deaths. One of them was drunk and run over. Another was drunk and froze to death. (He was the best runner I ever knew). One man was murdered, butchered by a kinsman under a telegraph pole just east of San Ysidro. And yet another committed suicide. A good many who survived this long are living under the Relocation Program in Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, etc. They're a sad lot of people.¹³

This statement spells out the disastrous violence, suffering, and despair which frequently accompany cultural dislocation. While Abel's conflicts are aggravated by a particularly unsettling historical period, his difficulties in reconciling his tribal origin with the presence of the modern world are a latent and potentially disruptive problem for every generation of Native Americans.

Abel is struggling to find an identity within his own tribe long before he comes into direct contact with the culture of modern America. From a developmental point of view his experience is universal: it is the

struggle of a young man to establish a stable position in his community. He is a misfit who like Hamlet, is out of place everywhere and at home nowhere. He is caught between two worlds: one his father's, binding him to the rhythm of the seasons and the harsh beauty of the land; the other of industrial America, propelling him into a compulsive cycle of dissipation and disgust. Referring to Abel, Momaday has said,

None but an Indian, I think, knows so much what it is like to have existence in two worlds and security in neither.¹⁴

He is certainly the lone, culturally divided outsider seeking his identity as a Native American in an Anglo society, separated from and in conflict with not only himself but with his own society- an important twentieth century exemplar of one of American fiction's primary archetypes. That Abel is in conflict with two cultures only intensifies his story and his quest.

In an interview with Laura Coltelli in her Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak, 1990, Momaday says,

Abel is a commonplace in the sense that he is a kind of, a kind of- I can't think of the word I want- he represents a great many people of his generation, the Indian who returns from the war, the Second World War. He is an important figure in the whole history of the American experience in this country. It represents such a dislocation of the psyche in our time. Almost no Indian of my generation or of Abel's generation escaped that dislocation, that sense of having to deal immediately with, not only with the traditional world, but with the other world which was placed over the

traditional world so abruptly and with great violence. Abel's generation is a good one to write about, simply because it's a tragic generation. It is not the same, the generation after Abel did not have the same experience, nor the one before. So it is, in some sense, the logical one to deal with in literature.¹⁵

On his return, in that inebriated state, in part a reaction to being cut adrift from his native culture and inability to reconcile with mainstream America, Abel tries to readjust himself to the land and the culture of his tribe by searching for a sign in his environment:

He stood for a long time, the land still yielding to the light. He stood without thinking, nor did he move; only his eyes roved after something. The white rain-furrowed apron of the hill dropped under him thirty feet to the highway. The last patches of shade vanished from the river bottom and the chill grew dull on the air. He picked his way downward, and the earth and stones rolled at his feet. He felt the tension at his knees, and then the weight of the sun on his head and hands. The dry light of the valley rose up, and the land became hard and pale. [p. 23]

Abel is slowly feeling his way back to a centre which had been lost to him. Only by relating himself to this centre can he reestablish order and overcome his inner chaos. His search is informed with religious meaning, as it aims at a communion with the land which is sacred to his people. This search for a sign is a universal religious impulse in a state of disequilibrium.

Later when Abel sees his grandfather and some men working in the fields, he acquires for a moment the old familiar sense of unity with his homeland:

The breeze was very faint, and it bore the scent of earth and grain; and for a moment everything was all right with him. He was at home. [p.27]

Carole Oleson in her analytical work, The Remembered Earth: Momaday's House Made of Dawn, remarks that the novel

is a long prose poem about the earth, about the people who have long known how to love it, and who can survive as a people if they will cling to that knowledge.¹⁶

Does Abel fully recognize the ties to his native environment? Perhaps, but he still finds himself unable to enter the ceremonial life of his people. Five days after his return, the people of Jemez celebrate the game of the *Chicken Pull*. This activity was introduced by the Spaniards who called it the Feast of Santiago and the Southwestern tribes observed it as well. Momaday's myth of Santiago shows the blend of the Native myth of origin that features the trickster figure as culture hero, and the Christian genre of saint's tales with its miracles. The people of Walatowa have their own peculiar brand of Pueblo Christianity, with its own rituals and mythology. In the novel, while Fray Nicolas's journal reveals his horror at his sacristan Francisco participating in the rituals, by 1945, the attitude

of the church has become more tolerant. Momaday himself regards the character of Fray Nicolas as a 'desperate man' in

a position where he has no advantage. All of his strengths, which are predicated upon Christian faith, are futile.¹⁷

He represents white insensitivity to traditional Native culture, like the other 'priests on the reservation'. Father Olguin, on the other hand, makes some accommodation when he articulates the Feast celebration which goes back a long way and according to him, when Santiago had journeyed to New Mexico, he stopped to rest at the house of a poor peasant who had but a single rooster which they cooked for the guest who in exchange blessed the family for their generosity. Legend has it that Santiago journeyed onward to the royal city where the king proclaimed that whoever wins some contests of skill, would claim his daughter's hand in marriage. When the disguised Santiago won, the king in resentment that his daughter would be carried away by an ordinary man ordered that he be killed. By a miracle Santiago brought forth from his mouth the rooster, whole and alive, and the bird warned him of the impending danger. Santiago was saved, and at his journey's end, his horse asked that he be sacrificed for the people's welfare. Accordingly, Santiago stabbed the horse, and from his blood there issued a great herd of horses, enough for all the Pueblo people. Then he acted on the

rooster's request and sacrificed it too by tearing it apart with his bare hands and scattering its remains on the ground. The blood and feathers became cultivated plants and animals. Thus the Rio Grande Pueblos view the intersection of the rooster into the ground and its subsequent removal as a symbolic representation of planting and reaping. The scattering of the bird's blood and feathers are representative of rain and are believed to increase the fertility of the land and the success of the harvest.

Abel's participation in the ceremony offers him an opportunity for reconciliation with his culture:

In a little while the riders came into the west end in groups of three and four, on their best animals...They crossed the width of the Middle and doubled back in single file along the wall. Abel rode one of his grandfather's roan black-maned mares and sat too rigid in the saddle, too careful of the gentle mare...The appearance of one of the men was striking. He was large, lithe, and white-skinned;... He was last in line, and when he had taken his place with the others in the shade of the wall, an official of the town brought a large white rooster from one of the houses. He placed it in the hole and moved the dirt in upon it until it was buried to the neck. Its white head jerked from side to side, so that its comb and wattles shook and its hackles were spread out on the sand. The townspeople laughed to see it so, buried and fearful, its round, unblinking eyes yellow and bright in the dying day...Then, one at a time, the others rode down upon the rooster and reached for it,...When it came Abel's turn, he made a poor showing, full of caution and gesture...

The white man...powerful and deliberate in his movements...got hold of the rooster and took it from the ground. Then he was upright in the saddle... A perfect commotion, full of symmetry and sound. And yet there was something out of place, some flaw in proportion or design,

some unnatural thing...The albino...rode in among the riders, and they, too, parted for him, watching to see who he would choose, respectful, wary, and on edge. After a long time of playing the game, he rode beside Abel, turned suddenly upon him, and began to flail him with the rooster (in accordance with the rules of the game)...Abel was not used to the game, and the white man was too strong and quick for him...Then the bird was dead, and still he swung it down and across, and the neck of the bird was broken and the flesh torn open and the blood splashed everywhere about. The mare hopped and squatted and reared, and Abel hung on. The black horse stood its ground, cutting off every line of retreat, pressing down upon the terrified mare. It was all a dream, a tumultuous shadow...Here and there the townswomen threw water to finish it in sacrifice. [pp. 37-40]

Abel's poor performance is evident of the fact that he is estranged from the old traditions, and he consequently fails to integrate himself into the cultural context of his community. His loss of confidence is a further obstacle to his participation in any of the other ceremonial events which adds to his frustration. It may be noted that one purpose of burlesque and mock violence in Pueblo ritual drama is catharsis, and as Alfonso Ortiz says in New Perspectives on the Pueblos:

purgation of the individuals or community of rebellious tendencies so that they behave during the rest of the year.¹⁸

A further indication of Abel's failure to re-enter the Native world of his boyhood is his loss of articulation. His inability to find the proper words to acquire wholeness and communion with his cultural environment makes him aware that his return has failed:

Abel walked into the canyon. His return to the town had been a failure, for all his looking forward. He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it. And yet it was there still, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past and the words had taken hold of the moment and made it eternal. Had he been able to say it, anything of his own language- even the commonplace formula of greeting "Where are you going"- which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself; but he was dumb. Not dumb- silence was the older and better part of custom still- but *inarticulate*. [p.53]

Some sense of the old harmony still remains, but Abel lacks the active power to re-establish harmony. He feels emotionally stifled and repressed and therefore potentially violent. This power is the power of the word. To Native Americans, since the preliterate times, words are a source of power that link them to their religious and mythological heritage. If the word is lost, culture and identity are forfeited, as wholeness can only be established by the word. And Abel has indeed lost this power:

He began almost to be at peace, as if he had drunk a little of the warm, sweet wine, for a time no longer centred upon himself. He was alone, and he wanted to make a song out of the old canyon, the way the women of Torreon made songs upon their looms out of colored yarn, but he had not got the right words together. It would have been a creation song; he would have sung lowly of the first world, of fire and flood, and of the emergence of dawn from the hills. [pp. 53-54]

As his imaginative re-creation of his childhood and adolescence was an attempt to understand his situation, his effort to make a song is an endeavor to restore harmony between himself and the universe. His creation song would have been a bid for the creative power that heals, restores harmony, and provides wholeness. But he lacks the 'right words' and thus remains isolated through his prison term and relocation in Los Angeles until the end of the book when he learns the Navajo *Night Chant, House Made of Dawn*, from his friend, Ben Benally.

After his failed attempts to attune himself to his tribal culture, Abel tries to acquire some semblance of stability in an intimate relationship with the white woman, Angela, yet another symptom of his confused identity. But in this relationship, he is reduced only to 'sex-primitive,' silenced 'other' and 'non-being' as A. Robert Lee states in Multicultural American Literature. In an April 1986 interview with Dagmar Weiler, Momaday says,

Angela's role is to be a kind of foil to Abel. She represents the anti-thesis of the pueblo world. Yet, she and Abel are able to relate to one another on one level although they are so diametrically opposed in most of their cultural attitudes. So she enables us, I think, to see the pueblo world and Abel in a particular way, a way in which you would not otherwise be able to see in his traditional context.¹⁹

Abel is portrayed as a mute, 'wooden Indian' with his face 'cold and expressionless', and he often does not react to Angela's queries:

His face darkened, but he hung on, dumb and immutable. He would not allow himself to be provoked. It was easy, natural for him to stand aside, hang on. [p.30]

She grows aware of his powerlessness:

There he stood, dumb and docile at her pleasure, not knowing, she supposed, how even to take his leave. [p.31]

It is in this state of verbal, as much as existential, dispossession that he kills his nemesis, the albino in a bar fight. The frustration in him is one source of his aggression, but another is the deeply-rooted fear which has haunted him since his childhood- the fear that evil forces in the universe may exert their influence on him, an anxiety common among the tribes. Abel's vision of witchcraft and his inability to comprehend it translates itself in his violent reaction which was quite lacking in the ritual.

Alan R. Velie observes that the albino is a curious figure. From Fray Nicolas's letter of January 5, 1875, we know that at the time of the *Chicken Pull*, this Tanoan albino, Juan Reyes Fragua is seventy years old but he displays a remarkable athleticism. In some mysterious way the albino represents evil and his beating of Abel with the chicken is an act of malice. As Momaday puts it, 'evil is a negative force', a 'negative impulse that motivates us,' and it is 'pre-existent.' Some critics view the albino as a Melvilleian evil on the lines of Moby Dick which suggests the conjunction of whiteness and evil. In chapter 42, *The Whiteness of the*

Whale, Melville describes how white symbolizes both purity and goodness but also the spectral qualities of terror and evil: the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind. In his interview with Charles Woodard, Momaday confirms his interest in Melville but his character shows an obvious similarity to Claggart from Billy Budd, Sailor, rather than Moby Dick in the portrayal of the albino:

He is manifesting the evil of his presence. Witchcraft and the excitement of it is part of that too.²⁰

The albino is a kind of witch as the community perceives him. Francisco has a vague notion of his presence while working in the fields:

‘...he was suddenly conscious of some alien presence close at hand...He peered into the dark rows of corn from which no sound had come, in which no presence was...He was too old to be afraid. His acknowledgement of the unknown was nothing more than a dull, intrinsic sadness, a vague desire to weep, for evil had long since found him out and knew who he was. [p.59]

The story in its mythic dimension began with Francisco who abandoned the daughter of a witch and because of his perfidy, Porcingula’s mother, the Bahkyush *bruja* known as Nicolas *teah-whau*, cursed Abel. In the pueblo, witches transform themselves into snakes. And after that the young Abel hears a certain sound:

the wind whistling around a snake hole, ‘and it filled him with dread’. [p.12]

All his life he would bear the curse; he would kill a snake and in turn be mortally injured by another, the *culebra* Martinez in Los Angeles.

And yet had it not been for the curse and for his encounters with evil Abel could not have made that run and delivered that final blessing to himself and his people. Like his grandfather, he is kin to those spirits who must run forever, keeping evil in its place.

As for the Biblical connotation of the name Abel, Velie points out that perhaps, the albino represents Cain, not as a hostile outsider but one of his own, just as John Big Bluff Tosamah, the Kiowa *Priest of the Sun* is a fellow Indian who ridicules Abel until he drives him to drink excessively, or even the sadistic policeman Martinez, who forcefully takes away his pay, could be a Chicano or a Native with a Spanish name. Ironically, the biblical figure is indeed an innocent victim while his namesake chooses to kill his tormentor.

The fear of witchcraft may be Abel's conscious motive for killing the albino. But it grows out of his frustration and cultural estrangement and his feeling of inadequacy. Or perhaps it is his own confused self that he is trying to annihilate, and in doing so he is trying to find his way back to his tribal background. It is coincidental that this act of violence is explicitly expressed during another ceremonial *Pecos Bull Dance*, which

Abel does not take part in. Momaday had witnessed it as a child and described it in The Names:

On the first of August, at dusk, the Pecos Bull ran through the streets of Jemez, taunted by the children, chased by young boys who were dressed in outlandish costumes, most in a manner which parodied the curious white Americans who came frequently to see the rich sights of Jemez on feast days. This "bull" was a man who wore a mask, a wooden framework on his back covered with black cloth and resembling roughly a bull, the head of which was a crude thing made of horns, a sheepskin, and a red cloth tongue which wagged about. It ran around madly, lunging at the children.

In the Middle of the town, the central plaza which was a holy place, 'the Shrine for Porcingula, Our Lady of the Angels, had been raised at the center of the north side and adjacent to the *kiva* (the sacred dugout of the Pueblos). It was a small green enclosure, a framework of wood and wire, covered with boughs of cedar and pine.' The Lady is borne in procession from the church and 'the bull would lope all around and wheel and hook the air with its wooden horns, and the black-faced children, who were the invaders, and the clowns would follow, laughing and taunting with curses, upon its heels'. The bull was 'a sad and unlikely thing, a crude and makeshift totem of revelry and delight. There was no holiness to it, none of the centaur's sacred mien and motion, but only the look of evil....But it was a hard thing to be the bull, for there was a primitive agony to it, and it was a kind of victim, an object of ridicule and hatred; and harder now that the men of the town had relaxed their hold upon ancient ways, had grown soft and dubious. Or they had merely grown old.' [pp. 145-146]

Momaday indicates in this context the increasing difficulty of adhering to the ancient ways, which is a major problem for the younger generation

for these lose their meaning in the confrontation with mainstream America.

After the rain subsided at nightfall, Abel encountered the albino in the bar and exchanged some words:

And then they were ready, the two of them. They went out into the darkness and the rain...All around was silence, save for the sound of the rain and the moan of the wind in the wires. Abel waited. The white man raised his arms, as if to embrace him, and came forward. But Abel had already taken hold of the knife, and he drew it. He leaned inside the white man's arms and drove the blade up under the bones of the breast and across...There was no expression on his face, neither rage nor pain, only the same translucent pallor and the vague distortion of sorrow and wonder at the mouth and invisible under the black glass. He seemed to look not at Abel but beyond into the darkness and the rain, the black infinity of sound and silence. Then he closed his hands upon Abel and drew him close. Abel heard the strange excitement of the white man's breath, and the quick, uneven blowing at his ear, and felt the blue shivering lips upon him, felt even the scales of the lips and the hot slippery tongue, writhing. He was sick with terror and revulsion, and he tried to fling himself away, but the white man held him close. The white immensity of flesh lay over and smothered him...The white hands still lay upon him as if in benediction, and the awful gaze of the head, still fixed upon something beyond and behind him...Abel threw down the knife and the rain fell upon it and made it clean...And Abel was no longer terrified, but strangely cautious and intent, full of wonder and regard...He knelt over the white man for a long time in the rain, looking down. [pp. 73-74]

The cultural ambiguity of the albino thus highlighted, Momaday left the presentation of the scene 'entirely open to interpretation' for there is 'an ineffable aspect to the killing'. This is a violent reaction from someone

who is otherwise inarticulate but the act itself seems natural to Abel. The snake symbolism is apparent, as are the homosexual overtones, but otherwise Momaday seems to imply that pigmentation is only accidental, in his conversation with Woodard:

There is a kind of ambiguity that is creative in the albino- the white man, the albino, that equation, whatever it is.²¹

A gap of six and a half years lies between the end of the opening chapter *The Longhair* and the beginning of the next, most puzzling section titled *The Priest of the Sun*. Momaday employs the device similar to the cutting technique of film-making, through stream of consciousness, and a series of flashbacks which are at best fragmentary connections. Abel's past alternates with blurred perceptions of his immediate environment in Los Angeles where he is relocated after serving his prison term.

When Abel is tried for the murder Father Olguin attempts to explain in the young man's defense that he was moved to do what he did by an act of the imagination so compelling as to be inconceivable to us. On his part Abel had told his story once, simply, and refused to speak though he could not bear to see the pain in the priest's eyes:

He was embarrassed, humiliated; he hated the priest for suffering so.

He had killed the white man. It was not a complicated thing, after all; it was very simple. It was the most natural thing in the world. Surely they could see that, these men who meant

to dispose of him in words....A man kills such an enemy if he can. [pp. 90-91]

The issue of cultural relativism is addressed here as Abel registers the court proceedings with detachment and a keen awareness that his case lies beyond his judges' frame of reference in a scene that is reminiscent of Albert Camus' The Outsider:

Word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, *their* language, and they were making a bad job of it. They were strangely uneasy, full of hesitation, reluctance. He wanted to help them. [p. 90]

Momaday has this to say about Abel's loss of language:

I believe that as soon as Abel leaves his traditional ground, his language begins to deteriorate. He is bombarded and threatened by the language around him. He is threatened by the currency of the English language, and so he is isolated in his own language, and finds that it does not operate for him outside its context. And so little by little, as this is driven home to him, he falls silent. In the court scene, everybody is not only talking in something other than his language but talking in a language that is even more highly artificial than languages in general- legalese- at that point he's just done in. Language becomes his enemy. It has turned on him, and he understands that there's nothing he can do about that...'²²

The nature of the act cannot be assessed in terms of American law, resting as it does, on different cultural assumptions; Momaday's suggestion is that in a Pueblo context, Abel would not be condemned or punished for destroying evil as he did when he killed the albino. And

therein lies the tragedy. Abel serves his term within the walls of a prison cell which

were abstractions beyond the reach of his understanding, not in themselves confinement but symbols of confinement.
[p.92]

For a Native used to wide, open expanses the 'bare one-dimensional surface' is perhaps the greatest punishment.

During the period of his relocation in Los Angeles, Abel encounters an interesting, rather enigmatic character, whose articulateness is measured against his own voicelessness. John Big Bluff Tosamah, pastor, orator, physician, Priest of the Sun, who might as well be Momaday's mouthpiece in the sense that he uses him to 'present some of my views concerning language' but is not exactly a 'reflection of me'.

Tosamah's sermon, aptly titled *The Gospel According to John* on the word as something that antedates everything, however, reflects the Native American's view of language as sacred in comparison to the white man's misuse of it:

In the beginning was the Word....that was the Truth,...the essential and eternal Truth...but he went on, old John, because he was a preacher...old John was a white man, and a white man has his ways....He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents. He adds and divides and multiplies the Word. And in all of this he subtracts the Truth.
[p.82]

While the white man inundates the word with more letters, the Native American oral tradition believes that in words one 'could have whole and consummate being,' and the

simple act of listening is crucial to the concept of language, more crucial even than reading and writing, and language in turn is crucial to human society. [p.84]

The native's

use of language was confined to speech...words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning. They were beyond price; they could neither be bought nor sold. [p.85]

Conversely:

In the white man's world, language, too- and the way the white man thinks of it- has undergone change. The white man takes such things as words and literatures for granted....On every side of him there are words by the millions, an unending succession of pamphlets and papers, letters and books, bills and bulletins, commentaries and conversations. He has diluted and multiplied the Word, and words have begun to close in on him....his regard for language- for the Word itself- as an instrument of creation has diminished nearly to the point of no return. It may be that he will perish by the Word. [p.85]

Tosamah is of course a trickster figure. In his interview with Weiler, Momaday regards what he says as 'provocative and true' and that his sermon is a 'wonderful kind of commentary on language, even in his own ironic terms.' Yet he concedes that both he and Abel are 'poised somewhere apart from their traditional world. They are also apart from

the other world, but they have fashioned an existence in that no man's land.'

But Tosamah twists the classic doctrine of the western world in such a way that he 'condemns the whole white culture' achieving a tour de force in the process especially since 'he speaks for both the worlds' and does it so eloquently. Alan R. Velie wonders if Tosamah closely resembles Momaday, how do we account for his derision of Abel? His estimate of Abel's demeanor is full of irony though clothed with scorn:

They (the whites) gave him every advantage. They gave him a pair of shoes and told him to go to school. They deloused him and gave him a lot of free haircuts and let him fight on their side. But was he grateful? Hell, no, man. He was too damn dumb to be civilized. So what happened? They let him alone at last. They thought he was harmless. They thought he was going to plant some beans, man, and live off the fat of the land...But it didn't turn out that way. He turned out to be a real primitive sonuvabitch, and the first time he got hold of a knife he killed a man. That must have embarrassed the hell out of them...And do you know what he said?...He killed a goddam *snake*! ...There was this longhair, see, cold, sober, of sound mind, and the goddam judge looking on, and the prosecutor trying to talk sense to that poor degenerate Indian...I mean where's the legal precedent, man? When you stop to think about it, due process is a hell of a remedy for snakebite." [p.131]

Tosamah certainly uses puns or rather he plays a lot with language and that is how Momaday injects humour in the book when he says, "an Indian would find that funny."

Meanwhile, confused and not sure where he is in relation to his surroundings, Abel is on the verge of losing his sanity when we come across him after his prison term. The narrative voice is centered on Abel's consciousness as he is lying, delirious from alcohol and a near fatal beating he received from the corrupt policeman, Martinez. To the Native mind, this violent policeman is the *culebra*, a repository of the snake-evil equation, come back to haunt Abel:

He was lying face down on the ground, and it was cold and there was a roaring of the sea in his brain...The pain was very great, and his body throbbed with it...it was so great that he fainted...He wanted to die...He was lying in a shallow depression in which there were weeds and small white stones and tufts of long gray grass. There was a fence on the bank before him; at his back there was a broad rocky beach, tilting to the sea. The fence was made of heavy wire mesh, and on the other side there were tractors and trailers, the long line of a roof...His hands were broken, and he could not move them. Some of his fingers were stuck together with blood, and the blood was dry and black. The sight of his hands made him sick. His mind boggled and withdrew...and it came around again to the fishes. [p.88]

Momaday shows the psychological situation of a man who is lost between two worlds, torn apart culturally and spiritually, drifting toward death. Victor Turner, in his work, "Betwixt and Between": The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage. The Forests of Symbols, prefers the term 'liminary' to describe Abel, as a person who is 'no longer classified and not yet classified' when his earlier attempt at assimilating into the

traditional life of the village proves him to be an abysmal failure. Momaday indicates that the social and cultural barriers could be the source of Abel's disintegration. On the symbolic level, Abel's isolation is evoked by the image of the fence. His inability to reach let alone overcome it is symbolic of his failure to break through the barriers between him and the mainstream of society.

The sequence of sense perceptions and flashbacks in *The Priest of the Sun* is connected by an underlying image pattern. The intensity of these images, the apparent disjunction of time, and surface - all typical of dreams and hallucinations- account for the haunting, nightmarish effect of this chapter:

He awoke coughing; there was blood in his throat and mouth...He peered into the night: all around the black land against the star-bright, moon-bright sky...He was delirious now and gasping for breath...He got down on his knees and put his ear to the ground. Men were running toward him. He left the road and hid away in the brush, and soon he could see them in the distance, the old men running after evil, their white leggings holding in motion like smoke above the ground. They passed in the night, full of tranquility, certitude. There was no sound of breathing or sign of effort about them. They ran as water runs.

There was a burning at his eyes.

The runners after evil ran as water runs, deep in the channel, in the way of least resistance, no resistance. His skin crawled with excitement; he was overcome with longing and loneliness, for suddenly he saw the crucial sense in their going, of old men in white leggings running after evil in the night. They were whole and indispensable in what they did; everything in creation referred to them. Because of them,

perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them. They ran 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. Evil was abroad in the night; they must venture out to the confrontation; they must reckon dues and divide the world.

Now, here, the world was open at his back. He had lost his place. He had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void. The sea reached and leaned, licked after him and withdrew, falling off forever in the abyss. And the fishes... [pp. 91-92]

Foreshadowing the end, Abel envisions these Native rain dancers 'running in the way of least resistance'. This vision provides him with the perspective necessary to reshape his sense of himself and his future. It is only after Abel realizes the source of his dilemma during this vision of the men running after evil, that he finds the strength to reach the fence. It is with its help that he raises himself. Thus the fence symbolism stresses the theme of cultural segregation and at the same time emphasizes Abel's vision as the turning point of the novel. Abel's degeneration resulting from his lack of stability reaches the climax in his struggle with the murderous Martinez and subsequently with death. The symbols which surround these events suggest that what is happening in this powerfully conceived scene is a rite of passage in which Abel progresses from lack of understanding to knowledge, from chaos through ritual death to rebirth and regeneration.

The setting is in itself suggestive. Abel is

lying in a shallow depression in which there were weeds and small white stones and tufts of long grey grass. [p.88]

It is a common feature of initiation ceremonies that the initiate is placed into a shallow grave from which he eventually rises as a new being. Besides, the darkness signifies the world “beyond”.

The beating that he receives results from his attempt to get even with Martinez, who has tyrannized him. On the symbolic level, this beating represents the initiatory mutilations which are frequent features of such rites of passage. In the Sun Dance ceremony which was discussed in the beginning, men lacerate themselves to demonstrate courage and willingness to sacrifice. Such life-crisis rites of passage are necessary for one who has been alienated from the equilibrium of his former, harmonious state of being, so that one can reintegrate oneself among the elements of creation.

Perhaps Momaday is alluding to the *Stricken Twins*- mythical siblings, born illegitimately of a poor woman and a god- who were taught the healing songs by Native deities called ‘*digini*’, and they in turn taught it to the *People on the Earth*. The Twins- the older one is blind and the younger is paralysed- embark on a quest after improvising a way to travel whereby the latter rides the back of the former who can walk. During a

sweat-lodge curing ceremony, the *twins* sing the *Night Chant* which moves the healers enough to cure them. Thus they emerge from their liminal journey and establish a link in the transmission of the *Night Chant*, ensuring that the sacred song will be handed down to a future generation. Incidentally, Abel and Vidal symbolize the 'betwixt' and 'between' status of these Twins; Tosamah can be regarded as a liminal guide, and we can also examine Abel's role as a practitioner and transmitter in the chain of oral tradition but only after he emerges from his rite of passage and is reintegrated. In this respect, the danger of oral tradition being one generation away from extinction suggests why Momaday transformed the Navajo *Chants* and the *dawn runners* into literature by writing this groundbreaking novel.

That Abel is lying on the beach, close to the water, is again significant though there is no suggestion that he actually comes in contact with the sea. He is however associated with it and the

small silversided fish that is found along the coast of southern California. [p.79]

Water is traditionally a symbol of life, creation and fertility, the element from which all cosmic manifestations emerge and to which they return. Water creates and dissolves. The sea furnished a perfect symbol of eternity, a unity centered in harmony. According to Mircea Eliade's The

Sacred and the Profane, water symbolizes a total regeneration for immersion dissolves the forms, and reintegrates into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is an act of creation in which form was first expressed. In initiation rituals, water confers a “new birth.”

Abel’s closeness to and association with water, suggests the dissolution of his state of estrangement and the potential for rebirth into his tribal environment. The fish imagery and his connection with the fish reinforce the meaning of his transformation:

There is a small silversided fish that is found along the coast of southern California. In the spring and summer it spawns on the beach during the first three hours after each of the three high tides following the highest tide. These fish come by the hundreds from the sea. They hurl themselves upon the land and writhe in the light of the moon, the moon, the moon; they writhe in the light of the moon. They are among the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth. [p.79]

Like the fish, Abel too is lying helpless, and removed from the natural element of his culture:

his whole body shaking violently, tossing and whipping, flopping. [p.101]

He empathises with them, the

small silversided fishes spawned mindlessly in correlation to the phase of the moon and the rise and fall of the tides. The thought of it made him sad, filled him with sad, unnamable longing and wonder. [p.87]

The sight of his broken hands made him sick:

His hands were broken and he could not move them...His mind boggled and withdrew...and it came around again to the fishes.
[p.88]

In that delirious state his thoughts constantly return to the fish,

holding still against all the force of and motion of the sea.
[p.107]

Another complex symbol featured here is the moon, though it is a common denominator that brings varying episodes together in Abel's mind. It is also associated with initiation rites. Its reappearance after her three-day 'death' has traditionally been seen as a symbol of rebirth. Among the Plains Indians it was customary to focus one's eyes on the moon (like sun gazing) to secure help in a moment of distress. The Pueblo medicine-water chief implored the moon to provide him with power to diagnose diseases. For Abel, the awareness of the moon which indicates a unifying and controlling natural force, gives him spiritual assistance to return to the state of fundamental oneness, the cosmic unity that reflects his growing re-attunement to Native American ways.

In the Southwest, as in most tribal regions elsewhere, the moon is believed to exert a strong influence on the growth of crops, and it therefore has an immediate impact on the process of sowing and reaping.

Momaday refers to this influence on the communal work in the fields:

The fields are small and irregular, and from the west mesa they seem an intricate patchwork of arbors and gardens, too

numerous for the town. The townsmen work all summer in the fields. When the moon is full, they work at night with ancient, handmade plows and hoes, and if the weather is good and the water plentiful they take a good harvest from the fields. [p.5]

The holiness attributed to the moon by Native Americans is reflected in the 'red and yellow symbols of the sun and the moon' which decorate the lectern in the Native Church in Los Angeles. If one subscribes to the view that a man finds himself anew in the life of the moon, then Abel's rediscovery of his native heritage appears to be a result of his re-entry to a lunar rhythm. Like the association with the fish that 'lay under the spell of the moon' the other animal imagery that mirrors Abel's distress is the eagle hunt:

That night, while the others ate by the fire, he stole away to look at the great bird. He drew the sack open; the bird shivered, he thought, and drew itself up. Bound and helpless, his eagle seemed drab and shapeless in the moonlight, too large and ungainly for flight. The sight of it filled him with shame and disgust. He took hold of its throat in the darkness and cut off its breath. [p.20]

Here he destroys the eagle because he obviously did not share in the traditional belief of many of the hunting communities that the spirit of the hunted survives and returns in a new physical manifestation. If he had been familiar with the rituals, as the old man Francisco was on his bear hunt, he could have killed the eagle in the appropriate ritual way, with a sense of gratitude and appreciation rather than remorse.

One understands one's past, and retains it through recollections of symbolic events. Another such event that occurred in Abel's recollections of his childhood is when in a hunting expedition with his brother Vidal, he recovers a shot water bird:

The bird held still in the cold black water, watching him. He was afraid, but the bird made no move, no sound. He took it up in his hands and it was heavy and warm and the feathers about its keel were hot and sticky with blood. He carried it out into the moonlight, and its bright black eyes, in which no terror was, were wide of him, wide of the river and the land, level and hard upon the ring of the moon in the southern sky. [pp. 105-106]

The depiction of the dying bird resembles his own suffering in the face of death. In recollecting the dying bird, Abel can establish a link between his own desperate state and the reaction of the bird which is a part of the complexity of nature and therefore has no fear of death. As an adult who has lost his contact with his heritage, Abel does not have a natural view of death and this has contributed to his intense fears.

Momaday uses many devices to reinforce the connection between the moon and his protagonist. The course of the moonlight on the water functions as a bridge:

'...the moon made a bright, shimmering course upon it, a broad track breaking apart and yet forever whole and infinite, undulating, melting away into furtive islands of light in the great gray, black, and silver sea. [p.87]

In another recollection, a flock of geese serves as a link again:

The gray geese, twenty-four of them, broke from the river, lowly, steadily on the rise of sound, straining to take hold on the air...But one after another they rose southward on their great thrashing wings, trailing bright beads of water in their wake. Then they were away, and he had seen how they craned their long slender necks to the moon, ascending slowly into the far reaches of the winter night. They made a dark angle of the sky, acute, perfect; and for one moment they lay out like an omen on the bright fringe of a cloud. [p.105]

Abel's recognition of the moon as a vital influence shows that he is beginning to return to his roots, to the Native American concept of the universe. The following passage which fuses the three images of the sea, moon, and fish, unites the bird and fish imagery and thus widens the scope of Abel's vision to a universal dimension:

And somewhere beyond the cold and the fog and the pain there was the black and infinite sea, bending to the moon, and there was the cold white track of the moon on the water. And far out in the night where nothing else was, the fishes lay out in the black waters, holding still against all the force and motion of the sea; or close to the surface, darting and rolling and spinning like lures, they played in the track of the moon. And far away inland there were great gray migrant geese riding under the moon. [p.107]

Land and sea, man and animal are connected with the moon. This notion coincides with the general idea of the inter-relatedness of all elements in the Native universe. Abel discovers that he too is tied up in the totality of creation and has a legitimate place in it.

The vision of the 'runners after evil,' like most dreams and visions in the Native scheme of things, brings Abel another step closer towards restoration and re-initiation into his tribal culture. John Skinner in *On Indian Poetry and Religion, Little Square Review, Nos.5-6(1968)* commented on the religious nature of dreams in the Native American world:

Man succeeds first in his dreams...man becomes in his dreams and words before he becomes in deeds. A man becomes his successful dream, not his successful deed.²³

Abel's experience must be seen in the light of this statement. In his vision he catches, for the first time, a glimpse of meaning of tribal ritual as he becomes aware of its importance to the relationship between the individual and the universe. The vision confronts him with the ritualistic practices the elders employ to maintain control over the supernatural. The race is connected with the ceremony of clearing the irrigation ditches in the spring. It is an imitation of water running through the channels, a magic bid for the vital supply of rain, and a ritual act to prevent the harvest from being influenced by evil powers. The vision modifies Abel's view of his own actions in the past; he realizes that, although his destruction of the albino as a source of evil was in accordance with tribally sanctioned practices, Pueblo religion offers non-violent ways of controlling supernatural powers. The ritualistic expression of human

creativity through words in songs and prayers and through motion in dance and races is the central instrument by which the Native American maintains a balance between himself and the universe. That is what is called *hozho nahasdlii*, or beauty restored, a concept of wholeness and of integrity.

However, the interplay between the dual forces of good and evil needs to be recognized. It may be said that it is our destiny to be forever manifesting one or the other, until we can locate the balance between them. Paula Gunn Allen locates this balance in the Pueblo *House of the Sun*, at the mid-point of the northern and southern poles of its journey:

Just there at the saddle, where the sky is lower and brighter than elsewhere on the high back land [p.173]

is the position that signals the time to clear the ditches and the

long race of the black men at dawn. [p.173]

The *House of the Sun*, which is a feature of every pueblo, is the solar calendar which allows the people to locate their own equilibrium in the continuous interplay of the forces of the universe; it is the ceremonial timepiece which allows a person to know “who and what and *that* they are.”

The essential nature of pueblo life is its mysteriousness. The central issue of its belief is growth and transformation; the belief in spirit

is strong among them, and their life is a matter of locating the mortal being in spirit. There is, for each individual, a perfect moment when the balance of mortal and spirit is achieved, though this moment occurs at a different point in the life of each person. Francisco achieved his perfect moment when he was a young man- he played the drum during the clan dance for the first time; he changed drums without missing a beat:

there had been nothing of time lost, no miss in the motion of the mind...It was perfect. And when it was over, the women of the town came out with baskets of food. They went among the singers and the crowd, throwing out the food in celebration of his perfect act. And from then on he had a voice in the clan, and the next year he healed a child who had been sick from birth. [p.181]

Abel is sick and dislocated; in order for him to find himself balanced in the universe of being, he must be healed. The events which he experiences are analogous to those commonly experienced by those who have been wounded or cursed as they make their journey toward wholeness for it is the essential nature of healing: 'one who is whole is healed; one who is whole is holy.'

Abel's growing understanding of the cosmic order leads him to the recognition that his estrangement from the center of Native life has been the cause of his dilemma. The diagnosis of the source of this disease puts him on the road to recovery. Abel's previous inability to make sense of his situation is indicated in a flashback to his departure from his village,

which is the continuation of the corresponding passage in the opening chapter:

He tried to think where the trouble had begun, what the trouble was. There was trouble; he could admit that to himself, but he had no real insight into his own situation. Maybe, certainly, *that* was the trouble; but he had no way of knowing. [p.93]

Now in his hallucinatory state the insight for which he had searched so long suddenly comes to him:

He had lost his place. He had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void. [p.92]

From the cultural landscape of the Canyon de San Diego to the beach where 'the world was open at his back', Abel's journey has taken him, as his Bahkyush ancestors, to the edge of oblivion. He finally realizes that 'he had lost his place', a realization accompanied by the comprehension of the social harmony a sense of place requires. Out of his delirium, as if in a dream, his mind returns to the central thread of the novel, the race to which he is able to assign meaning as a cultural activity. This realization epitomizes the entire development of the novel up to this point. The Native world of his boyhood is the only place where he can find a meaningful existence and an identity. As in a vision quest Abel receives a sign which shows him the way to personal wholeness. And Abel realizes

evil is that which is ritually not under control. In the ceremonial race and not in individual resistance, the 'runners' are able to deal with evil.

Tosamah's description of the emergence journey and the relations of words and place serve as a clue to Abel's cure, but the role he plays in Abel's journey appear as ambiguous and contradictory as his character. He is at once priest and clown. He exhibits remarkable insight, buffoonery, and cynicism. He has all the characteristics of Coyote, the trickster figure in Native American myths. Alternately wise and foolish, Coyote is at once a buffoon who provides comic relief, and is a companion of the people on their emergence journey. As Coyote, the Right Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah speaks with a voice full of authority and rebuke, and 'he likes to get under your skin; he'll make a fool out of you if you let him.' Momaday describes Tosamah thus:

He was shaggy and awful-looking in the thin, naked light: big, lithe as a cat, narrow-eyed, suggesting in the whole of his look and manner both arrogance and agony. He wore black like a cleric; he had the voice of a great dog. [p.80]

The perspective Tosamah offers Abel and the reader derives not so much from his *peyote* ceremonies, but rather from the substance of his two sermons. The second sermon, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, addresses the relation of man, land, community, and the word. Tosamah describes the emergence of the Kiowas as 'a journey toward the dawn, and it led to a golden age' where a culture which is inextricably bound to the land of

the southern plains evolved and flourished. There, much in the same way that Abel looked over the Canyon de San Diego in Part 1, he looks out on the landscape at dawn and muses:

All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man. At the slightest elevation you can see to the end of the world. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun. [pp. 112-113]

By making a re-emergence journey, Tosamah is able to feel a sense of place. That coherent relation to the land described so eloquently is counter-pointed in the novel not only by Abel's experiences but also by the memories of Milly, the social worker who becomes Abel's lover in Los Angeles. Milly and her family too had struggled with the land:

The earth where we lived was hard and dry and brick red, and Daddy plowed and planted and watered the land, but in the end there was only a little yield. And it was the same year after year after year; it was always the same, and at last Daddy began to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own very personal and deadly enemy...And every day before dawn he went to the fields without hope, and I watched him, sometimes saw him at sunrise, far away in the empty land, very small in the skyline, turning to stone even as he moved up and down the rows. [p.108]

The contrast with Francisco, who seems most at home in his fields, and with Tosamah, who finds in that very landscape the depth of his existence, is obvious. The novel incorporates the motif that a person's

sense of self is intimately and reciprocally involved with the landscape. Indeed language and place are intimately connected in the world of House Made of Dawn, and Tosamah makes this explicit in his Sunday sermon:

There are things in nature which engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil's Tower is one of them. Man must account for it. He must never fail to explain such a thing to himself, or else he is estranged forever from the universe. [p.115]

With this passage he fuses the notion of one's sense of the landscape and the importance of language, for these two fundamental concepts of man's life are integrated thematically. Francisco had imparted the same knowledge to his grandsons. According to Robert Nelson, Abel's healing depends ultimately upon his coming to terms not only with the sky power represented by the eagles, but also and as importantly, with his relationship with the earth, very specifically with the snake medicine, that is, with the earth power.

The third section titled *The Night Chanter* is told from the point of view of Ben Benally, another relocated Navajo who befriends Abel, and the two share many things in their backgrounds:

We were kind of alike, though, him and me. After a while he told me where he was from, and right away I knew we were going to be friends. We're related somehow, I think. The Navajos have a clan they call by the name of that place (Jemez). [p.135]

This kinship gives Benally special insight into Abel's problems and strengthens his role as *Night Chanter*:

But he was unlucky. Everything went along all right for about two months, I guess. And it would have gone all right after that too, if they had just let him alone...The parole officer, and welfare, and the Relocation people kept coming around...They wanted to know how he was doing, had he been staying out of trouble...I guess that got on his nerves...They were always warning him....Telling him how he had to stay out of trouble, or else he was going to wind up in prison again...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; they're different, and they're the only words you've got. Everything is different, and you don't know how to get used to it...You have to get used to it first, and it's hard. [pp. 139-140]

It may be noted that the joint policies of termination and relocation did encourage many reservation Native Americans to move to the cities but not all of them were provided with federal assistance, or like Abel, they were given jobs that were clearly unsuited to them. Thus they proved to be failures. Like Abel, Benally had been raised by his grandfather in that natural environment, and his childhood memories reveal a sense of place very much like that Abel groped for on his return to Walatowa:

And you were little and right there in the center of everything, the sacred mountains, the snow-covered mountains and the hills, the gullies and the flats, the sundown and the night, everything- where you were little, where you were and had to be. [p.138]

In Los Angeles, however, Benally's sense of place is lost in his idealism and naivete. Return to the Reservation seems an unattractive proposition as compared to the glitter of the city:

It's a good place to live...once you...get used to everything, you wonder how you ever got along out there where you came from. There's nothing there, you know, just the land, and the land is empty and dead. [p.158]

Like Milly, he believes in 'Honor, Industry, the Second Chance, the Brotherhood of Man, the American Dream...' [p.94]

Yet in the very next scene following this reflection on the urban cornucopia, Benally is excluded even from the community of 'The Silver Dollar'; he is counting his pennies, unable to buy a second bottle of wine. Although material culture is desirable and available to him, it is not as simple as it seems; there is therefore, an inescapable sense of repudiation of the capitalistic society thriving in Los Angeles. Idealism obscures his vision, even as Tosamah's cynicism obscures his.

Nevertheless, Benally is the *Night Chanter* who helps restore voice and harmony to Abel's life. In the hospital having realized the significance of the 'runners after evil', and gaining insight into the meaning of ritual and the controlling forces in the universe, he is ready to establish a formal union with his tribal heritage through the ceremony of the *Night Chant* which Benally conducts for him:

“House made of dawn.” I used to tell him about those old ways, the stories and the songs, Beautyway and Night Chant. I sang some of those things, and I told him what they meant, what I thought they were about...and I wanted to pray...I kept it down because I didn't want anybody but him to hear it.

Tsegihi.

House made of dawn,
 House made of evening light,
 House made of dark cloud,
 House made of male rain,
 House made of dark mist,
 House made of female rain,
 House made of pollen,
 House made of grasshoppers,
 Dark cloud is at the door.
 The trail out of it is dark cloud.
 The zigzag lightning stands high upon it.
 Male deity!
 Your offering I make.
 I have prepared smoke for you.
 Restore my feet for me,
 Restore my legs for me,
 Restore my body for me,
 Restore my mind for me.
 This very day take out your spell for me.
 Your spell remove for me.
 You have taken it away from me;
 Far off it has gone.
 Happily I recover.
 Happily my interior becomes cool.
 Happily I go forth.
 My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
 No longer sore, may I walk.
 Impervious to pain, may I walk.
 With lively feelings, may I walk.
 As it used to be long ago, may I walk.
 Happily may I walk.
 Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
 Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.

Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
 Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
 Happily may I walk.
 Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.
 May it be beautiful before me,
 May it be beautiful behind me,
 May it be beautiful below me,
 May it be beautiful above me,
 May it be beautiful all around me.
 In beauty it is finished. [pp. 129-130]

In Native American thought, God is known as the *All-Spirit*. The natural state of existence is whole. Thus healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness; health is wholeness; goodness is wholeness. The circle of being is not physical; it is dynamic and alive. It is what lives and moves and knows, and all the life-forms- partake of this greater life. It is acknowledgement of this, as Paula Gunn Allen explains, that allows healing chants to heal and make the person whole again.

The songs from both the *Beautyway* and the *Night Chant* are designed to attract good and repel evil. Both are restorative and exorcising expression of the very balance and design in the universe Abel perceived in the 'runners after evil.' Ben's words from the *Night Chant* are particularly appropriate for it has curative and regenerative powers for

those who are mentally imbalanced. It is interesting to note that Ben 'kept it down'. Momaday says that

one does not necessarily speak in order to be heard. It is sometimes enough that one places one's voice on the silence, for that in itself is a whole and appropriate expression of the spirit. In the Native American oral tradition expression, rather than communication, is often first in importance...In the Indian world a word is spoken or a song is sung, not against, but within the silence.²⁴

To expand such a concept, one may consider this poem, *The Words* by the Cherokee poet Norman H. Russell:

it is not the words of the chant
 that make the prayer
 it is the way they are said
 that reaches god's ear

 it is the same with you and me
 it is not the words we say
 each to the other
 it is how we say them

 a good chant
 grows and grows with the singing
 a good talk
 comes from a singing heart.²⁵

The structure and diction of the song demonstrate the very harmony it seeks to evoke. Dawn is balanced by evening light, dark cloud and 'male rain' by dark mist and 'female rain'. All things are in balance and control, for in Navajo and Pueblo religion, good is control. The journey metaphor is prominent as is the restorative sequence which culminates with 'restore my voice for me'-an echo of an outward sign of

inner harmony. Finally the song begins with a culturally significant geographic reference: *Tsegihí*. One of its central messages is that ceremonial words are bound efficaciously to place. In the essay *Sacred Places*, Momaday writes that a

prayer from the *Night Chant* of the Navajo begins with homage to *Tsegil*, 'place among the rocks,' place of origin. It would be impossible to imagine an invocation of greater moment or power, or a word or concept more elemental.²⁶

The prime feature of Navajo life is the healing. Singers devote many years to learning one *Chantway* perfectly. The ceremonies are handed down in the traditional way, but must be learned and paid for by the apprentice before he can practice independently. The Navajo may be the finest healers in the world; certainly, their *Chantway* system is one of the most complex metaphysical systems, made even moreso by its relationship to Pueblo ceremonialism. The two are related; the relationship goes back a long way in time, beyond the coming of the Spaniards, and is as complicated in its inter-workings as the *Chantway* system itself, and the bond is more of Spirit than of earth.

Thus it is the Navajo spiritual song that penetrates Abel's consciousness during those brutal weeks in Los Angeles and helps him survive the worst beating at the hands of Martinez; for him thoughts of home, the music, the stories, are the only comfort he finds. The changes

he undergoes as a result of his vision enable him to make the 'spiritual commitment' of submitting himself to the healing powers of the *Night Chant*. In doing so, he shows his newfound trust in the effectiveness of Native ceremonials, where he is a passive patient. But it is the first step towards his rehabilitation as a member when he conducts the funeral ceremony of his grandfather and later on enables him to participate in the ceremonial race that ends the novel.

This ritual formula, according to Momaday

has the formality of prayer and the measure of poetry....It is significant that in this rich, ceremonial song the singer should end upon the notion of beauty, of beauty in the physical world, of man in the immediate presence and full awareness of that beauty...The singer....aspires to the restoration of his body, mind, and soul, which in his cultural and religious frame of reference is pre-eminently an aesthetic consideration, a perception of well-ordered being and beauty, a design of which he is the human center. And the efficacy of his prayer is realized even as he makes it; it is done in beauty.²⁷

The result of the *Night Chant* is the restoration of the wholeness Abel had lost in his crisis of identity and through his exposure to the disruptive forces of incompatible cultural patterns, far from his native landscape. The ritual and song aim at the preservation of order and the integration of the individual into the larger context of his environment. Paula Gunn Allen remarked that through ceremonial practices

the isolated individualistic personality is shed and the person is restored to conscious harmony with the universe.²⁸

Abel's inner balance and equilibrium with the world around him are re-established; he must regain his physical and mental wholeness and his power of the word all of which had disintegrated:

He had loved his body. It had been hard and quick and beautiful; it had been useful, quickly and surely responsive to his mind and will....(now) his body was mangled and racked with pain. His body, like his mind, had turned on him; it was his enemy. [pp. 88-89]

The line 'restore my body for me' in the *Chant* is directed at the return of Abel's physical strength and his control over his body, while the line 'restore my mind for me' aims at the restitution of his mental wholeness and the co-ordination between his body and spirit. Abel's voicelessness stood at the center of his personal and cultural isolation. It was a syndrome of his estrangement from the oral tradition without which he remained cut off from his tribal heritage. Gladys A. Reichard in *Navajo Religion: A Study of Symbolism* (1974) stressed the fact that

the word... is of great ritualistic value, and in order to be complete, man must control language. The better his control and the more extensive his knowledge, the greater his well-being.²⁹

The desire to regain power over the word finds expression in the request 'restore my voice for me.' It is also necessary to bring back the power of

motion Abel lost in the course of his decline. Reichard acknowledges the importance of this:

Man may breathe and speak, his organs may function well, but without the power of motion he is incomplete, useless.³⁰

The lines ‘restore my feet for me...Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk’ call for the return of Abel’s power of motion, and the race at the end of the novel shows that the request has been granted.

The last section, *The Dawn Runner* opens with a description of a grey, ominous winter landscape:

The river was dark and swift, and there were jagged panes of ice along the banks, encrusted with snow. The valley was gray and cold; the mountains were dark and dim on the sky, and a great, gray motionless cloud of snow and mist lay out in the depth of the canyon. The fields were bare and colorless, and the gray tangle of branches rose up out of the orchards like antlers and bones. The town lay huddled in the late winter noon...There was no telling of the sun, save for the one cold, dim, and even light that lay on every corner of the land and made no shadow, and the silence was close by and all around and the bell made no impression upon it.
[p.169]

Father Olguin was reflecting on his seven years’ service at Walatowa in his rectory:

He was alone and busy in the dark rooms, and in seven years he had grown calm with duty and design. The once hectic fire of his spirit had burned low, and with it the waste of motion and despair....In the only way possible, perhaps, he had come to terms with the town, and that after all had been his aim. [p.170]

Yet he remains estranged from the village; it is not his place. He reveals his inadequacies as he attempts to live within the Native community but fails to understand its members. He measures his achievement in the language of commerce, like his predecessor Fray Nicholas:

He had set an example of piety, and much in the way of good works had accrued to his account....and with it (Fray Nicholas' journal) he performed the mild spiritual exercise that always restored him to faith and humility. [p.170]

Whereas Abel looks to Benally's *Night Chant* for restoration, Olguin seeks and claims to find restoration from the journal of Fray Nicholas who had himself sought it of his Christian God:

When I cannot speak Thy Name I want Thee most to restore me. Restore me! Thy Spirit comes upon me and I am too frail for Thee! [p.43]

And then Olguin is seized with a fit of coughing and in that moment of physical frailty even his prayer seems singularly ineffectual.

In the meantime, Abel has returned to the Jemez world and this significantly proceeds from a visionary, sub-conscious level through a ritualistic to a rational level. His recovery, which originates in his hallucinatory visions and is furthered through Benally's performance of the *Night Chant*, continues after his return to the pueblo, to the cultural landscape from which he draws 'strength enough to hold still against all the forces of chance and disorder.' Back home he finds his grandfather

Francisco dying. For six days the old medicine man struggled against death, uttering memories of his life:

The old man had spoken six times in the dawn, and the voice of his memory was whole and clear and growing like the dawn. [p.172]

The voice reminded Abel of the secrets of the solar calendar which his grandfather had taught him, of the ceremonial races and festivities of Jemez, of the traditional hunting code and rituals:

...he told them (his grandsons) there was the house of the sun. They must learn the whole contour of the black mesa. They must know it as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart. The sun rose up on the black mesa at a different place each day. It began there, at a point on the central slope, standing still for the solstice, and ranged all the days southward across the rise and fall of the long plateau, drawing closer by the measure of mornings and moons to the lee, and back again. They must the long journey of the sun...for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were, in time...that was the day of the rooster race...the secret dances...the clearing of the ditches in advance of the spring rains and the long race of the black men at dawn.

These things he told to his grandsons carefully, slowly and at length, because they were old and true, and they could be lost forever as easily as one generation is lost to the next, as easily as one old man might lose his voice, having spoken not enough or not at all.[pp.172-173]

Not only does this emphasize the importance of the oral tradition and its relation to place and community, but more importantly, these recollections refresh Abel's knowledge of the ancient ways of his people;

each of the fragments is therefore, a memory initiation. This is the sense of place Abel lost in

the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused.
[p.21]

As he is instructed to know the shape of the mesa like his own hands, it is appropriate that in the *corre de gaio* the albino should first attack his hands, that in the murder scene the hands should figure prominently, and finally, that as he lies brutally beaten on the beach after Martinez gives him the third degree:

One of his eyes opened a little, and through the slit he could see his hands; they were twisted and mangled, the thumbs splayed back and broken at the joints. [p.101]

And it is in this regard that Abel should think of Angela's effect on him in terms of his hands:

Angela put her white hands to his body. [p.89]

Watching his broken hands, Abel realizes how his relation to his cultural landscape is severed as well. Now through Francisco's memory he is once again taught about his ordered relation to place and how it is expressed in the 'race of the dead.' Abel participates in his grandfather's memories of his initiation as a runner (in the race against Mariano), as a dancer (from which he gained the power to heal), as a man (with Porcingula, 'the child of the witch'), and as a hunter (when he stalks the

bear). All signs then point to a new beginning, a rebirth for Abel as he rises on February 28, the last day of the novel.

By then, these recollections began to make sense and carry meaning, for on the morning of the seventh day Abel, strictly adhering to the timeless practices of his people, prepares Francisco for the funeral, and in doing so, he takes over the role of the dead medicine man. His rediscovery of his native identity despite the pressures of an alien culture, and the sense of the appropriate through the experience of his grandfather's death after years of inappropriate behaviour precipitated by the disorienting experience of war, his murder sentence and relocation, helps him find his way back through the spiritual legacy of Francisco:

It was a while still before the dawn, and he got up and began to get ready. There was no need for the singers to come; it made no difference, and he knew what had to be done. He drew the old man's head erect and laid water to the hair. He fashioned the long white hair in a queue and wound it round with a yarn. He dressed the body in bright ceremonial colors: the old man's wine velveteen shirt, white trousers, and low moccasins, soft and white with kaolin. From the rafters he took down the pouches of pollen and of meal, the sacred feathers and the ledger book. These, together with ears of colored corn, he placed at his grandfather's side after he had sprinkled meal in the four directions. He wrapped the body in a blanket.

It was pitch black before the dawn, and he went out along the corrals and through the orchards to the mission. [pp. 183-184]

His own memory healed by his grandfather's, for the first time in the novel, Abel makes arrangements for the ceremonial ritual as he prepares the old man for burial and heads to the mission to deliver him to Father Olguin.

Significantly, Abel's return to his tribal roots takes place just before dawn. This event is part of a coherent pattern of dawn images which permeate the novel. The book opens and closes with Abel running across the land at dawn. When he is lying on the beach after the assault, struggling against death, he can hear the 'sound of the city at night, ticking like a clock toward the dawn.' If one takes the symbol of dawn to stand for rebirth, or regeneration, or a new beginning or creation, and of spiritual renewal, the reference to dawn at this point anticipates Abel's resurrection. The connection between the symbol of dawn and the idea of creation is suggested in the passage in which Abel attempts to bring forth a creation song:

He would have sung lowly of the first world, of fire and flood, and of the emergence of dawn from the hills. [pp. 53-54]

The first world, fire, and flood are references to the creation myths of many Southwestern tribes like the Zunis, Hopis and the Navajos, who hold a common belief that they emerged to their present land after a migration through several underworlds, in which they encountered these

elements. Dawn marks the moment of emergence from these worlds, the beginning of tribal life, and the creation of their culture. Every new morning is the moment of invigoration when new life awakens and all creation is astir. At the center of the dawn image stands another passage which encompasses the historical migration of a tribe, its cultural crisis, and its potential regeneration:

Man came down the ladder to the plain a long time ago. It was a slow migration...and then everything would be restored to an older age, and time would have returned upon itself and a bad dream of invasion and change would have been dissolved in an hour before the dawn. [p.52]

This passage which features in both The Way to Rainy Mountain and House Made of Dawn encapsulates the essence of the latter novel which shows how a traditional Native American community that is threatened in its cultural survival by an encroaching alien world is struggling to defend itself against this influence.

Putting a cultural crisis in its wider historical and mythological context, Momaday emphasizes that the archaeological remnants of previous generations only seem to indicate the extinction of an ancient civilization, because Pueblo culture has survived to the present. In referring to the cyclical concept of time Momaday demonstrates his belief in the inherent potential of Native American cultures to survive historical crises. In the larger context of the novel, the resurgence of the old culture

taking place before dawn for Abel as well, is not only the moment when he finds his way back to his roots but also, from a historical perspective, the point where Jemez culture gains new impetus in its struggle to survive a period of cultural encroachment and oppression. Like the Bahkyush people who had once journeyed along the edge of oblivion and recovered to become eagle hunters and rain-makers, Abel also returned from the edge of the void to become a 'dawn runner.' As the Kiowas' migration from the north to the south and east of America was a 'journey toward the dawn' which 'led to a golden age,' the positive outcome of Abel's migration between two worlds is the hopeful beginning of a new period of Pueblo culture.

In much the same way, the cyclical structure of the novel which operates in a way similar to the Navajo *Chantway* system, and in its division, follows the number structure of 4-7-6 and 12, which are the major Native American ceremonial numbers, justifies a hopeful reading of Abel's future when he returns to the land and establishes a relationship with it, and thus regains a personal wholeness and harmony which were his strengths at its beginning. In the Native American spiritual concept, the *Medicine Wheel* or *Mandala* stands for wholeness. The roots of the *Medicine Wheel* go back to the archetypal concept of the Buddhist *Mandala* or the "magic circle" in Hindu philosophy, a symmetrical

arrangement of 4 parts around a midpoint. The circle represents cycles, and the quartered sections represent order and harmony. Carl Jung identified this symbol as a basic representation of the Self, self-awareness, balance and wholeness. Indeed the cyclical concept of tribal history and the cyclical movement of Abel's personal history interconnect at the end.

It is important to note that there are alienated characters in American fiction who are running away from something and have no viable alternative to which they can turn. For example, Faulkner's Joe Christmas in Light in August, who is the epitome of the outsider and who runs away from persecution but is ultimately terminated by a bigot; Ralph Ellison's nameless, 'invisible' protagonist in Invisible Man, who runs ironically, from his own community but ends up living in a manhole; John Updike's Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom in Rabbit Run, who is running away from the constraints of his life, leaving the novel ending in mid-air. Unlike them, Abel is unique in that his running manifests an act of integration, not a symbol of estrangement. Momaday suggested this reading of 'the man running to fit himself into the basic motion of the universe' as a symbol which prevails in the Southwestern Native American world by referring to its cultural context.

The race then, is a race for both personal and communal identity, finding its resolution in the reconciliation of Abel with his culture and Native universe. Alan R. Velie points out that there is no indication that he will win the race; yet the simple act of entering the race establishes that, despite the onslaughts of the ‘Cains’ who have attacked him, he has survived because he is able to integrate himself into his tribal culture. Momaday explained this ceremonial race in his essay, *The Morality of Indian Hating*:

It is a stick race: the runners imitate the Cloud People who fill the arroyos with life-giving rain, and keep in motion, with only their feet, a “stick-ball” which represents the moving drift of the water’s edge. The first race each year comes in February, and then the dawn is clear and cold, and the runners breathe steam. It is a long race, and it is neither won nor lost. It is an expression of the soul in ancient terms of sheer physical exertion. To watch those runners is to know that they draw with every step some elemental power which resides at the core of the earth and which, for all our civilized ways, is lost upon us who have lost the art of going in the flow of things. In the tempo of that race there is time to ponder morality and demoralization, hungry wolves and falling stars. And there is time to puzzle over that curious and fortuitous question with which the people of Jemez greet each other.³¹

Facing east, the very question-‘Where are you going?’- must ring in Abel’s ears from this vantage point, as he begins the race after rubbing his arms and chest with ashes:

He came among them, and they huddled in the cold together, waiting, and the pale light before the dawn rose up in the

valley. A single cloud lay over the world, heavy and still. It lay out upon the black mesa, smudging out the margin and spilling over the ice. But at the saddle thee was nothing. There was only the clear pool of eternity. [pp. 184-185]

Abel's running at dawn, singing the words of the *Night Chant*, marks the end of his struggle as he has returned finally, to his place in the '*house made of dawn*.' This is what Francisco had imparted to Abel and Vidal when they were still boys. Abel has found the right words to articulate himself and he has a vision of the appropriate path to wholeness, *hozho nahasdlit* or harmony restored. In the recovery of his primal completeness he sings the *chant* to the sun, in the dawn light. This final scene is charged with mythological overtones: according to a Pueblo emergence myth, *Ia'tik*, the corn mother, also known as the *All Mother* in the matrilineal society of the Western Pueblos, after creating the present world, called on the people to emerge from the previous underworld: You are rain gods, created to call the rain when you dance before my people. As they entered their new environment they were blind. Talking about these *Rain Dance People*, Richard Erdoes related

Ia'tik lined them up in a row facing east and made the sun come up for the first time in this new world to shine upon them. And when its rays shone upon the eyes of the people, they were opened and they could see.³²

In the primordial setting of dawn over the Jemez Valley, Abel too regains his vision and he could see the entire landscape. Illumination is

brought to the distractions and dependencies that have been getting in the way of forward progress. His new vision and voice are expressions of his communion with his native tradition and raise the hope that he may become the living link between the ancient past and a promising future for his culture.

That this ceremonial race and the words of the song which Abel sings are bound to the land is what Momaday means when he emphasizes upon the Native American land ethic:

The Native American concept of the land, concept of the earth, is something that is extremely valuable in its own right and for its own sake. Western civilization has, I think, withdrawn from an adequate notion of the earth as spiritual...tends to think of the earth as dead matter. It's something, it's minerals...that need to be extracted and used. The Native American has a very different idea of the earth. It is living matter. And it is deserving of the kind of respect that we give to living things. And it's possessed of spirit. You can construct a catalogue of values in the Native American world, ranging from the respect for language, to the reverence for the earth, to a sense of humour. These are all things that the Native American can contribute, and is willing to contribute if the rest of the world is willing to accept it.³³

In an interview with Joseph Bruchac he says

the Indian has an understanding of the physical world and of the earth as a spiritual entity that is his...the non-Native can benefit a good deal by having such a perception revealed to him.³⁴

Learning about these ancient traditions can help non-Natives to reflect on their own traditions and cultivate those strains which foster a sense of the sacredness of the land.

A similar outlook is also articulated in the work of Aldo Leopold, a wildlife ecologist and founding member of The Wilderness Society. In Leopold's view, Native Americans lived in accordance with a land ethic and revered the aesthetic as well as intrinsic value of land. He speaks about this harmonious relationship with the land in an essay titled *The Land Ethic* in his posthumously published book, A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There (1949). In the foreword he says,

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts...The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land...In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such.³⁵

He elaborates that the whole informs the parts; the ecosystem as we know it today, and mankind's place and responsibility within, is best understood contextually, from the perspective of the whole. In this anthropocentric or human-centered land ethic, our personal health is inextricably tied in with the health of the ecosystem. For Native Americans, the worldview is one that involves an understanding of the

wholeness of existence, a science of interdependence. The foundation of interdependence involves the individual as located within the world and as part of the world with the understanding that all things are inter-related. The individual does not experience an independence of being as the primary mode of existence; existence is communal involving “all my relations” and that includes the human, animal, plant, mineral, spiritual and elemental.

In his 1999 work, Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria Jr. Reader, Vine Deloria Jr. says, “everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationships makes up the natural world as we experience it.” The community of “all my relations” extends beyond the human to all aspects of existence including environmental and multi-dimensional scientific aspects of existence. In his interesting study of the South East Asian people of erstwhile Burma, Fielding Hall sums up the teachings of Buddha thus: Be in love with all things, not only with your fellows, but with the whole world, with every creature that walks the earth, with the birds in the air, with the insects in the grass. All life is akin to man. The oneness of life is realized by the Oriental mode of regarding life as it seldom is by the Western. Thoreau however, from among American men of letters of those days, was

fundamentally at one with such attitudes. In *A Week on the Concord*, he writes,

We talk of civilizing the Indian, but that is not the name for his improvement. By the wary independence and aloofness of his dim forest-life he preserves his intercourse with his native gods, and is admitted...to a rare and peculiar society with Nature...The Indian's intercourse with Nature is at least such as admits of the greatest independence of each...If one could listen...to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why we will not exchange his savageness for civilization.³⁶

Momaday explains that in the Native American worldview

Spirit is everywhere. It informs all of nature. It is a higher order of vitality than we are given in ourselves. So it is incumbent upon us to share in the spirit of nature and in the spirit of the universe. Everything is alive...That whole network of spiritual vitality is there to be entered into by us creatures.³⁷

Thus it is not only the specified spaces generally designated as consecrated ground in other cultures that is of concern to Native Americans but all of the physical world. Momaday offers a comprehensive understanding of the land ethic when he says 'the Native American incorporates the landscape into his most fundamental experience.'

In House Made of Dawn, Abel's 'last reality' in the race on his cultural landscape, is expressed in the essential unity and harmony of man and the land. He has come to terms with not only the sky power

represented by the eagles, but also with his relationship with the earth, more specifically with the snake or earth power. Interestingly, among the Khasi tribe of the Northeast Indian state of Meghalaya (South Asia), such a sacred space is located in the sacred grove, *Khlaw Kyntang* in Mawphlang. From primordial times this ancient forest, surrounded by numerous rough-hewn monoliths, erected in memory of the dead elders, is believed to be the abode of deities with positive and negative powers, which the tribe, animistic in spirit, worshipped. No kingship could function without such sacred groves. Religious rituals were centered on these sacred landscapes to seek divine protection from disease or aggression. The Mawphlang sacred grove stands undisturbed because it is believed to be the home of the *Basa*, the guardian spirit. Generations of oral tradition have reinforced the belief that the *Basa* takes the form of the *khla lum* (tiger) and the *bsein* (snake). While the tiger god is regarded as the benevolent one and is believed to protect and bring about prosperity to those who invoke it, the snake deemed its opposite, is said to plague those who offend it by collecting or cutting any plant or shrub within the sacred precincts, with afflictions. In most cultures the snake is believed to be malevolent but in the Native American perception it is regarded as 'supernatural' having an intimate connection with the rain, suggesting the sacred snake-earth equation. The general feeling towards it

is one of mingled fear and reverence, and great care is taken not to kill one, especially the rattlesnake.

Thus Abel's enactment of this dance of Laguna Pueblo time-space and health, restores his personal sanity, healing and regenerating his spirit. The ceremonial race is the means of achieving wholeness of being; it is the vehicle of the imagination which allows the human being to imagine himself fully outside the bounds of social concerns, and beyond the constraints of physical imperatives. It is that part of consciousness where the Spirit and the Human meet and merge to become one, and it is beyond time and history as it is far from the confines of pure reason. Motion leads no longer away from but towards centeredness; Abel is finally at home on the earth, 'running in the path of least resistance.' He feels the sense of place he was unable to articulate in Part 1, *The Longhair*. Here at last he has a voice, words and song. In beauty he has begun:

All of his being was concentrated in the sheer motion of running on, and he was past caring about the pain. Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hills at dawn. He was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; He had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song. *House made of pollen, house made of dawn. Qtsedaba.*

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- ³³ N. Scott Momaday to Linda Bolton, March 30th 1992, in 'Native Voices', *Poetics & Politics Series Background*.
poeticsandpolitics.arizona.edu/momaday/momaday.html.
- ³⁴ 'The Native American Attitudes To The Environment' in Walter Holden Capps (Ed.) 1976, *Seeing With A Native Eye: Essays On Native American Religion*, New York: Harper and Row, 132.
- ³⁵ N. Scott Momaday, in an interview with Joseph Bruchac, 1987, *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 190.
- ³⁶ Aldo Leopold, *The Land Ethic* in *Sand County Almanac*.
- ³⁷ Henry David Thoreau, 1849, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, self-published.
- ³⁸ N. Scott Momaday, to Woodard, *Ancestral Voice*, p.201.

Chapter IV

Momaday and the Native American Renaissance: The American Indian Speaks

Storytelling is imaginative and creative in nature. It is an act by which man strives to realize his capacity for wonder, meaning and delight. It is also a process in which man invests and preserves himself in the context of ideas. Man tells stories in order to understand his experience, whatever it may be. The possibilities of storytelling are precisely those of understanding the human experience.¹

Native American writers are kindred spirits in their concern and reverence for land, using literature to create a consciousness about its sacredness, and maintaining harmony between man and land. Though they experience not a 'renaissance' but a thousand years' continuum of literary tradition, a truism of canon formation states that unrecognized literatures need breakthrough events to gain attention and legitimacy. For Native American literature, the key event occurred in 1969 when N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. His breakthrough multicultural novel House Made of Dawn is an exciting foreshadowing of recognition for the rich and resilient oral tradition. This marks the emergence of powerful writers whose primary concern is to articulate the trials and tribulations of their people who are coming to terms with the transformation from a tribal and family-oriented community to alien social and religious systems. They firmly believe that it is these systems

which are responsible for the diffusion and sometimes complete breakdown of their cultures. Thus Native American writing exposes the tragic experiences of an ancient people.

In 1969 the Pulitzer committee for fiction awarded its annual prize to a young professor of English at Stanford University, the first to be acclaimed as Pulitzer laureate despite his Kiowa antecedents, and the fact that his novel dealt almost entirely with Native Americans. The Pulitzer committee's announcement that this novel demonstrates "the arrival on the American literary scene of a matured, sophisticated literary artist from the original Americans" may have colonial undertones but the recognition does mark a seminal moment in Native American literary history. That young writer Momaday is the first Native American novelist to focus on the plight of the contemporary Native American, and to establish it as representing the cultural estrangement and social alienation characteristic of post-war American fiction. He served as a guide to the elements of the past, of legend and landscape, and of the present that have the power to restore their best selves, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In an essay entitled *All the Good Indians*, Paula Gunn Allen recalls first reading Momaday's novel, as a student at the University of Oregon:

I was the only Indian I knew. That was around 1967. Sometime in 1968, a package arrived in the mail from my

parents. It was a signed copy of N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn. I believed that book saved my life.²

The hopeful ending of the book enabled her to believe that she was not alone, that the world was not without Indians. The point she makes, albeit metaphorically, rightly sheds light on the novel's place in history. In a 1985 overview of Native American literature, Native American Fiction, Andrew Wiget devotes little space to the period between Darcy McNickle's 1936 novel The Surrounded, and Momaday's House Made of Dawn thirty-two years later. Instead he describes the social and political conditions of the Native Americans between 1940 and 1970. Charles Larson alludes to the same lacuna:

There is a gap between American Indian fiction of the thirties and the sixties- more than one of years. The hiatus of the forties and the fifties represents a philosophical and symbolic break with earlier practices, a turn from assimilation to rejection.³

The writer whose work began what is called the Renaissance of American Indian literature was N. Scott Momaday.

The same year, that is 1969, another writer, a Standing Rock Sioux attorney named Vine Deloria Jr., published Custer Died for Your Sins, with the subtitle An American Manifesto which analyzed current American attitudes towards Native American issues. Around the same time, John R. Milton edited a special Native American issue of the South

Dakota Review, which included the works of young writers of promise like Simon J. Ortiz, James Welch, Grey Cahoe, Norman H. Russell - all of whom had been up until then little published. The issue became so popular that Milton published it as an anthology entitled The American Indian Speaks.

Two other works that evoked interest in contemporary Native American writing was Peter Farb's Man's Rise to Civilization (1968) and Dee Brown's Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (1970) - both books that stimulated interest in Native Americans from historical and anthropological viewpoints. Dee Brown's book is one of the foremost works documenting eye-witness accounts and official records of the systematic subjugation of the Native American peoples during the latter half of the 19th century. Focusing on the 30 year span from 1860 to 1890, it offers a scathing indictment of the US government's attempts to grab land by using threats, deception and murder, and to crush Native American beliefs and practices. The book chronicles the fate of the Dakota, Ute, Cheyenne and several other tribes in a series of events that many consider the most grievous atrocities in American history. Sitting Bull, the proud Lakota Sioux chief refused to submit to the US policies designed to strip his people of their identity, dignity and their sacred land- the gold-laden Black Hills of the Dakotas, as well as the Ghost Dance

which is a messianic movement that promises an end of suffering under the white man. But it was all but obliterated after the killing of Sitting Bull, and the massacre of men, women and children by the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, 1890.

But it was Momaday's groundbreaking first novel that ushered in a Native American Renaissance leading to a flurry of literary activity that finds its own continuity in the works of Leslie Marmon Silko (*Laguna*), James Welch (*Blackfeet/Gros Ventre*), Louis Erdrich (*Turtle Mountain Chippewa*), Linda Hogan (*Chickasaw*), Sherman Alexie (*Spokane-Couer d'Alene*), Paula Gunn Allen (*Laguna-Sioux*) to name a few notable ones. Hitherto, works by primarily white writers predictably serve up white triumph and Indian killing and disappearance as working pre-requisites. It is in this connection that Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, long-time editor of *Wicazo Sa Review* and the novelist of *From the River's Edge* (1991), with its portrait of Sioux Community, berated Wallace Stegner in her 1996 work titled *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice*, for his stance on the tribes' 'glorious demise', his fantasy Indians, and his allegation that the Native West somehow ended with Wounded Knee:

I argue with Stegner's reality. The culture I have known....exists in communities all over the region, in

language and myth, and in the memories of people who know who they are and where they come from.⁴

Native American literature is more than 30,000 years old and its roots are deep in the land - too deep for a mere five centuries of European influence to upturn in any lasting, complete and irrevocable way. According to Kenneth Lincoln in his book Native American Renaissance, the commonly accepted estimate is that there were once five hundred distinct Native cultures and as many languages in America. When Columbus landed in San Salvador in the Bahamas in 1492, there were about 4.4 million Native Americans. Today, they number about 2 million, consisting of eight or nine primary cultural groups; and of the three hundred and fifteen tribes, some thirty-eight percent live on tribal lands with the largest concentration of Navajos, Pueblos, Lakota and Apache, in California. Removed, dispossessed, transplanted, and relocated by federal fiat, with language and ceremonies gone, the Native people carry on their traditions while adapting to the tribal reality of the moment:

They worry about trading older Indian ways and values for short term benefits in a modern world. [p.185]

The central issue for them is to redefine their 'Indianness' in terms of the new and the old. However, 'never more than a generation from extinction', as Momaday says in *The Man Made of Words*, it is all the more to be cherished by the people because of this tenuous link. In

remembering, there is strength and continuance and renewal throughout the generations. For them it is important that they remember their histories through the art of story-telling. Geary Hobson reiterates in his introduction to the anthology The Remembered Earth, 'Indians are everywhere, enduring, surviving, continuing.' Kenneth Lincoln's study serves as a critical focal point for he argues that despite ties to mainstream Western influences, genres, and themes,

Grounded Indian literature is tribal: its fulcrum is a sense of relatedness.⁵

He suggests that the literature of this Renaissance is

a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms. Contemporary Indian literature is not so much new, then, as regenerate: transitional continuities emerging from the old.⁶

Momaday's use of oral narrative, his re-telling of the old in new contexts and genres, in Western forms such as poetry, fiction and autobiography, all place him within the movement he is credited with initiating. And this is seen in the contemporary literature of Native Americans who are writing about themselves; their writings are based on firm ground, nurtured by strong roots, and are putting forth indomitable flowers.

When Hartwig Isernhagen asked Momaday as to how he accounts for the seminal importance of his novel, the latter's response was:

I think, maybe, the answer to that is simply timing, that it appeared at a time when the world was ready for it, in 1968. I think of the publication of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* [1970] about the same time, and those two books contributed to some kind of important change in the publishing world, for one thing. Suddenly the publishing world found that it had an audience it was not aware of. *So House Made of Dawn* was fortunate in being very early in what has been called “the Renaissance.” That meant a great deal...And moreover, you know, it was a story authentically set in an Indian community, the characters are Indian, and recognizably so. And all of that came together in a good way—so that’s the answer to that.⁷

In response to the same question, Gerald Vizenor declares that the publication of Momaday’s novel made an impact in three ways. First, Momaday has certainly given Native American writers ‘the contemporary voice that has a kind of courage to speak with complexity and diversity.’ In the context of it winning the Pulitzer, it ‘brought attention to what was thought to have been a non-existent literature.’ Lastly, it inspired critical studies of Native American fiction. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac in *Survival This Way*, James Welch remarks, “We no longer have to apologize for Indian writing” because by winning the Pulitzer Prize Momaday not only challenged the academic world to take notice of Native American issues and worldviews, but he was also “an encouragement to many young Indian writers.”

Momaday’s novel therefore, further laid the ground for the emergence of several new presses and magazines in addition to the

already established periodicals. These are listed as the South Dakota Review and Cimmaron Review, the Sun Tracks, out of the University of Arizona; Blue Cloud Quarterly of South Dakota; Indian Historian Press, with both a quarterly magazine and a monthly newspaper, Wassaja; Akwesasne Notes of upstate New York; Greenfield Review; Scree; Pembroke; Strawberry Press; and A Press-all have been instrumental in publishing most of the new and primarily young Native American writers such as Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Simon Ortiz, William Oandasan and many others. These publications and their editors and publishers like Rupert Costo, Lawrence Evers, Joseph Bruchac, Maurice Kenny, Brother Benet Tvedten and John R. Milton, have offered a forum for these writers who share a deep sense of obligation to Native American people. These are voices that have emerged as a result of a 'crash program of education' to use Lynn M. Bayne's words, initiated in 1954, after eighty-eight years of neglect by the federal government. The year 1970 then, became a landmark for the first generation of Native American college graduates.

Sidner Larson, a professor of English in the University of Oregon says:

American Indian writers such as Pulitzer Prize winner N. Scott Momaday have found their audience by blending a tribal world view with the Euro-American world view...The result is a Native American Renaissance that seeks to combine the best of mainstream culture with that of

American Indian cultures and may help with the pressing problems such as how to heal our damaged environment and slow the disintegration of our social fabric.⁸

These new writers and poets fuse the traditional and modern to tell us who they are and what it is to be a Native American. A Native American is a quarter blood Indian tribal member, who may not speak his native language, or be raised on his ancestral land; he is a complexity of attitudes, choices, tribal endorsement, geography, gender, history and tradition. Only about a few hundred thousand Native Americans survive as full-bloods with one non-Native parent. To understand who they are, we must relinquish all inherited stereotypes such as the 'red devils' so triumphantly vanquished by the US Cavalry or John Wayne in the Westerns, 'noble savage', 'vanishing Indian' or 'eco-messiah', each of which offers a prejudiced portrayal.

At the point of convergence of various literary paradigms from a cross-section of the tribes, these writers have experienced the alienation, exile, and prejudice but have reached beyond such an experience to find greater inter-relatedness, one common to all tribes of the earth. These are a group of post-World War II artists who began to learn their own cultures in a revival of the quest. They retained, or even developed their sense of tribal connectedness, and the inter-relatedness within the *Medicine Wheel* which is symbolic of the Native American Renaissance.

The wheel, or circle, is where the tribal Native American seems to find power. In Seven Arrows, (1972), Hyemeyohsts Storm gives an elaborate account of the concept of the *Medicine Wheel*, which helps one to seek understanding of one's self, and learn the many levels of perceiving, to achieve wholeness: if you and I were sitting in a circle of people on the prairie, and if someone placed an object in the centre of the circle, each of us would perceive that object differently.

The perception of any object, either tangible or abstract, is ultimately made a thousand times more complicated whenever it is viewed within the circle of an entire People as a whole. [p.4]

At the south of the wheel, the mouse represents innocence and trust; to the west is the bear, representing introspection; the buffalo at the north stands for wisdom, and the eagle to the east is illumination. However, we cannot understand our individual perspective until we are acquainted with many levels of perception. The Native American undertakes the perceiving or vision quest to seek his relationship with earth, air, water, fire, plants, animals, brothers, sisters, family, tribe and finally all the spirits of the universe. Native Americans regard tribe as family, not just bloodlines but extended family, clan, community, ceremonial exchanges with nature, and an animate regard for all creation as sensible and powerful. Tribe therefore means "an earth sense of self,

housed in an earth body, with regional ties in real things.” One can draw a parallel here with the following prayer in Vairagyashataka of Bhartrahari Sanskrit, A.D. 7th Century:

“O Earth, my mother, Air (wind) my father, O Fire (light) my friend; Water, my kinsman, Space my brother, here I do bow before you with folded hands!”⁹

The natural circle of the earth horizon, the sacred hoop, the sun, the moon, the rainbow and star - all of it is material for the Native American song-poet who

sings of kinship in the tribal circle...and rejoining the circle is the song that binds tribal America. [p.59]

However, the subject of their writing is not exclusive to Native American concerns but cover what the individual writer feels to be important. For instance, Momaday’s poem, *Krasnopresnenskaya Station* has a Russian feel to it. At the same time non-Indian writers should continue in the freedom of writing about Native Americans, but given the past three hundred years and more, of American literary history as well as Hollywood, considering the nauseating stereotypes of Indians as ‘red devils’ and ‘noble savages’, they must recognize that Native American people are now more aware of what is being said and written about them, and the old truisms, the satire and even the adulations will not hold up anymore. Looking back to nineteenth-century portraiture of Native life in

All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction (1990), Thomas King of mixed Cherokee and Greek stock, recognizes the romance, the beckoning power, of mythic Indianness, and at the same time calls for its end:

The literary stereotypes and clichés for which the period is famous have been, I think, a deterrent to many of us. Feathered warriors on Pinto ponies, laconic chiefs in full regalia, dusky, raven-haired maidens, demonic shamans with eagle-claw rattles and scalping knives are all picturesque and exciting images, but they are, more properly, servants of a non-Native imagination. Rather than try to unravel the complex relationship between the nineteenth-century Indian and the white mind, or to craft a new set of images that still reflects the time but avoids the flat, static depiction of the Native and the two-dimensional quality of the culture, most of us have consciously set our literature in the present, a period that is reasonably free of literary monoliths and which allows for greater latitude in the creation of characters and situations, and, more important, allows us the opportunity to create for ourselves and our respective cultures both a present and a future.¹⁰

James Welch, too objects to the sentimentally romanticized portrayal of Native Americans by white poets:

I have seen poems about Indians written by whites and they are either sentimental or outraged over the condition of the Indian. There are exceptions...but for the most part only an Indian knows who he is ...and hopefully he will have the toughness and fairness to present his material in a way that is not manufactured by conventional stance.¹¹

That could well be corroborated by Lucy Evers' (the narrator of Betty Louise Bell's 1994 book, Faces in the Moon) riposte

“I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen”¹²

which justifiably carries forward the resolve of Native American writers as to their own terms of literary imagining for Native identity.

For over half a century, Native American literature was primarily the productions of autobiography and biography and they constitute an important genre. Ignoring them would leave out not only a whole panorama of fairly recent history, but also an important link between the generations of people making the adjustment from oral tradition to the written word, standing as they were, at the crossroads of the 19th and 20th centuries. The most famous of this genre is John G. Neihardt’s Black Elk Speaks (1932), a story told in Oglala Lakota by the renowned Chief to his son who then translated it to Neihardt, who reproduced it. Momaday comments on this transitional work which bridges the gap between the oral tradition and contemporary literature:

(it) has been and remains a standard introduction to American Indian oral tradition. An indispensable element here is the voice of Neihardt himself, who was a poet and could see clearly into the lyrical heart of Black Elk’s speech and preserve it in its true spirit.¹³

Other than this “as-told-to” variety was the individual effort like Charles A. Eastman’s Indian Boyhood and his other works, and Momaday’s The Names and The Way to Rainy Mountain - delineating his family genealogy and sense of place- which continues to win admiration, for his

uniquely reflexive deployment of Western literary styles and of Native oral legacy. He points out in *The Man Made of Words*,

The Kiowa tales which are contained in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* constitute a kind of literary chronicle. In a sense they are the milestones of that old migration in which the Kiowas journeyed...they evoke the sense of search and discovery. Many of the tales are very old, and they have not until now been set down in writing.¹⁴

The sustained imagining of the southwest's geology, its time, its atmosphere and lineages, makes for autobiography simply luminous in the telling as Robert A. Lee has observed. And yet, House Made of Dawn, despite ushering in a Native American Renaissance, cannot help but bring into play paradox and vexation, for allowing the many Native-authored novels to go almost unrecognized. Is it then fair to say that there has been a circling back into these ancestries of Native word and story, and that the generation of James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich and even Gerald Vizenor are to be recognized as having emerged from a Native literary vacuum?

Midway into James Welch's Winter in the Blood (1974), his bemused and unnamed Montana Blackfeet narrator makes an observation:

Again I felt that helplessness of being in a world of stalking white men. [p.120]

It carries the novel's darkly laconic tone, the historic role-reversal of the hunter hunted. It may depict contemporary life but the effect is to imply a

larger, more collective dislocation, at once serious and yet often close to some comedy of errors. However, despite the characters' drifting, drinking, absurd chance encounters, and each accusing shaft of memory, Welch's story is not one of sentimentality. It points back into the sustenance of tribal legacy. To this end, Welch develops a first-person voice full of queries in which worlds clash yet, often overlap and even collude.

James Welch, of Blackfeet and Gros Ventre stock, started his literary career with a collection of poems, Riding the Earthboy Forty, in 1971. Earthboy was the name of a family from his reservation; the forty refers to the number of acres in their allotment of land. The poems are drawn from his Montana experiences, and reveal an influence of American Surrealists like James Wright and the Peruvian Cesar Vallejo. The Surrealists in the 1930s wrote poems that reproduced the ambience of dreams, but were composed by the same creative processes as traditional poetry. In these poems, as in dreams, objects undergo strange transformations, and normal, everyday causality is suspended, but the works are carefully disciplined products of the conscious imagination. In the works of Vallejo, Wright and Pablo Neruda, there is the passionate feeling, the bitter cynicism, the weary feeling of defeat, and the sense of *anomie* in an absurd universe. Welch shares the existentialism and

surrealism particularly of Vallejo who he learnt to appreciate through the translations of Wright. His existentialism is largely the result of the disillusionments of reservation life and a tribal and personal habit of laughing at the absurdity of existence.

Dreaming is a motif that runs through many of Welch's surrealist poems. For instance, *Dreaming Winter* reads in part:

Wobble me back to a tiger's dream,
 a dream of knives and bones too common
 to be exposed....
 Have mercy on me, Lord. Really. If I should die
 before I wake, take me to that place I just heard
 banging in my ears. Don't ask me. Let me join
 the other kings, the ones who trade their knives
 for a sack of keys. Let me open any door,
 stand winter still and drown in a common dream.¹⁵

Meaning is elusive in such a poem, but it appears that Welch is contrasting the old Plains Indian way of life, hunting and warfare, with the uncertain world that the Natives now inhabit. The tiger is a predator who symbolically stands for the Native as a hunter and fighter, and the dream of knives is the memory of the old life. But that life is over, for better or worse, and so the hunter must trade his knife for the keys to the real world. Welch's attitude toward this new world is ambiguous. The word 'really' in the last stanza indicates that the prayer may be more ironic than fervent. Whatever the tone, the 'door' which Welch mentions leads to life in the white world, and drowning in a common dream means

participating dubiously in American mainstream culture. 'Winter' refers not only to the fierce season that ravages Montana but also to the 'winter in the blood' that is the subject of his first novel written in 1974, a classic story of reservation life.

In the Montana that Welch depicts in his poems and novel, Native Americans drift in and out of white towns and bars, floundering in a meaningless universe, estranged from their traditional culture and the security and meaning it afforded them. History ended for them when their traditional way of life ended, and days that were once filled with meaning for them are now meaningless. History is over, and the gods are dead; events continue to transpire, but there is no pattern to existence, only dreams of the past.

From the narrator's reluctant return home past the borrow-pit, with its implication of earth lost or evacuated, to his mother, Teresa First Raise, and her new husband Lame Bull, a homecoming which he describes as:

Coming home to a mother and an old lady who was my grandmother. And the girl who was thought to be my wife. But she really didn't count. For that matter none of them counted; not one meant anything to me [p.2]

through to the epiphanous recognition of the blind Yellow Calf as his true Blackfeet grandfather as against the 'half-breed Doagie' [p.159] and the

funny as well as serious burial of his grandmother, he might as well be enmeshed in two landscapes. The one evokes literal Dodson, Montana, its township bars and commerce, along with his mother's Reservation valley holding of hay, alfalfa and fishing country. The other bears 'the presence of ghosts' [p.159], the line of family which includes the snowdrift drunken death of First Raise, his father, who loses consciousness and lays exposed to the elements, and of Mose, the fourteen-year-old brother, who is run over and mangled by an automobile in a cattle round-up whom the twelve-year-old narrator might have saved. Between the two, disjuncture indeed holds sway:

I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon [p.2]

Afflicted with emotional frostbite, 'winter in his blood' after the death of Mose, which renders him unable to feel compassion for anyone, he resents his mother's marriage to Lame Bull, a genial but somewhat clownish adventurer who wants her for her prosperous farm. Welch makes masterful use of ironic diction to undercut the dignity of his characters:

Lame Bull had married 360 acres of hay land, all irrigated, leveled, some of the best land in the valley, as well as a 2000-acre grazing lease [p.13]

Though he never felt any closeness toward her for she 'never gave much,' the narrator prefers staying with them to getting out on his own.

Much of the action of the book centers round his search for Agnes, a Cree girl. He 'lies to his mother that he has married her'. He lives with her for a short while then disappears, abandoning and leaving her with his hostile family, who despises her because of her lineage. So she returns to the bar joints of Havre, and the narrator's search takes him there.

These different terrains lead to confusions and charades which only slowly begin to clear. Agnes steals his gun, her brother beats him up, and she continues to haunt him. Nature itself can seem out of joint, 'cockeyed' as Yellow Calf calls it. Hence, meadowlarks sing in mock-chorus, pheasants gabble, magpies as tricksters argue, a hawk shot by him in childhood is remembered only because of its immobile tongue, his long-time horse 'Bird' which dies of over-exertion when he is pulled down by the mud in the slough while attempting to pull out a cow which was stuck- it echoes a previous experience, a sense of *deja vou*:

I had seen her before, the image of catastrophe, the same hateful eye, the long-curving horns, the wild-eyed spinster leading the cows down the hill into the valley. [p.166]

Welch's skillful technique in the final scene, the grandmother's funeral, gives a description as though he was investing a character with some dignity, and then pulls the rug out from under him suddenly:

I had to admit that Lame Bull looked pretty good. The buttons on his shiny green suit looked like they were made of wood. Although his crotch hung a little low, the pants

were the latest style....His fancy boots with the walking heels peeked out from beneath the new cuffs...Teresa wore a black coat, black high heels, and a black cupcake hat...Once again she was big and handsome- except for her legs. They appeared to be a little skinny, but it must have been the dress. [pp. 173-174]

Winter in the Blood is a comic novel but there is a good deal of pathos too, seen especially in the death of Mose. When the two brothers have rounded up the cattle and driven them from the range to the gate of their land, one recalcitrant cow, a “wild-eyed spinster” who has been leading the herd, balks at going through it. As she stands there, a calf breaks, and Bird instinctively gives chase. The hero is too small to control the horse and can only cling to the saddle horn. As this is happening a car flies past, hitting his brother’s horse and killing Mose. Although the narrator could not have seen the accident, he has a graphic picture of it in his mind:

I couldn’t have seen it- we were still moving in the opposite direction, the tears, the dark and wind in my eyes- the movie exploded whitely in my brain, and I saw the futile lurch of the car as the brake lights popped, the horse’s shoulder caving before the fender, the horse spinning so that its rear end smashed into the door, the smaller figure flying slowly over the top of the car to land with the hush of a stuffed doll. [p.142]

This is a climactic scene in which the narrator falls from Bird, injuring his leg. His brother dies and that leads his father to drink himself to death-

the only two people in the world he had ever loved, and so after the accident he goes through life crippled emotionally and physically.

But the epiphany in which the protagonist recognizes his roots with the sudden revelation of truth that is supposed to transform his way of looking at the world, and the ending, Welch deliberately opts for a combination of comedy and absurdity, by using scatology, an important ingredient of comedy, to undermine the sentimentality. Nevertheless, the “old lady who was my grandmother” becomes more real to him when Yellow Calf, the man he discovers to be his grandfather, tells him the story of how the Blackfeet cast her out to die during winter. The narrator sees her as a young, beautiful, and vulnerable woman, whereas before he had thought of her as bloodless and superannuated. In a flash of profound insight he realizes that Yellow Calf is the hunter who had provided her with food and kept her alive: that discovery first makes him laugh, but it is a laughter that lacks humor:

It was the laughter of one who has been let in on the secret through luck and circumstance...And the wave behind my eyes broke. [p.158]

The narrator thus finds adulthood in a historic Blackfeet and Gros Ventre continuity of name, family, tribe, land, and call to health as he returns to the earth. He makes a promise to himself to have his leg fixed and, in a typical touch of Welch irony, even marriage to Agnes. The signs

of disjuncture remain, as seen in the grandmother's funeral. But they do so also in relation to the signs of juncture, life over death. Winter in the Blood fuses the sense of carnival into seriousness, and portrays the narrator's life as Native *comédie humaine*, a jugglery, yet at the same time holds the promise of order to be won from that same discordance.

The Death of Jim Loney too, has a victim-protagonist whose search for significance and meaning, moves in a downward graph into alcoholism, delusion, vision, and death - the process of alienation that offers little possibility of relief. The narrator in the first novel achieves some sort of sanity, but Jim Loney chooses to die like a warrior, out of choice, not out of defeat. Perhaps the most destructive aspect of alienation is the loss of power, of control over one's destiny, over one's memories and thoughts, relationships, past and future. In a world where no normative understandings apply, where one is perceived as futile and unwanted, where one's perceptions are denied by acquaintance and stranger alike, where pain is the single most familiar sensation, the loss of self is experienced continually and desperately. Native Americans, like the protagonists in these novels live in a land that is no longer their home, and they are, for the most part, powerless to do much more than determine the cause of their deaths.

In a 1986 interview with Kim Barnes, Leslie Marmon Silko gives her version of the place of story in Laguna community life and tradition:

The key to understanding storytellers and storytelling at Laguna Pueblo is to realize that you grow up not just being aware of narrative and making a story or seeing a story in what happens to you and what goes on all around you all the time, but just being appreciative and delighted in narrative exchanges.¹⁶

If this observation holds true for the telling-listening process of oral tradition, it can be said to have been adapted to modern Native autobiography. Her work, *Storyteller* could not be better thought an endeavour to shadow these spoken ‘narrative exchanges’, the text as representative, at once celebration and mural, story-cycle and a collage of text and image. In a 1991 essay, titled *Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective*, she says,

Where I come from, the words most highly valued are those spoken from the heart, unpremeditated and unrehearsed.¹⁷

A written speech or statement is suspect because the true feelings of the speaker remain hidden as one reads words that are detached from the occasion and the audience.

Silko, however, acknowledges her own paradox of writing oral heritage through the figure of her Aunt Susie, a Carlisle-educated teacher, and archivist of Laguna life and family:

This is the way Aunt Susie told the story.

She had certain phrases, certain distinctive words
 She used in her telling.
 I write when I still hear
 Her voice as she tells the story. [p.7]

Oral-written, the speaking voice overheard as it were, makes a perfect point of entry in this real-life history which weaves into poem-chronicle or legend. And later, in *The Storyteller's Escape* she adds:

With these stories of ours
 We can escape almost anything
 With these stories we will survive... [pp. 247-253]

Silko's white Marmon lineage is given equal play alongside her Laguna-Mexican ancestry. The Lagunas are a Keresan people whose culture is similar to that of the Jemez Momaday writes about in House Made of Dawn and The Names. Despite the mélange of Hopi, Zuni, Navajo, Jemez, Acoma, and a few other tribes, the Laguna have a keen idea of their discreet identity. Thus it is not surprising that Silko's sensitivity about living on the fringes of her mixed-blood antecedents has contributed to her creativity, and she admits, "My poetry, my storytelling rise out of this source."

Storyteller has no shortage of allusion to all these tribes' cultures as also the Sioux and the Apache, and introducing a Laguna-Keres myth regarding the Acoma place, Silko issues a reminder of how a story, is by necessity a shared circle and consent:

The Laguna People
 Always begin their stories
 with 'humma-hah':
 that means 'long ago'.
 And the ones who are listening
 Say 'aaaa-eh'. [p.38]

Yet she reserves her own margin to adapt, transform, collate, as an imaginative form requires in this weave of fact into fiction:

The story was the important thing and little changes here and there were really part of the story. [p.227]

Having been awarded the prestigious McArthur Fellowship in 1981 for her literary achievements, Silko's more famous novel, Ceremony, rewards what she, in a 1981 interview with Elaine Jahner, calls

the ear for story and the eye for pattern.¹⁸

by inviting readers to explore ways in which the protagonist Tayo's story converges with the underlying mythic structure. Ceremony begins with a verse, or short poetic lines set into the conventional prose form that gives its rationale:

'Ts'its'tsi'nako,
 Thought-Woman, the spider
 named things and
 as she named them
 they appeared.

She is sitting in her room
 Thinking of a story now.
 I'm telling you the story
 she is thinking [p.1]

Through the vehicle of the story, *Ts'its'tsi'nako's* thought, Silko explains how witchcraft could be responsible for sickness in individuals, societies, and landscapes simultaneously, and ceremony is necessary to contravene its effects.

Ceremony, located in the Gallup arroyo, is the story of a mixed-blood Laguna named Tayo who, tortured by the desertion of his mother, the contempt of the aunt who raised him, and the trauma he experienced as a soldier in the Second World War, has acute mental illness which is linked to the Laguna reservation drought and the nearby Los Alamos atomic tests, that give the novel a contemporary setting. When he recovers, by the efforts of a Navajo medicine man named Betonie and a mysterious woman, Ts'eh Montano, the land begins to bloom again. Silko intersperses Laguna creation myths, witchcraft, vision quest and healing that give the work a timeless quality, and a sense that the action has happened before and will happen again. This has won the novel a central place in Native American fiction, leading her more famous compatriot Momaday to remark:

Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* is an extraordinary novel, if indeed 'novel' is the right word. It is more precisely a telling, the celebration of a tradition and form that are older and more nearly universal than the novel as such.¹⁹

Momaday is referring to the Native American narratives but Ceremony incorporates in it an older form and tradition- that of the Grail romance though Silko was not aware of the medieval legend at the time.

The chief similarity between Ceremony and the Grail legend is that there is a link between Tayo's condition and the drought that has devastated his land. Tayo could well play the role of the maimed Fisher King who, as he languishes, his land suffers and becomes a wasteland. When a knight- Gawain, Percival or Galahad- comes in search of the Holy Grail, believed to have been used by Christ in the Last Supper, he cures the King, and the land blooms again. Silko's work is a Native American analog of the Grail legend. The ultimate cause of Tayo's illness is the result of a centuries-old witchcraft, and Betonie's ceremonial cure is completed by Tayo's sacred quest. His illness is traced to his behaviour during the World War II, when he and his cousin Rocky were stationed on a nameless Pacific island fighting the Japanese. When Rocky is wounded, Tayo and a fellow soldier carry him on a litter through the drenching rain. Tayo fears the effect of the rain which is bothering Rocky's wound and making the road slushy, so he prays for it to stop:

When Tayo prayed on the long muddy road to the prison camp, it was dry air, dry as a hundred years squeezed out of yellow sand, air to dry out the oozing wounds of Rocky's leg, to let the torn flesh and broken bones breathe, to clear the sweat that filled Rocky's eyes...He wanted the words to

make a cloudless blue sky, pale with a summer sun pressing across wide and empty horizons. The words gathered within him and gave him strength...he could hear his own voice praying against the rain. [pp. 11-12]

What follows is the Laguna myth of the *Reed Woman* who spends all her time bathing while her sister *Corn Woman* works in the sun. Reproached by her sister, *Reed Woman* goes away to:

The original place
down below.
And there was no more rain then.
Everything dried up
all the plants
the corn
the beans
they all dried up
and started blowing away
in the wind.
The people and the animals
were thirsty.
They were starving. [pp. 13-14]

Whether this is an interpolation of Tayo's prayer or that of myth is not clear but the narrative picks up:

So he had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry, the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked Tayo could see the consequences of his praying. [p.14]

Tayo's guilt about Rocky's death and the drought causes a nervous breakdown in him, what in medical terms can be called catatonic schizophrenia which could have been cured by Western medicine, but in a work of fiction, which shows that Natives are better off with their

traditional culture, he must find his salvation within a tribal context. A traditional ceremony is required to reintegrate Tayo's self by re-impressing upon his fragmented psyche the whole mythic pattern of the culture hero and his quest, thus restoring the shape of his personal and communal history and re-establishing his identity. He thinks he is responsible for the drought because he had gone to war and might have killed someone there, and that somehow he is accountable for the death of his uncle Josiah too. He has the idea that if he had died instead of Rocky or Josiah, the land would receive rain. He retreats into a psychosis which he believes, renders him invisible, and which robs him of his ability to speak or be heard. The War provided only the catalytic shock necessary to galvanize the forces working to alienate him from his land, his family, tribe and tradition, even from his own flesh. More corrosive than the War had been his aunt's Christianity, which

Separated people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul. [p.70]

All it took was the experience of total war, especially its final atomic destruction, to convince Tayo that for tribal elders the white world was 'too alien to comprehend.' [p.38] It almost destroyed Tayo, as it had others who returned, including Emo, Pinkie and Harley. He no longer had a usable past; his

Memories were tangled with the present...as he had tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more. [p.6]

Many of the characters in Ceremony suffer from the effects of alienation, which they experience in their perceived powerlessness to control their destinies, their isolation from the old ways and the attendant homogeneity, the growing meaninglessness of the traditions, and the lowered self-esteem that being a Native American in a white man's world too often creates.

On the other hand, Betonie, the Navajo shaman, who exemplifies the creative possibilities of mixed blood, accepts his heritage for the strength it gives him, and looks to basic causes for the situation the whole world is in. He is aware that alienation is a common sickness, not confined to the reservation or its urban extensions, and he identifies 'the witchery' as its source. Because he is comfortable with his integrated cultures and because ceremonialism has been his mainstay, he is able to heal Tayo and to help him find the mission he was meant to complete. His magic propels Tayo along his ceremonial journey which takes him to Ts'eh, the mountain spirit woman. Through her psychic powers during an intimate encounter, as in initiation rites, he gains the power to resist further witchery, whether his own or that visited on, and perpetuated by, the white world. At that point his land blooms again:

The valley was green, from the yellow sandstone mesas in the northwest to the black lava hills in the south. But it was not the green color of the jungles, suffocating and strangling the earth. The new growth covered the earth lightly, each blade of grass, each leaf and stem with space between as if planted by a thin summer wind. There were no dusty red winds spinning across the flats this year. [p.219]

After he has been transformed by these efforts, from isolated warrior to spiritually integrated person, after he has taken on the aspect of unity termed *naiya* (mother) in Laguna, he is able to understand the whole thing:

He would go back there now, where she had shown him the plant. He would gather the seeds for her and plant them with great care in places near sandy hills. The rainwater would seep down gently and the delicate membranes would not be crushed or broken before the emergence of tiny fingers, roots, and leaves pressing out in all directions. The plants would grow there like the story, strong and translucent as stars. [p.254]

While Ceremony is ostensibly a tale about a man, Tayo, Paula Gunn Allen observes its feminine landscape, and regards it as a tale of two forces: the feminine life force of the universe and the mechanistic death force of the witchcraft. And Ts'eh is the central character of the drama of this ancient battle as it is played out in contemporary times. Further laying emphasis on the Native reverence for land, she says:

We are the land, and the land is mother to us all. There is not a symbol in the tale that is not in some way connected with womanness, that does not in some way relate back to Ts'eh and through her to the universal feminine principle of

creation: Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought Woman, Grandmother Spider, Old Spider Woman. All tales are born in the mind of Spider Woman, and all creation exists as a result of her naming.

We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same. As Luther Standing Bear has said of his Lakota people, "We are of the soil and the soil is of us." The earth is the source and the being of the people, and we are equally the being of the earth. The land is not really a place, separate from ourselves, where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies; the witchery makes us believe that false idea. The earth is not a mere source of survival, distant from the creatures it nurtures and from the spirit that breathes in us, nor is it to be considered an inert resource on which we draw in order to keep our ideological self-functioning, whether we perceive that self in sociological or personal terms. We must not conceive of the earth as an ever-dead other that supplies us with a sense of ego identity by virtue of our contrast to its perceived non-being. Rather for American Indians like Betonie, the earth *is* being, as all creatures are also being: aware, palpable, intelligent, alive. Had Tayo known clearly what Standing Bear articulated-that "in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested," that human beings "must be born and reborn to belong," so that their bodies are "formed of the dust of their forefather's bones"-he would not be ill. But if he had known consciously what he knew unconsciously, he would not have been a major agent of the counter-ceremony, and this tale would not have been told.²⁰

Thus Tayo's illness is a result of separation from the ancient unity of man, ceremony, and land, and his healing takes place when he recognizes this unity. The land is dry because the earth is suffering from the alienation of a part of herself; her children have been torn from her in their minds; their possession of unified awareness of and with her has

been destroyed, partially or totally; that destruction characterizes the lives of Tayo and his mother, Auntie and Rocky, Pinkie and Harley, and all those who are tricked into believing that the land is beyond and separate from themselves.

The healing of Tayo and the land results from the re-unification of land and person. He is healed when he understands, in magical and loving ways, that his being is within and outside him, that it includes his mystical mother Night Swan, part-Mexican flamenco dancer, prophetess, and herself an incarnation of Thought Woman who gives him the vision of the pathway to recovery. It also refers to Ts'eh, the 'wonder' being whom he had unconsciously loved from 'time immemorial,' and who had answered him with rain and Josiah, the spotted cattle, winter, hope, love, and the starry universe of Betonie's ceremony. Through the stories, the ceremony, the gap between isolate human being and lonely landscape is closed.

When the story begins he is an empty space, a vapor, an outline:

For a long time he had been smoke...He inhabited a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely and their own bones mark the boundaries. [pp. 14-15]

And he has no voice:

He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound, he tells the army psychiatrist. [p.15]

After Tayo completes the first steps of the ceremony, he is ready to enter into the central rituals of the cosmic ceremony which can simultaneously heal a wounded man, a stricken landscape, and a disorganized, discouraged society. He becomes a warrior in a peace-centered culture, dissociating himself from the people, totally negating his mundane self. At the beginning he does not understand the nature of death, or the fact that the departed souls are always within and part of the people on earth, and that they are still obligated to those living on earth and come back in the form of rain as a blessing. The people need a story that will take the entire situation into account, that will bless life with an integrity where spirit, creatures, and land can occupy a unified whole. In the end, the cure for him was a re-orientation of perception so that he could know that the true nature of being is magical and that the proper duty of the creatures, the land, and people is to live in harmony with what is. For Tayo, wholeness consists of sowing plants and nurturing them, caring for the cattle, and knowing that he belongs where he is, that he is and always has been home:

The transition was completed. In the west and in the south too, the clouds were round heavy bellies that had gathered for the dawn. It was not necessary, but it was right, even if

the sky had been cloudless the end was the same. The ear for the story and the eye for the pattern were theirs; the feeling was theirs; we came out of this land and we are hers...They had always been loved. He thought of her then; she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there. He crossed the river at sunrise. [p.255]

Thus Tayo as the buzzard that purifies the land is able to take his place in the life of the Laguna; he has come home, and they can get on with the life of a village, which is what the land, the ceremony, the story and time immemorial are all about. Despite cultural differences, Tayo's story becomes for us our ceremony of reading and in restoring some of our shared humanity it offers us a healing equal to his. Silko adds this myth:

Hummingbird and Fly thanked him
 They took the tobacco to old Buzzard.
 "Here it is. We finally got it but it
 sure wasn't easy."
 "Okay." Buzzard said
 "Go back and tell them
 I'll purify the town."
 And he did-[p.255]

In many respects, Momaday's Abel, James Welch's Jim Loney or his nameless narrator and Silko's protagonist Tayo are alike. All have been psychologically affected by death, all are orphans except the narrator in Winter in the Blood, whose mother cannot communicate any maternal affection to her son, and none of these protagonists has a clear sense of belonging to a people, a tradition, or a culture. A tribal member's estrangement from the web of tribal being and the conflict that arises are

common themes in the works of contemporary Native writers. The ancient thrust toward integration of the individual within the common whole is a movement fraught with pain, rage, and angst, beset by powerlessness, and *anomie*, and often characterized by political and personal violence. The contemporary Native American writer's preoccupation with alienation in its classic dimensions of isolation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, lowered self-esteem, and self-estrangement, accompanied by anxiety, hopelessness, and victimization, may be pervasive because the writers are themselves predominantly of mixed parentage. This consciousness makes them equally alien among traditional people and whites alike. As Paula Gunn Allen says,

The Indian world informally classifies individuals according to their "Indianness."²¹

This imposes on such people the need to conform to the qualifying standards, often without knowing what these might be. Then too one can meet the formal standards and still find oneself excluded from the community on social levels; or one might change communities and be forced to re-establish one's Native identity, often with respect to unfamiliar norms. This is particularly true for those who come into a strange urban environment, conform to the standards of appearance,

speaking one's own language or use English in the way that bilingual Natives of whatever tribal origins do.

The pervasive sense of uneasiness, of having been shut out or disenfranchised, of anger at circumstances that have resulted in overt or covert alienation from the basic source of one's consciousness, informs the greater body of Native American writing, though its expression is often disguised by historically justified anger and culturally supported romanticizing of the old ways. The subject of 'Indianness' generates an intense response because when belonging is a central value, those who are excluded are likely to feel the importance of that value, and are necessarily affected by separation. Thus we have the dimensions of alienation and the poetry and fiction that ensue from the position of the outsider- a position that is all the more painful when the perceived right to belong is greatest.

What is important here is that the world is seen in terms of antagonistic principles: good versus bad, Indian versus white, and tradition versus cultural borrowing. Personal significance is lost in a confusion of dualities. The personal war waged by those who choose to perceive themselves as thoroughly westernized is often worked out in bouts of suicidal depression, alcoholism, abandonment of Native ways, 'disappearance' into urban complexes, and verbalized distrust of and

contempt for 'longhairs'. John Big Bluff Tosamah in House Made of Dawn represents this response to the forces of alienation.

Those who cannot reject their race or culture, either because the winds of fashion and politics have convinced them or because they are aware that such an action is impossible, choose the course of self-rejection, working out their struggle through rage against others. A third category of victims of alienation are people caught between two cultures. These are suicidal, inarticulate, almost paralysed in their inability to direct their energies toward resolving what seems to them, an insoluble conflict. Their lives are beyond their control and any hope of reconciling the oppositions within and outside themselves seems beyond their reach.

For many writers and activists, unity with traditional tribal roots is sought in the humorless repudiation of the experiences that form a large part of their cultures. In the attempt to integrate a fragmented personality, many prefer a violent rejection of what they know and intensely cling to dreams of lost glory, lost traditions, and a fantasized past of plenty, justice, and rectitude. The better part of integration lies in a careful reclamation of facts that are relevant to one's present circumstances. Many Native Americans do recognize the realities of their existence; the realization often produces a tragic vision because there is no way to be acceptably 'Indian' and acceptable to whites at the same time.

'Tonguelessness' is the prime symbol of powerlessness in the Native American world, and is a dimension of alienation that one finds in the works of Native poets and novelists from Momaday to Welch and Silko and many others as well. Abel, in House Made of Dawn is essentially an outsider in his own community even before he is drafted, but by the time he returns he has lost the power of speech. Estranged from his tribe as well as from himself, he lives his days remembering events that marked his strangeness and his isolation from all that should have been familiar to him. As a young boy, he is unable to perceive the geese as his brother Vidal does. He seems to be haunted by the deaths of his mother and brother that intensify the terrors of the unseen force that seems to stalk him; his grandfather, Francisco has made an uneasy peace with it, but carries the curse: his crippled leg, the deaths of all those he loved with the exception of Abel, whose crippling is less visible but more complete, indicate that he is a victim of some supernatural ill will.

This evil is echoed in Abel's inability to participate in the ceremonial life of the village. He is isolated from the traditions that organize the seasons and human relationships into significant patterns. His participation in the Bahkyush eagle hunt is flawed by his inability to accept the pain of the bird's captivity, resulting in his strangling it, thus violating the ceremony and separating himself further from it. He has no

norms, he cannot understand or structure what happens to him, and his response is a violent attempt to destroy what is destroying him. It his inability to articulate his powerlessness and isolation that results in him killing the albino, believing him to be a repository of evil, and therefore responsible for his pain. He misplaces his terror and humiliation at the hands of the white soldiers onto the strange being that resembles a white man:

One of the arms lay out from the body; it was there, in the pale angle of the white man's death... [pp .78-79]

In his attempt to reconcile opposites that he cannot control Abel kills the albino and this leads to his own exile. The violence is a result of the collision of tradition and history. It is in contrast to Francisco's acceptance of the unknown as

nothing more than a dull, intrinsic sadness, a vague desire to weep. [p.64]

and how he finds it possible to live out his life in relative tranquility.

There are several 'mixed breeds' in House Made of Dawn: Benally, the relocation Navajo who finds a middle ground between his economic need and his tradition, Tosamah, who attempts to connect his Native self and his white self by becoming both a Christian minister and a Peyote priest, and the lost men who attend his sessions. They all suffer

from some degree of alienation and attempt, through drink and *powwows* on the Los Angeles hills, to come to terms with it along with its attendant anguish.

Only Abel finds no way to bridge the wide gap between the self and the whites. Alcohol feeds his sullen, speechless rage which leads to a near-fatal beating by the corrupt policeman Martinez. When he returns home, broken and sick, to preside over his grandfather's death, he is still speechless; until of course he enters into the ceremonial life of the people and joins the 'runners', and while doing so, regains his voice. The running is symbolic of his spiritual health even if there is no indication that in reclaiming his traditional culture, he has rejected white culture. He sings a Navajo *chant*, appropriate in the light of his own mixed ancestry for there is no such thing as pure culture.

Silko's half-breed protagonist, Tayo suffers from the same powerlessness. He thinks he is invisible and therefore lacks the gift of speech. He feels responsible for the drought in his reservation because he had cursed the rain believing that if it stopped, his cousin Rocky would survive the War in which he might have killed somebody. Convinced that he is accountable for the tragic events surrounding him, he retreats into a dream life in which he is an invisible 'gray winter fog'. His suffering is caused by his half-breed status in a tribe which disapproves of mixed

blood people, and thus he was not taught Laguna traditions or its arcane knowledge. He saw his place in the family as the shadow of his more handsome and successful cousin; he believed he would at least take his uncle Josiah's place in tending the cattle because Rocky was destined for college and a job in the white man's world. With both dead, he retreats into a psychosis of invisibility, and is convinced he can neither speak nor be heard.

But it is Betonie the Navajo medicine man who restores Tayo because he himself is grounded in his ancient heritage even though his eclectic 'medicine bundle' includes western paraphernalia and techniques. But the particular curative artifacts are the four hoops, four bundles of weeds, and a white-corn sand painting that is similar to the Buddhist sand *mandala*. Tayo's spiritual journey takes him to Ts'eh, the 'mountain spirit woman,' and through her love and assistance he finds Josiah's cattle, and finally, his own wholeness. The solution Silko offers is the realization of the self through a ceremonial rite.

However, such a solution is not likely to occur for the average half-breed. Welch poses the same situation but resolves it in a realistic way even if the final resolution is a matter of personal integration through insight and action. In Winter in the Blood, the symptom of voicelessness is a quality of his nameless protagonist, but it is most characteristic of his

grandmother who is a permanent fixture in her chair and seldom says anything. The anonymity of the narrator shows the degree of his lack of power- a nameless Native is indeed powerless. This also reveals the extent of his estrangement from the self.

When the novel begins he is isolated from his family and tradition; even his history has been cut off by the exigencies of history and his grandmother's past. As the novel progresses, he discovers his grandfather, a solitary man who converses with the weather and the animals, and through him, he recovers his family history. Other than these encounters with Yellow Calf and his mother Teresa, none have any meaning for him as he is adrift in his aimless life. In the end it is the recognition of his estrangement that leads him through this impasse and allows him to re-integrate his personality around realistic perceptions of himself and the reality he inhabits:

I wonder if Mose and First Raise were comfortable. They were the only ones I really loved, I thought, the only ones who were good to be with. [p.172]

Lying in the rain, unwilling to move, he finally confronts himself in a gentle encounter that enables him to understand that acceptance is the better part of grief.

We can see from the above accounts that none of these protagonists really felt a sense of belonging whether to a people, a tradition or a

culture. The conflict in each case is resolved in different ways: the southwestern authors, Momaday and Silko, choose traditional Native American modes, while the northern writer Welch prefers realism. This is attributed to the different perceptions the tribes in each region have; as the acculturation processes differ, so does the degree of alienation. Thus alienation becomes a political issue. In House Made of Dawn, police brutality accounts for Abel's destruction, as is the lack of comprehension by liberal sympathizers like Father Olguin and Milly. Momaday's portrayal of Abel as a lost case because he has been cut off from his sources of colonization focuses on alienation as a political theme. Silko's political arguments also include the ideas and values of ecology, anti-racist, and anti-nuclear movements, and give her narrative a topical quality while advancing the plot and the themes of the novel. Welch's tragic vision depicts the inevitable condition of Native Americans in the United States. His narrator achieves a sort of sanity, a balance between his anguish and his need, allowing him to make plans for a future that will not be as blighted as his past.

The traditional tribal concept of time is of timelessness, as the concept of space is of multi-dimensionality. In the ceremonial world that the tribes inhabit, time and space are mythic. There is plenty of time in the Native universe because everything moves in a dynamic equilibrium

and the fact of universal movement is taken into account in the ritual life of the tribe. Achronology is the device used by both Momaday and Silko. Events are structured in a way that emphasizes the motion inherent in the interplay of person and event. The protagonist wanders through a series of events that might have happened years before or that might not have happened to him personally, but that nevertheless have immediate bearing on the situation and his understanding of it.

The death of Francisco in Momaday's novel underscores the difference in perception of time between his people and Father Olguin who, unhappy at having been awakened at an ungodly hour, wants to know what time it is when Abel wakes him up to tell him his grandfather has died. Then aware that his response is inappropriate, he says, "I understand". But he does not. The novel revolves round the axis of time as motion. It opens with Abel running, and closes the same way. The epiphany occurs when Abel, brutally beaten on the beach, comprehends the significance of the 'runners-after-evil'. Momaday pursues his story, revolving all the while around the concept of Indian time, industrial time, pastoral time, ceremonial time, institutional time. In the end, the understanding Abel attains is the understanding gained by all who live in harmony and balance with the universe.

Ceremony is also organized mainly around motion and ritual. The role of the protagonist is to behave in an appropriate manner, and to this end he loses his mechanical sense of time; and his sense of identity is isolated in his movement within the mountain and within the ceremony he must enact. That his proper role is primarily one of motion is suggested by the amount of walking, riding, searching, and learning he undertakes in order to be a Pueblo man as the medicine man Ku'oosh explains to him,

But you know, grandson, this world is fragile. [p.36]

Native American time is a concept based on a sense of propriety on a ritual understanding of order and harmony. The right timing is that when the Native is in balance with the flow of the four rivers of life.

Two of Ceremony's themes which Silko develops entirely out of Laguna/Keres perspective, for both are fundamental to the fabric of Keres pueblo life and thought, are the centrality of environmental integrity and the pacifism that is its necessary partner. These are also common motifs in Momaday's work and indeed, in American literature in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Like Momaday, who was the first Native American novelist to take up the subject of ritual as witchcraft, Silko also uses it as a central theme, weaving these strands into the design laid down

in the clan story, which itself is the prose account or prescription for a ceremony.

Momaday explored the tribal mode of perceiving the conflict between good and evil as a complimentary dialogue and compared it both to the Christian belief that all pagan ritual is evil and is by nature opposed to the good and to the contemporary feeling that beliefs in ritual or witchcraft are primitive and have been culturally inculcated into members of a cultural system. Silko's book continues this exploration, positing a ceremony that will counter the 'witchery.' Like Momaday, she sees ritual as having dual faces, one evil and one good. But unlike Abel, Silko's protagonist is required to choose between good and bad, and the survival of his people rests on his decision. Abel is required to understand that all ritual is sacred and leads to the continuance of the tribe. Thus although the inter-textual link between House Made of Dawn and Ceremony has been much noted, Silko's achievement lies in realizing more fully than her contemporaries the possibilities of Native American myths and the storytelling frame, not just for ethnographic 'local color' or even for a context of allusion, but for providing the vital principle for plot construction and characterization. Also, Silko's novel is, and remains, emphatically her own, a narrative about ceremony yet, reflexively, itself that self-same ceremony.

Louise Erdrich's The Beet Queen (1986) portrays a North Dakota Chippewa, Russell Kashpaw, as a Korean war veteran who is honoured by his state as its 'most decorated hero'. He has been shot to pieces, has become an alcoholic, and needs a wheelchair after suffering a stroke. As the celebrants mill about, he sees himself as if in a Chippewa death vision:

This was the road that old-time Chippewas talked about, the four-day road, the road of death. He'd just started out.

I'm dead now, he thought with calm wonder.

At first he was sorry that it had happened in public, instead of some private place. Then he was glad, and he was so glad to see that he hadn't lost his sense of humor even now. It struck him as so funny that the town he'd lived in and the members of the American Legion were solemnly saluting a dead Indian, that he started to shake with laughter. [p.300]

Erdrich deals with tribal history as a mix of defeat and victory, the 'four-day road' to indicate Chippewa cosmology. She tries to debunk the stereotype in 'The only good Indian is a dead Indian', and the irony which can envisage the transformation of Russell as maimed 'dead' Indian into an all-American 'live' patriot. His musings are laconic, tough, rueful, yet free of self-pity. In building this and the rest of the Chippewa world at the US-Canada border, Erdrich deals with lives, families and histories interwoven, one into the other, and yet, at the same time, full of missed connection like the history behind their making.

For Erdrich 'Indian' has never meant a cheerfully harmonious tribal community. If there is such a pattern to her fiction, one of the 'revolving wheel' then it is the wheel as often broken as not, full of odd spokes, shards, lives caught out by circumstance. Characters, mainly from Chippewa dynasties like the Kashpaws, Lamartines and Morriseys, touch, move on, inter-marry and feud, always persuasively human, yet as if the inhabitants of an only dimly perceived circle within America's upper Midwest. If wheel and hoop are to be thought 'Indian', then the story, as it doubles back and forth on itself, almost turns that sense of circle inside out.

Told across a thirty-year span in first-person voices, the novel opens with Mary and Karl Adare, aged eleven and fourteen in 1932, who arrive illegally by boxcar in Argus, North Dakota, to claim kin with Fritzie and Pete, their aunt and uncle and owners of Kozka's Meats. They were abandoned along with a baby brother, by their widowed mother, Adelaide, who had flown to Florida with the Great Omar, an aviator stuntman. It is a first of many separations in lives whose connection is their apparent disconnection. At Argus, the siblings themselves part ways; Karl is raised in a Catholic orphanage from where he takes to the road as a salesman yet to find some connection. Mary goes about her life in a shared disjunctive manner, a life at the circle's rim. Their lives are

but two spokes in the wheel. This is a tale bordering on magic realism, and manages to capture the oddity of lives connected in discontinuity.

Gerald Vizenor, another important writer who has greatly contributed to the Native American canon, reconciles the opposing forces of good and evil in the manner of his Anishinaabe (Chippewa) people. He evokes the power of Manabozho or Wenebojo or Nanabush, the Trickster, who is the personification of the chaotic creative power that accompanies his main characters on their pilgrimage to find

nothing more than a place again. [p.206]

With this tribal and ritual device, Vizenor cuts through Christian-based dichotomies about good and evil, creative and destructive forces, and their analogues. Momaday describes him as

a brilliant and evasive trickster figure...He is the supreme ironist among American Indian writers of the twentieth century.²²

Thus far the funniest and most brutal Native American novel Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles (1990) might readily recall aspects of Chaucer, Dante or Cervantes in its use of the *peregrinus* motif. The most important achievement of this novel is that it tries to distance Native American fiction from its colonizer-influenced frameworks by reflecting the facts of Native life more faithfully than its predecessors.

Like all trickster narratives, Vizenor's post-modern novel, Bearheart is obscene and occasionally scatological, making the characters absurd and comical, because it is founded on the tribal perception of the essential humor of earthly life. Tricksters and clowns are common in Native cultures; the trickster is usually the principal culture hero of the tribe, but he is also an ambiguous figure who may create man, bring him fire, and rescue him from enemies, and can also be a menace and an amoral figure. In this work, Vizenor who, like Silko is keenly aware of being half-white and half-Chippewa tries to celebrate the unique status of the mixed-bloods to reverse the prejudice that has plagued them, and to make a hero of the half-breed. He slashes away at such prejudices and 'terminal beliefs' with merciless satire, exposing and ridiculing those who practice them. But Bearheart is also a serious and profoundly reverent book, and in joining these usually divergent impulses, Vizenor establishes the kind of chaotic equilibrium that the wilderness itself symbolizes.

Its thirteen pilgrims, each of whom reflects some aspect of Manabozho's nature, are led by an old Anishinaabe shaman, Proude Cedarfair, the last of the Cedarfairs who refused to leave their ancestral home in northern Minnesota to go to the Red Cedar Reservation, the fictional name of the White Earth Reservation where Vizenor's forebears lived. Along with his wife Rosina, and his 'circus pilgrims' [p.96], each a

mixed-blood whose number includes the seven clown crows, with Benito Saint Plumero or Bigfoot as the first to join them, and the mongrels Pure Gumption and Private Jones, they travel the abandoned interstate highways of America as though across a wasteland of a dark dream.

On their travels the pilgrims face and overcome a succession of perverted and murderous enemies, the first of whom is the Evil Gambler, Sir Cecil Staples, the 'monarch of unleaded gasoline', who wagers five gallons of gasoline against a bettor's life in a strange game of chance, in which he always wins, then allows losers to choose their form of death. Vizenor seeks to hold together the legacy of America as Manifest Destiny, Native-trap, and gasoline and fast-food culture. Such encounters, as one pilgrim after another dies or abandons the journey, will lead into Bearheart's (Proude) own final and transcending bear-entry into the Fourth World, which is the world of the native peoples much before the coming of Columbus, journeying backward into the ancient past of the earth. The novel ends with Rosina arriving at the pueblo and finding bear tracks in the snow. The frequency of violence and death, the extravagant sexuality, have aroused outraged puritanical complaints but once it is understood that the novel is shaped by Anishinaabe folklore and the post-modern tradition, the book is not so shocking after all.

In Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World (1992), Vizenor is venturing into the realm of shaman vision with due invocation of the Anishinaabe earth-diver creation-figure of Manabozho, and of the wise woman Bagese transformed into bear voice, as figurative mirrors by which to explore Native meaning. But it is for voicing his opinion on the 'Indian' identity in a celebrated 1981 interview, and his auto-biographical essay, *Visions, Scares, and Stories*, in Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series (1995) that Vizenor is better known. Both give points of departure as A. Robert Lee observes. How to de-invent 'the Indian,' and to re-invent, in his signature phrase, *post-indian* identity? The idea is amplified throughout his fiction of Native trickster pretenses and transgression, the fusion of fantasy and realism in the tradition of the Rabelaisian carnival.

Betty Louise Bell's Faces in the Moon (1994) has a female Cherokee narrator Lucy Evers, a divorced college teacher, who returns to Oklahoma just before her wayward mother dies. She summons the Evers lineage as through 'women's voices' and from across a 'kitchen table' [p.4], a family in which she has grown up as 'passed-around Indian child' and as the grown woman who 'every year (becomes) more Indian' [p.33]. Her homecoming stirs 'thick memory' [p.33], a litany of anti-romance:

Dust, outlaws, pretty black-eyed women raising children alone, chopping their way through cotton, good ol' boys and no-good men. Full-blooded grandmothers, mixed-blood renegades and lost generations, whirling across the red earth in forty-nine Chevys, drunk on homemade beer, and aged by years of craving under the hot Oklahoma sun. [p.5]

The voices which speak to this memory alternate between witness and accusation, comfort and recrimination, each in turn, originating from Cherokee displacement and dispossession.

Gracie Evers, defiantly yet pathetically repeats her credo 'Don't mess with Indian women', to be emulated by her sister 'Naw, I sure wouldn't wanna do that'. Drifting from man to man, Gracie's world has been one of margins, loss more than gain. Lucy finds a complete voice of history in their Great Aunt Lizzie, who raised her, and who acts as a means for the young woman to go back in history to the 1835 Trail of Tears. Through this history she can imagine the first Dawes Act tribal enrolment interview of the Georgia-born Robert H. Evers, to visualize the impact of the Dust Bowl on tribal life, and to situate the Evers line in the larger history of Cherokee names and places.

Lucy writes the saga of hope and poverty in her family ancestry.

Asked

'What's it like being an Indian?' [p.59]

her response shows an impatience with fictions and stereotype:

I wish I had Indian stories, crazy and romantic vignettes....Anything to make myself equal to their romance. Instead I can offer only a picture of Momma's rented house, a tiny flat two-bedroom shack in a run-down part of town. [p.59]

Years later while seeking out the Dawes Commission's Cherokee Rolls, she uses her writer-memorialist's voice with a supercilious librarian at the Oklahoma Historical Society:

I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen. [p.192]

This summarises the cutting edge of Bell's own novel and lays emphasis on the resolve of Native American writers to assert their own Native identity. By setting this trend Native American writers are moving towards establishing a distinct literary order.

Paula Gunn Allen's The Woman Who Owned The Shadows (1993) emphasizes on women's traditions which are the basis of tribal society. Women experience transformations in their life and their rituals are traditionally centered on continuance. In Keres perception the 'supreme being' is a figure referred to as *Grandmother Spider* or *Thought Woman*. She is the Dreamer, the ritual center, who sang her sister goddesses *Uretsetse* and *Naotsetse* into life and taught them the rituals they used to sing into being. Among the things they carried in their baskets were the heavens, the waters, the mountains, the earth, the *katsina*, the creatures and the plants. *Uretsetse* is also known as *Iya'tik*, the mother of all

creatures, and like her agricultural analogue the corn, she is the power of self-generation and regeneration which binds the people together and provides them with all they might need to live in harmony and reasonable plenty on earth.

Allen's novel is concerned with the journey of the half-breed protagonist Ephanie Atencio towards psychic balance and describes how the parallels between her life and the lives of the god-women help her in finding that balance. She traces her experience in four directions: New Mexican colonial history, her inter-cultural family life, tribal tradition, and personal emotion and perception. She suffers a mental breakdown when her husband abandons her and their two children, and she moves from one place to another, amongst traditional societies and urban set-ups looking for salvation. Her search for psychic unity is founded in ritual awareness that is embedded within the adaptive and inclusive properties of the oral tradition as well as the rituals of her Guadalupe people. She learns to understand how her life and those of her mother and grandmother parallel the tribal narratives. As she understands these implications, she is able to accept her place within the ritual tradition of her people and her responsibility to continue it. Her difficulty, like that of Abel, Tayo, Jim Loney and Welch's nameless protagonist, and Proude Cedarfair, is finding a point of entry into the ritual patterns of her people.

An important function of storytelling is to give people a basis of entry into the more obscure ritual tradition which will enable individuals to realize that the significance of their lives stems from connections with those who share a particular psycho-spiritual tradition. This makes the individual a part of the coherent and timeless whole, providing him/her with a means of personal empowerment thus giving shape and direction to his/her life. Leslie Marmon Silko reiterates that for the Native American,

the stories are always bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together.²³

In the essay, *The Native Voice*, Momaday offers a slightly different view

As with all literary productions, so close in the foreground, it is difficult to draw critical conclusions. There is a considerable group of American Indian poets whose published work constitutes an important corpus in American literature. There are relatively few novelists. Perhaps the disparity is due to the fact that poetry bears a closer relationship to forms of oral tradition than does the novel.²⁴

Love and death are twin themes that encompass the whole of human experience. Thus they become the core of the poets' writings in the interplay of connection and disconnection which form the Native Americans' most significant understandings of their selves, their fellow creatures, their tradition, and their past.

Referring to Native American women poets, Paula Gunn Allen says that because the present is inextricably bound to their continuing awareness of imminent genocide, their approach to the themes of love and death takes on a pervasive sense of sorrow and anger that is not easily reconciled with the equally powerful tradition of celebrating with the past and affirming the future that is the essence of oral tradition.

The impact of genocide in the minds of Native American writers is so dominant that even the humor derives from its awareness as the Chickasaw poet Linda Hogan says in her poem *Blessing*:

Blessed

are the injured animals
for they live in his cages.
But who will heal my father,
tape his old legs for him?

Here's the bird with the two broken wings
and her feathers are white as an angel
and she says goddamn stirring grains
in the kitchen. When the birds fly out
he leaves the cages open
and she kisses his brow for such
good works.

Work he says
all your life
and at the end
you don't even own a piece of land...

Blessed

are those who listen
when no one is left to speak.²⁵

Practitioners of Native American poetry are few and listeners are fewer. The Native people, who form a tiny sub-population in the United States and who hardly buy modern poetry or literary novels, are busy trying to preserve the elements of culture and tribal identity while accommodating these elements in the larger American society around them. The non-Native audience has different assumptions, expectations, experiences and symbol structures. Hence there is a difficulty in locating readers or listeners who can comprehend the significance of the work. Humor, then, is a primary means of reconciling the tradition of continuance, bonding, and celebration with the stark facts of racial destruction, though the same is addressed with vigor, resilience and hope. It is hope that helps the people to endure, revived in spirit, and enabling them to recognize the bond between land and their life as a community.

Another poem *Neighbors* might serve as a prologue to her novel

Mean Spirit (1990):

In this country, men have weapons
they use against themselves
and others. It is the dying
watching death. Light a candle.²⁶

This and *Oil* provide recurring images of the earth seeping 'blood' in a story that deals with a Osage dynasty dislocated by Oklahoma oil politics:

The earth is wounded
and bleeds.
Pray to Jesus...

The earth is wounded
and will not heal.²⁷

The land is lost and scarred by rigs and boreholes- the novel can be seen as a Native version of history written at the interstices of Oklahoma as 'Indian Country'.

The metaphors that these poets use are those that fuse elements of tribal tradition with contemporary experience: thus the poetry of the Creek poet Joy Harjo finds itself laconically entwining ancient understandings of the moon, of personal relationships, of womanhood, and of journeying, with city streets, rodeo grounds, highways, airports, Indian bars, and *powwows* as the background. We get a glimpse of that in

3 AM:

3 AM
in the Albuquerque airport
trying to find a flight
to old oraibi, third mesa
TWA
is the only desk open
bright lines outline New York,
Chicago
and the attendant doesn't know
that third mesa
is a part of the center
of the world
and who are we
just two indians

at three in the morning
trying to find a way back.²⁸

A contemporary Native American is always faced with a dual perception of the world but he/she must reconcile them. The ideal metaphor will harmonize the contradictions and balance them so that internal equilibrium is maintained, each perspective becomes meaningful and that in their fusion, psychic unity rather than fragmentation is achieved.

Both Joy Harjo and Linda Hogan incorporate a spiritual vision in their poetry. However, the latter's recent work is directed towards the politics of Native survival, which she, like all tribal activists, believes must include the survival of the natural world also. In an interview with Paula Gunn Allen, Hogan voices her deep, personal sense of the exact measure of global destruction we all face:

People used to think I was a very strange person, because when I was a child, I was speaking out for the animals, and I always will...But I also grew up with these visions of destruction. I feel that what people are doing from the beginning of the mining process all the way to the final explosion is that they're taking a power out of the earth that belongs to the earth. They're taking the heart and the soul of the earth.²⁹

One of the most complex of Native American women writers is Carol Lee Sanchez of Laguna-Sioux ancestry whose poetry is intellectually abstract and often jarring, with a combination of images, ideas, and insights from various sources that are far removed from

western categories. Her tone, posture, and point of view reveal a wry sense of humor with deep connections to Laguna thought and worldview. Perhaps she is not widely read because of her impatience with western stereotypes despite being raised in a multicultural, multi-linguistic, Roman Catholic environment. Her work avoids stereotypical images of Natives, it is mature and articulate. In spite of her cadences being closely attuned to Pueblo music and dance forms, her poetry can in no way be described as 'primitive'. She accepts her own identity without any question and is committed to her obligation of maintaining a sense of traditional propriety. In an interview with Paula Gunn Allen she specified:

I want to unify (the book), to give it the sense of proper ritual...That's what Indians have held on to. Even though they've gotten urbanized and acculturated, and even assimilated, they have held to those particular titles, or names of things that have become ceremony, that become ritual; that those directions, or whatever little fragment they've got to hang on to, it orders. It gives proper order. It also gives a connecting point to the spirit world. It is our bridge, our little rope bridge back into tradition. And that I think will be handed on. And the idea, I think, is for us in a transition period to place that tradition in the literary format so that it is comprehensible enough for Indians to grab it. Because genetically we respond to it.³⁰

Sanchez's poetry reflects this in that she writes with a view to connect with her people and with little or no concern about what white editors think about it. Her poetry combines technology and myth, politics

and motherhood, ritual balance and clear-sighted utterance, ironic comment and historical perspective in an attempt to keep that 'connection' viable in a modern context. In *Conversations #2* she says,

They have disappeared me
as they have done to all
my ancestors before me.
Are you watching?....

This is Not a Pocahontas dress.
I do Not wear feathers
or a headband
or beaded moccasins
because my tribe does not wear those things...

I'm a left over Primitive
and you're supposed to feel sorry
for me because:

I am poor and
diseased and
ignorant and
alcoholic and
suicidal...

We have Not been terminated
or exterminated.
We are here, all around you-
But- YOU disappear US
every day!

Are YOU watching?³¹

And in *Conversations # 4* she continues,

Father Europe:
I divorce you
from this tierra indigena
to me
this land filled with
tradition
long before your
displaced dropouts
began the rape and plunder
of what was already ordered.

Your genocidal tendencies
Have stripped 'la genta indigena'
Of costumbre and ritual;
That crucifixion complex
Woven through this social fabric
Sent that proper ritual underground
Or dispersed it into
Fragments of cross breeds
To leave only splinters
To fester
In wonder of what
Can't be remembered
That was forgotten or
Lost forever.

Father Europe:
I repel your future stake
in breaking my last connection
to my tierra-
this sacred altar
still holds the bones
of who I was.
those roots of me that
ache for knowledge of
who I might have been
before your Manifest Destiny
robbed my flesh
and diluted my blood.
I carry your cunning
in my veins-

your skill for mind-warp
 and manipulation
 along with my remembrance
 of the old ones
 who still vibrate
 in me.
 I am prepared to reclaim
 my land.

I stand before you:
 fully equipped.
 I am a New Age
 electronic Indian!
 carefully bred and
 tutored by you.

Father Europe:
 I dispossess you!
 take back my birthright
 with the force of
 my being.

This America
belongs to :
 my people.³²

Changes in custom and language, introduction of white education and occupation have resulted in the breakup of ancient ways of life of the Natives. Poets who address the stark fact of extinction no longer bemoan the brutal fate but have moved forward to locate the means of negotiating the perilous path between love and death, between bonding and dissolution. By using the metaphor of transformation or metamorphosis the oldest tribal ceremonial theme, they have attempted to build a bridge

between tribal consciousness and modern alienation. Paula Gunn Allen has written about assimilation and colonization, laying them against arcane and land-centered understandings, in a bid to balance between despairing reality and the hope that continued existence requires, as in the poem, *Transformations*:

Out in the light or sitting alone,
 sorting, straightening tangled skeins
 (they're always tying life in knots}
 I would like to be sleeping. Not
 dreaming, just blacked out:
 no one bumping around in my brain-
 no tangles, no deaths, just quiet
 empty nests, just threads
 lying straight and ordered and still.
 Outside the window I can see
 sweet winter birds
 rise up from tall weeds
 chattering. They fly
 into sunrises sky that holds them
 in light.³³

However painful and futile their struggle becomes, the cycle of nature will make them understand that change does not only imply destruction; one must accept these for what they can signify and use them to lend vitality and form to life. She concludes, "Certainly in the long ago that's what they did, and that's what they can do now as well."

She amplifies that Native Americans are resilient and their ways are durable. And while the dominant society has made it their business to assimilate the Native peoples into American life, tribal values,

perceptions, and understandings have endured to inspire the work of writers and artists as they continue to reach out to the Natives with this vital message. Highlighting the importance of the land, she says,

We are the land...the land is not really the place where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies...the land is not an image in our eyes but rather it is as truly an integral aspect of our being as we are of its being...Nor is this relationship one of mere "affinity"...It is not a matter of being 'close to nature'. The relationship is more one of identity...The Earth is, in a very real sense, the same as ourself (or selves), and it is this primary point that is made in the fiction and poetry of the Native American writers of the Southwest.³⁴

The centrality of the earth, unity and the eternal being of all things are also articulated in the poems of Simon Ortiz such as *Dry Root in a Wash*:

The sand is fine grit
and warm to the touch.
An old juniper root
lies by the cutbank of sand
it lingers, waiting
for the next month of rain.

I feel like saying,
It will rain, but you know
better than I these centuries
don't mean much
for anyone to be waiting.

Upstream, towards the mountains,
the Shiwana work for rain.

They know we're waiting.

Underneath the fine sand
it is cool
with crystalline moisture,
the forming rain.³⁵

The ancient bond to the land and to the spirit world is in large part responsible for this tenacity, and the strength of a benign presence speaks powerfully in all the works of contemporary Native American writers:

There is a permanent wilderness in the blood of an Indian, a wilderness that will endure as long as grass grows, the wind blows, the rivers flow, and one Indian woman remains alive.³⁶

Thus Momaday regards the Native voice in American literature as indispensable:

There is no true literary history of the United States without it, and yet it has not been clearly delineated in our scholarship...The subject is formidable; the body of songs, prayers, spells, charms, riddles, and stories in Native American oral tradition...has evolved over a very long and unrecorded period of time...it reflects a social and cultural diversity that is redoubtable...On the one hand, the native voice...has gone largely unheard; on the other hand, it is and always has been pervasive. Even those writers, among them some of the major figures in our literary history, who have known next to nothing about the American Indian oral tradition have consistently acknowledged that tradition and perpetuated it. That tradition is so deeply rooted in the landscape of the New World that it cannot be denied. And it is so distinguished an expression that we cannot afford to lose it...There is an interesting dichotomy here. We have side by side on our library shelves anthologies...from the oral tradition and books by contemporary American Indian poets and novelists. We must understand that the dichotomy is more apparent than real, that the one expression informs the other and that the voice is the same.

The continuity is unbroken. It extends from prehistoric times to the present, and it is the very integrity of American literature.³⁷

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CONCLUSION

That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.¹

Ecology is perhaps the most important subject of our time. I can't think of an issue in which the Indian has more authority or a greater stake. If there is one thing which truly distinguishes him, it is surely his regard of and for the natural world.²

At the time of its 'discovery,' the American continent was identified as the Fourth World of our planet. Today the term has been taken up again by its native peoples, to describe their own world- both its threatened present condition and its political history, which stretches back thousands of years before Columbus. It will be said: History cannot be undone. However criminal it may be deemed, the initial European attack on America happened. But history is not yet over and will become what we choose to make it. At the brute and military level, native territories are still being encroached upon. In certain nation-states Native Americans still constitute a majority and are struggling to have that fact recognized and respected. Native American activists and organizations like the American Indian Movement have found some redress through the process of law and ideology. And from within the citadel of what is now called First World capitalism, certain voices ask whether the end of the peoples

Columbus began to exterminate might not mean an irrevocable loss of identity and the end of all 'our selves.'

In July 1990, when the representatives of the 120 participating nations all over the Fourth World met in Quito to review their experience of the past five centuries since Columbus' discovery of America, they agreed on eight points which are prefaced by the Declaration. It acknowledges not only their struggles but also the communally held faith in the earth matrix and to the life and philosophy that explicitly conserve nature's resources, unlike the international capitalism that to date has been responsible for such abuse. Three of the most relevant declarations are enumerated as:

We affirm our decision to defend our culture, education, and religion as fundamental to our Identity as Peoples, reclaiming and maintaining our own forms of spiritual life and communal co-existence, in an intimate relationship with our Mother Earth.

We Indian Peoples consider it vital to defend and conserve our national resources, which right now are being attacked by transnational corporations. We are convinced that this defense will be realized if it is Indian People who administer and control the territories where we live, according to our principles of organization and communal life.

We denounce the victimization of Indian People through violence and persecution, which constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights. We demand respect for our right to life, to land, to free organization and expression of our culture. At the same time we demand the release of our leaders who are held as political prisoners, an end to repression, and restitution for the harms caused us.³

The Declaration suggests a Native American historiography that has admittedly witnessed internal conquest and oppression and divisive policies that differentiate between 'diabolically bad and hopelessly good Indians', denying strategy and memory to all. Hence one begins to recover the 'unwritten' history of American resistance beginning with Cuauhtemoc's opposition to several offensives and blockades by Cortez in Tenochtitlan (1521). A most formidable resistance, known as the Indian Uprising of 1761-1766 is seen in the Ottawa Chief, Pontiac's defense of Ohio and the truly international campaign of his Algonquin successor Tecumseh in 1812. Pontiac epitomized the gathering resentment of Native Americans to the invaders, recognizing fairly early, the difference in aim and temperament between French infiltration and the extensive settlement policies of the British, and the colonial rivalry between them. It started with the sale of liquor which robbed young Natives of their industry and endurance, making them easy targets for cheating fur traders and unscrupulous bootleggers. White interference also complicated the matter of chieftainship among the tribes; with the colonial practice of 'king-making' in European diplomacy, the invaders enticed friendly villagers with medals and declared them chiefs in the eyes of the 'great white father' across the Atlantic. The 1744 war between the French and the British known in American history as King George's

War was really the final contest for supremacy in which both sides used Native allies. Pontiac became embroiled in the dispute and in 1763 he not only opposed the western expansion but also led four tribes to war and captured nine British forts. This was the most successful Native American resistance to colonial aggression though with the French eliminated by the British reinforcements, and the desertion of his own men finally forced him to enter into a formal peace treaty in 1766. Soon after that he was murdered by a member of the Illinois tribe who may have been bribed with a barrel of whiskey by a British trader.

The Native American response to the white invasion exemplified one of the most important themes of the literary expression of these people since the early years of colonization. One such protest statement is articulated by Tecumseh, exhorting the different tribes to unite against the common enemy:

The way and the only way, to check and stop this evil, is for all the Redmen to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first and should be yet; for it was never divided, but belongs to all for the use of each. That no part has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers- those who want all and will not do with less...they seize your land, corrupt your women, they trample on the ashes of your dead...⁴

Indeed President Andrew Jackson (1828-35) himself described how the treaties were obtained: by first pandering to the predominant passion of

the tribes like avarice and fear, then encouraging white settlers to move into native settlements and telling the original inhabitants that the Federal Government cannot remove the new occupants so they had better cede the lands or be wiped out. Vividly reported in the battle images and spoken biographies of the Sioux, the heroic military resistance of Turtle Island- in native geography, the area covering the Mississippi and beyond the Appalachians, the Atlantic coast, which sustained the lives of many tribes- was ended only at the turn of the 20th century, by which time the machine gun had decisively accelerated the US killing rate.

Yet Native American tenacity and resilience in the face of such assault and against all technological odds, argue for a belief that is both practicable and renewable with its source lying in the origin of the universe. This belief finds a visionary resonance in Momaday's *The Man*

Made of Words:

I am interested in the way that a man looks at a given landscape and takes possession of it in his blood and brain...None of us lives apart from the land entirely; such an isolation is unimaginable. We have sooner or later to come to terms with the world around us- and I mean especially the physical world, not only as it is revealed to us immediately through our senses, but also as it is perceived more truly in the long turn of seasons and of years. And we must come to moral terms. There is no alternative, I believe, if we are to realize and maintain our humanity; for our humanity must consist in part in the ethical as well as the practical ideal of preservation...We Americans need now more than ever before- and indeed more than we know- to imagine who and

what we are in respect to the earth and sky. I am talking about an act of imagination essentially, and the concept of an American land ethic.⁵

Drawing attention to the traditional reverence for nature, Momaday emphasizes that one's sense of self is intimately involved with the landscape. All that exists is perceived as symbolic to the Native American. This gives currency to the concept of the Native as one who is close to the earth but not as a savage or a child but as one who assumes that the earth is alive in the same sense that he is alive. This mystical attitude is not anthropomorphism for no Native American would take his perception as the basic unit of universal consciousness which is the All-Spirit, the living fact of intelligence from which all other perceptions arise and derive their power.

In a more practical sense, the land is the place of origin, a source of sustenance and it provides for future generations. Thus the basic attitude of the Native American towards nature is one of living in harmony with it, not exploiting it for commercial benefits. They had little desire to conquer the natural world, and adapted their needs to nature's order. This is in stark contrast to that of Euro-America which found such attitudes and practices backward; which believed firmly in earning more than subsistence from it. It has remained a Western chauvinist's article of faith, going back to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, that the subsistence

methods of 'non-civilised' peoples can only afford them the barest hold on life which is at best 'poor, nasty, brutish and short.' The fabulous medieval-biblical mythic portrayal of the discovery of the New World in the 15th century eventually gave way to the pedestrian reality of conquest, colonization, domestication, exploitation, and inter-continental commerce. In subduing and exploiting the land, the white pioneer did untold harm to the natural order made worse by an increasingly industrialized, technology-driven reality. Neither society has adequately understood the other. White America has exalted the Protestant ethic to a theological level, figuratively worshipping at the intricately related altars of individualism, materialism, progress, and technology. To Native Americans, Euro-American society has seemed obsessed with the temporal rather than the spiritual, the individual rather than the community, change rather than stability, and chaos rather than peace and harmony. The non-Native Americans have viewed Native American life as hopelessly stagnant and inefficient, retarded by communal values, subsistence economies, and cultural ecologies.

Cultural hostility has inevitably led to political and economic conflict. Coalitions of white reformers and developers, religious and philanthropic groups supposedly intent on protecting, saving, or transforming Native American society have supported a long series of

removal, reservation, education, allotment, and termination programs, realizing that such policies would surely separate the tribes from their land; the Native American land base has shriveled due to large scale economic development aided by liberal rhetoric.

Contact with white America and its promise of abundance, the adoption of Western technologies accompanied by the aggressive disruption of their traditional belief systems, inter-tribal and intra-tribal hostilities, and inter-marriage caused a willing assimilation into the dominant society. Unlike other ethnic groups facing such pressures, Native Americans have not been able to harness the resources necessary to protect their ways of life. Their population declined as Old World diseases to which they had no built-up immunity, poverty and cultural change took their toll. While African and Hispanic Americans could muster considerable political strength by virtue of their larger numbers, Native Americans were few and scattered- factors that rendered them insignificant as a voting bloc either locally or nationally. Political and cultural conflicts within a tribe or between various tribes, and frequent tribal migrations, weakened Native Americans even further. Moreover, within individual tribes, inter-marriage and varying rates of assimilation into the mainstream society created new divisions. Gerald Vizenor, one of

the most prolific authors in the Native American tradition points out in

Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports:

Native American Indians are burdened with colonial pan-tribal names, and with imposed surnames translated by missionaries and federal agents. More than a hundred million people, and hundreds of distinct tribal cultures were simulated as Indians; an invented pan-tribal name, one sound, bears treaties, statutes, and seasons, but no tribal culture, religion, or language.⁶

He criticizes the fabrication of 'Indians' from travel and captivity narrative onwards, whether as daguerreotype, canvas, Cody circus warrior, museum exhibit, screen actor, or healer.

There were large scale problems of dislocation, leading to dissipation and despair particularly among the youth, forced by the controversial 'Relocation' program of the 1950s of assimilation into mainstream American metros such as Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and Minneapolis. 'Termination' refers to a series of resolutions and laws which sought to dismantle federal trust relationships with Native tribes, disputes over hunting and fishing rights in reservation lands, biased educational programs, unemployment and low incomes, police harassment and incarceration.

The 1960s onwards, saw a wave of Native American activism such as the 'Trail of Broken Treaties' march on Washington (1969-71), and the AIM (American Indian Movement) occupation of the Bureau of Indian

Affairs offices in 1972, followed by a siege at Wounded Knee in 1973. Until the activists made their presence felt, the general public was content to think that the Native American nations 'had gone out with the buffalo'. Unfortunately, the history lessons supplied in 1973 by the media were simplistic and inaccurate, and they failed to report the validity of Native claims of treaty violations and the legitimacy of other grievances. Eight years after the siege of Wounded Knee, the US Commission on Civil Rights issued a report entitled *Indian Tribes: A Continuing Quest for Survival*,- a landmark document compiled and written by a staff of mostly Native American lawyers and legal specialists who advance a unique perspective of American history and jurisprudence. It also explains that negotiations of treaties were conducted during peacetime. So they were basically contracts in which northwest coastal tribes gave non-Indians land to settle in exchange for promises of protection from the onslaught of white settlers and protection of their traditional fishing and hunting practices. However, land claims, law enforcement, and civil rights for them spell out violations of the rights by federal and state governments. White Americans, while they may not know much about Native American cultures or treaty rights, do tend to harbour a sentiment for the tribes. Whether this is because of the fact that they were the original inhabitants, or it is merely a romantic notion is difficult to determine. Yet

with the strength of these actions came a parallel resurgence of Native literary voices.

N. Scott Momaday became a touchstone for modern Native American literary achievement on the basis of his first novel House Made of Dawn (1968) ushering in the Native American Renaissance, with his familiarity of Kiowa, Laguna and Navajo history, tribal creation story, traditional theories of the universe, and his innovative voice achieved institutional recognition and public attention for Native American literature. In House Made of Dawn oral literature is not a static relic of past cultural purity but rather a contemporary resource in the post-World War II generation's confrontation with Indian policy.

House made of dawn is the first line of the Navajo *Chant* sung on the third day of the Navajo healing ceremony *Night Chant*. It is therefore appropriate that the focal point of this study is concentrated in the third section in correspondence with the Native formula. As for the themes, if the presence of evil is one theme that pervades the novel, one of its central images is that of dawn. With Benally's mention of the sacred '*place among the rock*', the ground becomes a potential site of healing for Abel, who lacked a sense of harmony with his environment and culture. Beginning with his introduction to the *Night Chant*, Abel begins a rehabilitation process which is set against a background of initiation rites

and religious patterns. The running motif is linked with his search for identity in so far as his final dawn-run is his ultimate discovery of himself in the context of his cultural heritage. Abel's literal run becomes a symbolic chasing after evil, of finding one's own self and a place for that self in the community. His run therefore becomes one of renewal and regeneration of his spirit.

The novel most significantly incorporates the motif that a person's sense of self is intimately and reciprocally involved with the landscape. And place and language, the oral tradition or the importance of the word, are also intimately connected in the world of House Made of Dawn. Tosamah echoes this when he makes this relationship explicit in his Sunday sermon:

There are things in nature which engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil's Tower is one of them. Man must account for it. He must never fail to explain such a thing to himself, or else he is estranged forever from the universe.
[p.115]

According to Momaday, one's existence has everything to do with one's relationship with the land, and is central to the identity that one imagines:

[the American Indian is] someone who thinks of himself in a particular way and his idea comprehends his relationship to the physical world.⁷

Foremost among the themes, and the main concern of this study, is Momaday's insistence on the importance and centrality of the land to a

person's sense of well-being. Momaday firmly believes in the sacredness of the land in general, and in the special regard for particular places sacred to him personally or to a culture with which he identifies such as *Tsegihi*, the sacred ground, the place of the *house of the sun* from Navajo tradition, Rainy Mountain in Southwestern Oklahoma which he reveres as his "ancestral home", and Devil's Tower which is associated with his Kiowa name and 'bear power' through which his people have 'kinsmen in the night sky.'

Indeed the Native American heritage has always been centered upon the landscape as a particular reality. Native American environmentalism is a way of life that advocates living in harmony with nature and to cherish it for its own sake. All the literary figures featured in this study are kindred souls with a holistic approach in their concern and reverence for land to create a consciousness about its sacredness and for maintaining harmony between man and land.

The 1960s era witnessed changing attitudes toward labor and capitalism, and civil rights reform or the anti-war demonstrations or even the revaluation of religious issues as is seen in the criticism of the use of peyote ceremony in the Native American Church against which the Navajo Tribal Council sought a ban in 1959. The final resolution came about only in 1978 when the US passed the American Indian Religious

Freedom Act. There were also concerns about ecology and environment. A significant percentage of the American population became aware of the incredible environmental degradation that had been going on for decades. According to the editors of The 60s without Apology, the decade ushered in an era that emphasized the importance of ecology and conservation:

Ecotopias do not exclude aspects of the other perspectives, but the emphasis is not in the end on the provision of material plenty: it is instead on the rational rearticulation of human social relations and our collective relation to nature.⁸

In the context of human responsibility towards the natural world, Momaday can be seen to share concerns with other writers and thinkers of the era; like them he laments the environmental degradation that is so prevalent across the United States. Rene Dubos the 1969 Pulitzer Prize winner and the author of So Human an Animal (1968), laments the way Americans have exploited the environment. Dubos is concerned with more than just air pollution, oil spills, and urban waste; he also articulates what many writers and intellectuals were concerned about in the 1960s:

All thoughtful persons worry about the future of the children who will have to spend their lives under the absurd social and environmental conditions we are thoughtlessly creating; even more disturbing is the fact that the physical and mental characteristics of mankind are being shaped *now* by dirty skies and cluttered streets, anonymous high rises and amorphous urban sprawl, social attitudes which are more concerned with things than with people.⁹

Momaday articulates a similar concern when he describes how the technological revolution has uprooted the people from the soil:

We have become disoriented, I believe; we have suffered a kind of psychic dislocation of ourselves in time and space.¹⁰
It is because of this dislocation that he argues for the formulation of an ethical sense with respect to the land and says,

The Native American ethic with respect to the physical world is a matter of reciprocal appropriation: appropriations in which man invests himself in the landscape, and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience.¹¹

In House Made of Dawn this need for humans to maintain an ethical idea of the land is fundamental. Momaday expresses this human connection with the land in the context of other living beings:

Man, too, has tenure in the land; he dwelt upon the land twenty-five thousand years ago, and his gods before him.
[p.58]

After years of angry confrontations and condemnations of dominant social institutions, the American Indian Movement's radical leaders, who favored self-determination in planning and implementation of government laws, started emphasizing in prophetic monotonous their traditional religious connections with Mother Earth and the regeneration of tribal values and life styles. They are guided by the philosophy that believes 'because all living things come from one mother, our Mother Earth...we (the two-legged) have to treat one another with the same

respect and reverence that we would our own blood relatives.’ In such poetic metaphors Russell Means expressed a collective tribal consciousness that there is spiritual significance in every form of life, that every living thing has direction and a role to play, and that we do not have license to exploit or manipulate ‘our brothers and sisters’.

But not only were Native Americans forced to come to terms with the transformation from a tribe and family-oriented community to alien social and religious systems which have encroached upon them and are fast obliterating their culture, they were also being shunted out, literally and metaphorically. While many urban-educated tribal peoples, adorned with pan-tribal vestments, were withdrawing from civilization and driving back to the reservation to live the way they have projected tribal life to be hundreds of years ago, still many others leave to attend colleges and find work in metropolitan areas. The movement back to the reservation is new in the experiences of these people following military service and assimilation and relocation programs; they returned to live and work *sans* the intensive revival of the traditional past. The movement corresponds to a general ecological temper and radical consciousness. Many returned to teach and manage tribal and federal programs. Donald Bibeau, instructor and director of Tribal Studies at Benidji State

University describes his home-coming as a return to “rest, to cleanse and cure and understand myself after a long period of urban angst.”

It is however, not an easy transition. Although many tribes were able to gain control of their own schools in the 1960s-70s and teach tribal history and culture for the first time, they have had to face the intense hostility of the school boards and state education authorities who emphasized education for life in the mainstream society. By doing this, they further alienated Native American children from tribal values. Young tribals who are educated are liberal and their attitudes conflict with reservation conservatism- the most obvious conflicts are with those urban tribals who espouse radical ideologies demanding immediate changes in tribal governments. Questions of identity often trouble modern youth, especially those of mixed Native and white ancestry. They wonder if being Native American is a matter of adopted life-style and point of view, or of physical appearance and the amount of genetic ‘Indianness’, which is traced by reconstructing a family tree.

The 1970s saw a resurgence of Native American tribalism with the Red Power movement intensifying the awareness of being “Indian” and at the same time stimulating tribal consciousness. The older leaders’ experience is limited to political acumen, while the educated youth speak technical languages of law and economics. Lion Cook is of the opinion

that economic survival is an individual problem and not a gathering of past cultural experiences for a mutual communal survival. James Bianco, President of the First National Bank of Cass corroborates, 'Indians are great sharers but they are not savers...they have so little to save.' True Indians are generally sharing and giving people who shun materialism and live close to nature and the old culture.

Throughout American history, the tribes were restricted to 'worthless' reservations- land which the European settlers and private corporations had at the time deemed without any economic value. Then because of the geographical isolation of these reservations, poor transportation facilities, lack of skilled labor, and an absence of capital, unemployment became an acute problem. This was compounded by poor housing, lack of electricity, improper health facilities, and low mortality rates, making them the poorest people in the United States. Suicide and alcoholism rates among Native Americans are also high. Teenage suicide is the most unexplained sign of community disintegration and personal despair. But time and again, westward expansion and technological change have enhanced the value of reservation land, making it a target of further exploitation. Archaic laws continue to impede the development of the tribes, adding to the chronic problems that keep them from participating in the general growth of the nation.

One of the original and controversial views to emerge from the US Commission on Civil Rights document is that greed, not racism *per se*, accounts for the apparent 'anti-Indian' backlash. The majority of white Americans are not necessarily 'anti-Indian', but the profiteers manipulated their ignorance, and using racism, not as an end in itself, but as a means of ensuring the promotion of special interests at the expense of the Native American tribes. An example of the increasing exploitation of reservation land came in the wake of the Arab oil boycott of 1973 with its resulting geometric rise in petroleum prices and subsequent search for alternative energy sources. Western reservations, particularly in North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona, possessed vast amounts of coal, oil, oil shale, natural gas, timber, and uranium. As oil prices skyrocketed in the 1970s, the economic value of reservation land rose dramatically. American and multinational corporations began clamouring for these resources, arguing once again that progress, destiny, and now national security make 'economic development' of Native American land imperative.

To a lot of Native Americans, the early 1980s were like Termination in a new guise as tribes were forced to exploit local resources in order to become the entrepreneurs Washington envisioned. By 1982 forty-five tribes from twelve states were involved in oil

production, and fifty-two were receiving income from mining. Yet such natural resources were distributed unequally among the reservations; this was not turning out to be the 'American Middle East' that Native energy proponents had dreamt about a decade ago.

Disputes over fishing and hunting, which intensified especially in the White Earth Reservation of the Chippewas in northern Minnesota, continue to create controversy. Fish and game wardens argue that Natives should be subject to the same laws as non-Natives in order to preserve game supplies while the tribes respond that white Americans have gone beyond subsistence even in these cases. Reflecting that point of view, the American Farm Bureau Federation passed Resolution 621 at its January 1983 convention:

We support legislation to establish the rule that all people have equal rights and responsibilities under the law. All citizens should be required to obey the laws of local, state and national governments. The "nation unto a nation" treatment of Native Americans should be abolished.

We favor abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and termination of special treatment of Native Americans and bring everyone to full equality under the law.

Also resolved: that we oppose the granting of power of eminent domain to Indian tribes.¹²

Legal pressures to incorporate Native Americans into the polity persist; many liberal reformers are uncomfortable with the special legal status

accorded to tribal entities. They argue that if Native Americans are to be fully accepted in the United States, with the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship, the law should be uniform, subjecting everyone to the same benefits and obligations.

Another major problem faced by Native American tribes along with the pressure of assimilation in educational programs is that of unemployment. The biased, assimilationist curricula, and racism among non-Native teachers and students, alienate Native American students. This reinforces the vicious cycle thus leaving them suitable for only seasonal agricultural and few industrial jobs in reservations that are hardly self-sustaining. Adam Beach, a well-known Native American actor said in an interview that the years of manipulation, of being told, “you’re not a good person” has deeply affected their psyche. A proud, strong people ‘corralled onto a little piece of land’ despite having ancient traditions that could teach the world how to relate with Mother Earth, how to relate with themselves, to the animals, to plants, to a stone, to trees, must first rid themselves of such a mentality in order to succeed. Except for some White Mountain Apaches who were successfully operating hunting, fishing and skiing resorts in Arizona and New Mexico, or the Navajos who had some income from coal and oil leases, and the

Osages who had oil leases in Oklahoma, most Natives had viable sources of income.

Finally, inter-tribal and intra-tribal factionalism and rivalries have continued to affect the Native American society, giving white American policy-makers a powerful political advantage. For example, the rise of the *peyote* cult, a religious activity in which hallucinogens are used, and the process of assimilation have inspired intense religious factionalism in many tribes. The Navajo Tribal Council has resisted *peyotism* since Navajo Christians find it sacrilegious and followers of this native religion view it as a threat to tribalism. Cultural hostility has inevitably led to political and economic conflict.

The state of Oklahoma looked very different when settled in the nineteenth century from the way it does now. Its pristine, almost arcadian quality which nourished the Native American's mystical attachment to the land, helped ease the wrenching experience of removal. The interior plains remained basically unchanged until white settlers came in the later 1880s. As a pioneer and historian wrote later,

pitted with the wallows of the vanished buffalo and broken
in the distance by irregular green lines of timber that marked
the courses of streams¹³

the land had absorbed generations of 'red men'. Because the tribes lived *from* the land, not *on* it, they did not destroy the prairies. To the first

white settlers, the land's most striking quality was a mantle of luxurious grasslands that were able to withstand recurring cycles of drought, wind, and extreme temperatures. As time passed by, the land's fecund look disappeared rapidly with industrious farmers burning, plowing, and grazing thousands of acres. Yet the memory of that verdant scene lingered. During the depths of the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s, a Panhandle farmer accidentally pulled up the cornerstone of an original land survey. The incident reminded his neighbour, Caroline Henderson, an early settler devoted to the land, of the time when the earth was fresh and untouched. She wrote a friend in Maryland that for her, the cornerstone

always...has suggested the beauty of the untouched prairie as it was when the surveyors set the stone, the luxuriant turf of native grass...the wild flowers which in their season fulfilled the thought of Shakespeare:

The summer's flower is to the summer sweet
Though to itself it only live and die.¹⁴

However, like everything else in Oklahoma, the seasons overlapped and competed with each other. Nor was the daily weather any more predictable than the actions of the people who lived with it. Nature did everything on a grand scale and with intemperate mixtures. Because of the great variations in the temperature and humidity of air masses colliding over Oklahoma, winds frequently whipped up violent tornadoes

or electrical storms. Yet, in an environment where everything- climate, soil, vegetation, topography, scope and isolation- combined to deter achievement, people endured.

Profound attachment to the land characterized both Native Americans and whites. But there were striking differences in their attitudes toward land use and toward the larger natural sphere of which it was a part. To the Native American, the land was one component of a great order of trees and streams, wind and rain, man and beast. He was but one part of a harmonious, unending cycle. Thus the only scars on the land were natural- marks of erosion, fire, or flood, as the tribes used the land with care. Towns in their territory were laid out neatly, and they built in accordance with the terrain, respecting streams and woodlands so that there was little sense of man's destructive impact. But their calm attitude toward nature seemed like apathy to the white settlers who were imbued with a different work ethic. This divergent view underlay much of the tension between Native Americans and whites.

The pioneers, actors in the long drama of filling up the continent, firmly believed in dominating the land, and gave man more importance than nature, a view that their religion, history, and human desire seemed to exemplify. Human energy, self-deception based on the desire for security and gain, and mechanical inventions broke the balance of nature

that had sustained the complex ecology of plains life. The white settler sincerely believed in his right to this vast, promising cornucopia. After he slashed the timber, destroyed the watershed, burned the grass, and mined the soil, he moved on. Indifference and simple negligence accounted for as much of the devastation as did ignorance. By the time Oklahoma was settled, agriculture was a business rather than a way of life. The coal operators and later the oil producers further violated the natural order each leaving ugly legacies. Soil soaked with petroleum and brine became badlands, while the patterns of gouging and filling the earth made while strip-mining created desolate areas that looked like ‘a giant’s plowed field.’ Early timber cutters did not bother to replant the forests that made them rich. The devastation of the landscape was usually the work of unthinking people caught in an exploitative ethic they took as natural. Much of Oklahoma was scalped; networks of gullies and sandy, scrubbed wastes replaced grass and forest lands; clear streams became silted, choked with debris, or stagnant. The fearful experience of the Dust Bowl was necessary to halt the chaos that threatened to destroy the land forever. It was a message written on the wind, echoing the ancient Native American ethic. Thus Will Rogers poignantly remarks:

We spoiled the best Territory in the world to make a State.¹⁵

Geographically, the granite outcroppings of the Wichita Mountains rise above the surrounding plains as weather-sculptured domes. They witnessed several frenzied gold rushes that spawned dozens of ghost towns like Wildman, noted for its post office on wheels. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt designated the area a national wildlife preserve. Congress later provided funds to purchase seventeen buffalo from the New York Zoological Society in an effort to preserve the nearly extinct species. A large number of old Native Americans in traditional dress camped near the specially constructed receiving pens in the Wichita Preserve and awaited the return of the *Great Spirit's Cattle*. It was a moving scene as the great beasts lumbered from the railroad cars back onto Oklahoma terrain. Deep emotions transformed the weathered faces of the Natives who pressed against the wire fences and 'recalled the old days when the plains were black with buffalo.' Within a month, in 1907, two calves were born. In a land rich with Native tradition, the arrival of the second calf, named 'Oklahoma,' on the day of statehood, November 16, 1907, was a good omen.

The importance of land, man's hunger for it, his attitudes toward it, his use and abuse of it, dominated Oklahoma history. Land for farms and homesteads, land that utilized human energy rather than capital, was the area's greatest lure. It represented the average man's last chance to make

security if not a fortune for himself and his family. Unlike the Native Americans, white settlers with no understanding for nature's balances or limits occupied this land and depleted its resources. The crisis came with the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and a realization that man's desires must conform to nature's plan.

The destruction of the natural environment is usually viewed as a modern problem. There is a growing realization, however, that from the beginning of American history, the Euro-Americans have been both destructive and wasteful of natural resources. They have come to realize that their frontier-sectional accounts give a glowing get-rich-quick chronicle of the conquest of the continent. When the Native American is brought into the story, he is depicted as an obstacle to the westward movement, and his respect for animal life and reverence for land, are usually dismissed as superstition. On the other hand, the white man, with his Judeo-Christian ethic stressing man's dominance over nature, had no religious scruples about exploiting the wilderness. Modern American social attitudes toward the wild animals show a persistence of the fur trader's point of view: unless a species can be fitted into a category of being 'useful' in a commercial sense, there is public apathy about its survival. A good illustration is the general acceptance of an extensive and

indiscriminate government poisoning project designed to exterminate coyotes in several western states, ignoring basic ecological principles.

Can modern Americans stand back and look at the historic western migration as a huge page in social history? Can they see how the white man's frontier advance is also the story of ravaging the land? The early fur traders who led the procession of pioneers were the vanguard of those who slaughtered the animals and thus reduced the Native tribes facing the frontier to a state of semi-starvation, making them easy victims for sporadic white military campaigns. Ironically, because of the exaggerated respect for the entrepreneur or the frontiersman, Americans have failed in their histories to condemn this early rape of the land, just as today there is no visible unity behind the condemnation of industrial pollution or the sacrifice of the priceless American wilderness heritage that belongs to all generations of citizens. Better knowledge of Native American cultures offer an insight into the difference between what 'wilderness' is and what we *think* it is.

The environmentalism of Native American religions is not a new idea; indeed it was reported by the earliest white observers, and it reached its culmination as a systematic theory during the late nineteenth century. Leon Shenandoah, the *Tadodaho* of the Six Nations of Iroquois states emphatically, "Nature: that's our religion, our way of life." Native

Americans live in harmony with nature; their identity is in congruence with the environment from whence they draw their sustenance. There was in their nature-ethics, a 'reciprocity' akin to piety for parents. The earth cared for humans and humans cared for the earth. They entered into covenants of mutuality with nature for the benefit of each. Demonstrably fertile women walked through their cornfields in order to promote nature's fertility, to make crops grow, and thus to help promote human life. Nevertheless, they realized that they had to exploit nature in order that they should live; they had to kill animals who they regard as their kin in order to survive. For them it was need that was the overriding factor, and it was determined by the primal necessities of life as these were understood and regulated by cultural considerations. As a result, they apologized to their slaughtered animals through rituals, and thanked them for the vital gift which they gave, their own lives.

Leslie Marmon Silko affirms that only through interdependence could the human beings survive. Families belonged to clans, and it was by clan that the human being joined with the animal and plant world. In the ancient times cohesiveness was all that stood between extinction and survival, and while the individual certainly was recognized, it was always as an individual simultaneously bonded to family and clan by a complex network of custom and ritual. This is exactly what Silko articulates in

Ceremony. She illustrates that the Hopi Pueblo elders have always maintained that the austere and barren plains and hills surrounding their mesa-top villages in northeast Arizona actually help to nurture the spirituality of the Hopi way which cherishes the intangible: the riches realized from interaction and inter-relationships with all beings, and that in order to survive, the Hopi people must 'live by their prayers'. The bare but beautiful vastness of the landscape emphasizes the visual impact of every plant or rock, and each is imbued with great value. Thus it is that the people are grateful to the landscape for aiding them in their quest as spiritual people.

The myth, the web of memories and ideas create a sense of identity which was intimately linked with the surrounding terrain, to the landscape that has often played a significant role in a story or in the outcome of a conflict. The landscape sits in the center of Pueblo belief and identity. For this reason, the people give a great deal of attention and detail to all aspects of a landscape, and have always been extremely reluctant to relinquish their land for dams and highways. Hence the Taos Pueblo fought from 1906 until 1973 to win back its sacred Blue Lake, which was illegally taken over for the creation of Taos National Forest. It is also for this reason that the decision in the early 1950s to begin open-pit mining of the huge uranium deposits north of Laguna, near Paguate

village, has had a powerful psychological impact upon the Laguna people.

In published sources many Native Americans have presented themselves and their nations as a people with a land ethic. Two of the most famous writers who have expressed this ecological point of view are Momaday, as this study has shown, and Vine Deloria, Jr. Each has contrasted the natural roots of Native American spirituality to the rootlessness of white American Christianity. Each has written passionately about the spiritual affinity of man to nature as the center of their people's religions and lives in contrast to the white repudiation of any attachment to the land. One may disagree with Deloria's extraneous metaphysical theories, question Momaday's poetry as a valid representative of traditional ideas, and attribute both writers' activism to Christian influence, but one cannot deny that their writings are part of the worldwide concern about the environment. The general secular concern stems from recognition of the polluting effects of industrialisation, but more specifically from the nuclear threat that looms over all. The image of Native Americans as spiritual ecologists filters down to education for whites, as is seen in the anti-pollution television advertisements of Cherokee actor Iron Eyes Cody, the two leading Native newspapers,

Akwesasne Notes from the east coast and *Wassaja* from the west, and many other educational publications.

It is therefore understandable why displacement from their land hurt Native American psyche in such a pervasive manner. It made their subsistence extremely precarious because upon removal, they had to 'learn' a new territory and become familiar with it in pragmatic ways in order to survive. Removal also meant taking them away from places charged with meaning and emotion. They were dislocated from sacred space, where they had emerged from their Mother Earth, where revelations occurred, where their ancestors were buried, where the powers of a living earth nurtured them. Removal was more than a geographical dislocation and political loss; it was a crisis of life itself, a religious crisis of the deepest order. When it was compounded by the environmental destruction brought about by white commercial technology, removal constituted a devastating religious and moral degradation.

There have been arguments that the Native American image is simply a white fabrication like that of the noble savage; that the tribes, despite their land ethic, were responsible for erosion, at Chaco Canyon and throughout the Eastern Woodlands where slash-burn farming depended on the ability of the Native peoples to move when they depleted

the soil. One cannot argue the ecological viability of such methods unless it is put in the context of Native societies which purposefully limited both their population and technology. The method therefore appears relatively benign. Vine Deloria says that the land-use philosophy of Indians is very simple and that man must live with other forms of life and not destroy it. He speaks for all Native Americans when he says, "every time we have objected to the use of the land as a commodity, we have been told that progress is necessary to American life." The white man's 'dollar-chasing civilization' is based on a conception of nature that he classifies as 'obscene...it is totally artificial.'

Unfortunately the US government continues its policy of termination, relocation, removal, and assimilation along with the destruction of the wilderness, reservation land, and its resources. The severe curtailment of hunting, fishing, timber harvesting and water-use rights pose the threat of extinction for the few existing tribes because several hundred tribal groups have already become extinct in the past five hundred years as a result of such a policy. In a nation that offers refuge, sympathy, and billions in aid to those in need, it is ironic that the indigenous subject population goes hungry, homeless, impoverished, and are kept out of the American Deal. They are seen as wayward and

infantile and alcoholics. The controversial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) generally afflicts them more than any other population.

The wars of conquest that began with the landing of Christopher Columbus on an isolated island of the southeastern sea continued until every tribe and every aspect of traditional life was practically wiped out. The wars are still being fought on reservations, in urban communities, along Indian-white frontiers in Mexico, Central America and South America. In a professional mental health journal of the Indian Health Services, Phyllis Old Dog Cross comments that the dominant society “devoted its efforts” to change the Native American into a “white Indian”. Despite the years of oppression “the Indian spirit survived” though not without the loss of cultural values and personal identity. The Native was taught to be ashamed of his tribal roots, and to emulate the non-Native instead because “white was right.” Paula Gunn Allen, however, says that contemporary tribal communities value individual members who are deeply connected to the traditional ways, even after centuries of concerted effort on the part of the American government, the churches, and the corporate system to break these connections. In the traditionalists’ opinion, rejection of one’s culture is the result of colonial oppression. The loss of tradition and racial memory is always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of the self. In short, Native

Americans think it is important to remember, while white Americans believe it is important to forget.

The belief that rejection of tradition and of history is a useful response to life is reflected in America's loss of memory concerning its origins in the matrix and context of Native America. America does not seem to remember that it derived its wealth, its values and a large part of its 'dream' from Native America. It chooses to be ignorant of the genesis of its culture and this ignorance helps to perpetuate the longstanding European and Middle Eastern monotheistic, hierarchical, and patriarchal oppression. Yet, even though the Natives are generally ignored as people of no consequence in America, they are the people with the most ancient tenure on the soil. Respect for others, reverence for life and land, importance of kinship ties, a sense of the sacredness and mystery of existence, balance and harmony in relationships both sacred and secular were all features of life among the tribal confederacies and nations.

Columbus wrote:

Nor have I been able to learn whether they (the inhabitants of the islands he visited on his first journey to the New World) held personal property, for it seemed to me that whatever one had, they all took shares of...They are so ingenuous and free with all they have, that no one would believe it who has not seen it; of anything that they possess, if it be asked of them, they never say no; on the contrary, they invite you to share it and show as much love as if their hearts went with it.¹⁶

As Native Americans faced the year 2000, the oldest questions seemed to be as timely as ever. Is this modern world, run by non-Natives, forcing them to choose between cultural and physical survival, between, as *The New York Times* put it, ‘tribal loyalty and the need to assimilate’? Was there any hope for equitable Native and non-Native relations? What could Native Americans offer a planet threatened by pollution of the environment and extinction of animals and plants? Or did the white man secretly possess a termination mentality, the idea that Natives will finally disappear? Spiritual leaders and creation narratives comment on these questions too. According to the Gros Ventre tribes of Fort Belknap, the creator left the fate of the earth up to human beings; that if they made this world ‘bad and ugly’ then he will destroy it.

Modern America’s urgency for goods and services has ‘clear-cut’ the forests and ‘strip-mined’ the land, defacing it completely. As the name indicates, the method of clear-cutting clears all the trees and the surrounding vegetation in its path. This is followed by the method of slash-burning which reduced the miles of once splendid woods to scarred deserts of blackened stumps and incinerated vegetation. The first settlers began an era of unrestrained cutting of the timberlands because to them the woods represented all that was uncivilized and savage- a dangerous wilderness. In recent times, ‘old growth trees’ in the National Forest

System have not been spared either. The term refers to woodlands thick with trees that reach to the heights of 300 feet or more, and are more than a thousand years old. Today the fiercest of all battles in the wilderness conflict is being fought over the felling of these venerable trees which the environmentalists consider a criminal offence because the life forms supported by them are invaluable and irreplaceable. This completely disrupted the complex of plant and animal life, what we now call the ecosystem. The ecosystem is a systemic whole, of which we human beings are a part. This is a Native American philosophy that has been largely ignored throughout by Western civilization. Calvin Martin's shot at the 'neo-romantic' environmental view of Native Americans as one of a profoundly different cosmic vision when it came to interpreting Nature, is something Western man would never adjust to. There can therefore be no salvation in the Indian's traditional conception of Nature for the troubled environmentalist. Western culture is grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition that "even if he (the Indian) were capable of leading us we could not follow."¹⁷

These two broad cultural traditions provide very divergent views of nature, and thus very differently stimulate the moral sentiments of their members. There is a mixture of selfishness and altruism in the attitudes of both. Hence Native American land ethics, like the humanitarian folk ethic

of Western culture appeal to both our noble sentiments and selfish fears. In traditional Native American culture, animals and plants are seen as fellow members of a *Great Society*. That is why they were mortified at the idea of slaughtering animals for sport alone. Destroying them is like destroying something in their own nature and spirit. Native American cultures provided their members with an environmental and ethical ideal which they never violated for fear of retribution if not the moral responsibilities that are attached with it. Momaday rightly says,

Very old in the Native American worldview is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, a dimension in which man rightly exists. It follows logically that there are ethical imperatives in this matter.¹⁸

Today, this is a concern of not only Native Americans but all environmentalists who echo the thoughts of America's foremost naturalist, Thoreau, who said, "In wilderness is the preservation of the world." A new bio-centric and organic worldview embedded in a holistic cosmology has already begun to emerge. The present interest in environmental pollution, endangered species, popularized economy are all harbingers of a consciousness that Luther Standing Bear, a chief of the Oglala Sioux tribe always understood, of the "earth as bountiful" and that we are surrounded by the "blessing of the Great Mystery." Aldo Leopold adds the following maxim

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.¹⁹

However, the pro-environment voice among the tribes has been one thing while another has been a negotiation of tribal councils to accept nuclear wastes on reservation land. In the 1980s, the tribes were not only involved in oil production and mining, they stunned everyone by imaginatively exploiting the white man's get-rich-quick ethic and their own freedom from state taxation, by initiating gambling. By 1987 almost fifty tribes were running bingo parlours, which the US Supreme Court regarded legal, 'smiling' on Native capitalism even if gambling was not what they had in mind by 'economic enterprise.' Is this a betrayal of the 'Indian' earth values, a sell-out or a parody of American consumerism? The remembered cultural history and ceremonial belief in the spirit of place have been challenged, dismissed, uprooted, warred against, relocated and re-relocated as economic fortitude has had its ramifications on the environment. Has the reverence for land been increasingly outdone by its commercial uses in the present day situation? Will earth endure the 'feeble clawings' of man's ego?

In the essay, *Tribal Councils: Puppets of the US Government*, Silko wonders that if the indigenous people traditionally revered Mother Earth and considered the land and all beings to be sacred, how can it be

that the Navajo Tribal Council's own company is deforesting the sacred Chuska Mountains? How can one explain the strip mines, clear-cut logging, hydro-electric dams, and radio-active waste disposal centers located on Native American land? Is the land no longer sacred to Native Americans?

She traces the answers to the tribal council form of government which is a non-Native form that was forced upon the tribes by the US Government in 1941 through the Indian Reorganization Act. The US Congress was not satisfied with the traditional forms of decision making and moved to interfere with tribal governments for the convenience of mining and timber companies. Acculturated natives who had been brain-washed in the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools or missionary schools, and achieved power in such councils were individuals who inclined towards white patterns of life, and had little tribal blood. This became an important issue in the reservations during the 1960s-70s when objections were raised against the financial and political clout of tribal councils dominated by white-oriented natives. These "Progressives" as they have become known, were not accepted as true representatives of the traditional tribes because they did not do anything to safeguard the interests of the Natives who were the most deprived groups. Traditionally, among the Navajo and the Pueblo people, decisions were

made locally through a consensus of the persons most directly affected by the proposed action. A consensus was reached only after the clan elders had discussed and debated with all family and clan members. If a 100 percent consensus could not be reached, then the proposed action was not taken. The people had learned over the years that contentment and harmonious co-operation within the community are far more important to the survival of the people than any short-term gains that aroused dissent or hard feelings.

If the traditional decision-making processes of the Pueblo and Navajo people had been respected, there would have been no strip mines, oil wells, dams, toxic waste deposits, or logging operations on tribal lands. But the councils made it possible to circumvent all that to obtain outcomes deemed favourable by the US Department of the Interior. The communities that refused to re-organize were penalized by the US government. Even the most basic nutrition, health, and agricultural aid programs were denied to them. The constitutionality of coercing the tribes to abandon their traditional governments for puppet councils has not been tested in court, nor have the grazing, mining and timber leases been invalidated.

When uranium deposits were discovered in an area a few miles southeast of Pagate, a village in the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New

Mexico in the late 1940s, the village elders declared the earth was the sacred mother of all living things, and blasting her open to reach the deposits of uranium ore was an act almost beyond imagination. But the advent of the Cold War had made the mining a matter of national security, and the ore deposits at the Jackpile Mine were vast and rich. As wards of the federal government, the small Pueblo tribe could not prevent the mining of their land. What used to be fields of corn and melons, and apple and apricot orchards, are now open pits which gape within two hundred yards of this Pueblo village.

Before world uranium prices fell, the mining companies had proposed relocating the entire village to a new site a few miles away because the richest ore deposits lay directly under the old village. The Pagate people refused to trade their old houses for new ones; this is because there is a small mossy spring that bubbles out of the village. This spring is the 'emergence place,' the entrance humans and animals used when they first climbed into what the Native Americans regard as the Fifth World. But when the mining companies could not move the people, they simply sank shafts under the village.

When the mining began, the village elders and traditionalists maintained that no one of their people should work at the mine and participate in the sacrilege. But the early 1950s were drought years; the

men who returned from military service in World War II and the Korean War had worked for wages and when they came back home to Laguna, they wanted jobs. All this ushered in changes within the community, and despite the old traditionalists' predictions of dire consequences from the desecration of the earth, increasing numbers of young people worked in the mine. The greed for the quick buck that comes without much effort, and compulsive imitation of the Western world has led to the degradation that has invaded them with this neo-colonialism superimposed on their resilient and philosophical values.

All places and beings of the earth are sacred to the Native American but only some have been designated as sacred. No part of the earth is expendable; the earth is a whole that cannot be fragmented. As Ruth Rudner asks, in her article, *Sacred Land*, 'what spiritual replenishment is possible if one must travel through ghastly fumes and ravaged lands to reach the little island or mountain that has been preserved by the label *sacred land*?' Even among the conservationists there is an unfortunate value system in place that writes off or sacrifices some locations because they are no longer 'virgin.' Those who claim to love and protect Mother Earth must love all of her, not just the places that are pristine. Native people believe that *Ma ah shra true ee*, the giant serpent messenger of Mother Earth, chose the unlikely location at the

edge of the uranium mining trails at Jackpile Mine for his re-appearance to make this point. The land has not been desecrated; human beings desecrate only themselves.

Given the Native emphasis on balance and harmony, it was shocking when, in 1973, Paguate became the one of the first communities to experience the unexpected tragedy of a teenage suicide pact, the victims being the brightest and most promising students. The usual psychological explanations of unstable family environment or alienation do not apply here. The Pueblo community was further disrupted by another motiveless murder of two young men at the hands of their own friend. The old people have their own explanation: destruction of the earth does immediate harm to all living things. The ancient Mayan codices foretelling the arrival of the Europeans also predict that over time, all things European will eventually disappear, at least the European customs will. This is a spiritual process; man-made crises and catastrophes could wipe humanity off the face of the earth. Could we dismiss these prophecies or accept them as the superior knowledge of an ancient civilization?

Modern science speaks of an extraordinary range of inter-relations understood years ago by Native Americans. It has taken environmental catastrophe to reveal to us why we need the rain forest of Brazil.

Ecologists know that a tree burning there alters in some way the air breathed by a citizen of Paris. Biologists are uncovering the fantastic and complex dance of genes that creates personality and identity. Physicists have introduced us to the world of the quantum particle, a world astonishingly like that described by the Buddha in his image of the glittering net that unfolds across the universe. Just like the jewels in the net, all particles exist potentially as different combinations of other particles. Everything is inextricably inter-related. The Dalai Lama explains

We must therefore develop a sense of universal responsibility...It is our collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family...and to preserve and tend to the environment in which we all live.²⁰

Yet, modern people have nothing to restrain them from plundering the planet for their own immediate gains. That notwithstanding, today, space exploration is portrayed essentially as a geometric and technological projection of the European expeditions to the New World in the 15th -17th centuries. We entertain the prospect of exploring and ‘colonizing’ the final frontier because we think we can. There is a complete lack of response and reaction in this ‘era of procrastination’; we are gradually but steadily moving from denial to despair. Worldwatch Institute, an American organization engaged in the study of global environmental

problems, reported alarming news from Brazil in 1988. Satellite data revealed that more than 32,266 square miles area of the Amazon Basin had been burned, causing the destruction of the rain forests that were home to myriad varieties of plant and animal life. How many more warnings do we need like this one from Jose Antonio Lutzenberger, the former Brazilian Minister for the Environment, responsible for the Amazon rain forests?

Modern industrial society is a fanatical religion. We are demolishing, poisoning, destroying all life-systems on the planet. We are signing IOUs our children will not be able to pay... We are acting as if we were the last generation on the planet. Without a radical change in heart, in mind, in vision, the earth will end up like Venus, charred and dead.²¹

However, to old Pueblo religious men, the discovery of the giant stone snake, the biomorphic configuration near the base of mountainous piles of uranium in the spring of 1980 by two employees of the Jackpile uranium mine, was not something extraordinary because the old stories do make references to *Ma ah shra true ee*, the giant serpent, the sacred messenger spirit from the Fourth World below. No thing or location on the earth is of greater or lesser value. The traditional notion of the wondrous in a splendid setting befitting its claim is subverted here in this landscape where the wondrous can be anywhere and is everywhere, even in the midst of a strip-mining operation. Therefore, people may blast the

earth open, dig it up, or 'cook' it with nuclear explosions: the earth is inviolate.

Mother Earth is inviolable.

And as Momaday says in an interview with Joseph Bruchac,

The Indian has an understanding of the physical world and of the earth as a spiritual entity that is his, very much his own. The non-Indian can benefit a good deal by having that perception revealed to him.²²

That, he insists is one of the most valuable contributions his writing can make to history. Momaday is firmly grounded in his heritage and the Native American concerns despite adapting to the 'dominant society.' Mere hurling of invectives will not reverse the situation. Going beyond them, he says the Native peoples' wounded psyche needs the right salve. One must emphasize the need to re-examine oneself in respect to one's indigenous heritage and culture and to acknowledge it, if not to retain it in its entirety, for cultural and generational continuity is relevant to withstand the acculturation and assimilation.

Given the hold of such a perspective, this thesis has re-examined the rich cultural legacy and oral tradition of a people who were until recently thought to be margins in the drama of nation. It has delineated an account of ethnic autobiography, some verse chronicles, as also Native culture-myths- a body of literature that weaves fact into fiction, each

situated within its own due context of history, locale, politics and popular culture, working through a spectrum of texts that call up inter-connections and allusions, but is at the same time a continuum.

With regard to the environmental degradation caused by human energy and spurred by a microchip society in an environmentally fragile state where ambivalent attitudes inimical to human interest operate, this study cannot help but draw a parallel between the Native American concerns and the ground realities in the North Eastern part of the Indian sub-continent where many tribes represent societies in which an ecological philosophy is practiced. The 800 sq. kms. of virgin rain forests in Upper Assam that spills over to Arunachal Pradesh are facing fast depletion due to ignorance and negligence as well as apathy of the authorities and the community alike. This lack of accountability, has had a serious impact on the livelihood of the people even in the vicinity of the 'khlaw raid' or community-owned forest of the basically agrarian Khasi tribe of the State of Meghalaya. If not for public intervention the many sacred and protected forests of the State might have been compromised to make way for economic progress because the Government has no jurisdiction in the ownership and management of areas owned by the community or clan. Except for the *Khlaw Kyntang* or sacred groves where people are not permitted to disturb the resident deity in compliance

with the beliefs and practices of the people by plucking the plants or cutting the trees, the sustainability of community-owned forests has been greatly threatened.

Stone quarrying in many areas has led to accelerated soil erosion and deposition of debris in the streams, drying them and depleting the life forms therein. Coal and limestone mining which is far from being sustainable, has already ravaged the natural environment, and continues to encroach upon forest land. Then there is the question of uranium mining which has long been a divisive and sensitive issue with both affirmative and pessimistic interpretations. The Khasi world view like that of the Native Americans is important in today's ecological age in which harmony, cooperation and symbiosis with nature is an imperative. Of late, there is a growing concern that the forest resources will be excessively extracted unless new regulations are made to control them. How long can this green gold of nature continue to nurture and nourish mankind as a mother does?

Perhaps comprehension need not come from obvious catastrophes, like the thinning of the ozone layer, or global warming or climate change, or the oil crisis- all changes that herald the end; but more through subtle indications like the sacred messenger spirit of the Native Americans, the stone snake at Jackpile, along the highway which is Interstate 40 now,

that will remind us that the violence against ourselves and against one another, can run as deep as the deepest shafts with which humankind has pierced the earth. The ancient Pueblo people called the earth the Mother Creator of all things, and that includes the green life, and the rocks that emerge in various forms, and has being and spirit. According to the Ao tribe of Nagaland (NE India) their first forefathers emerged out of the earth at the place called *Lungterok* which literally translates as Six Stones, as this poem, *Stone-People from Lungterok* by Temsula Ao illustrates:

Lungterok,
 The six stones
 Where the progenitors
 And forebears
 Of the stone-people
 Were born
 Out of the womb
 Of the earth...

Stone-people,
 The worshippers
 Of unknown, unseen
 Spirits
 Of trees and forests,
 Of stones and rivers,
 Believers of soul
 And its varied forms,
 Its sojourn here
 And passage across the water
 Into the hereafter.

Stone-people,
Savage and sage
Who sprang out of LUNGTEROK,

Was the birth adult when the stone broke?
Or are the Stone-people yet to come of age?²³

Native Americans believe that in the end, we all originate from the depths of the earth. Perhaps this is how all beings share in the spirit of the Creator.

In his book, *Ecological Medicine*, Kenny Ausubel says

I think that to restore our personal and collective sanity we need to get back on track, to rediscover a universe of living beings intimately related: the biosphere as our family. This family has values: respect for life, harmony with nature's cycles, gratitude, balance, and above all, reciprocity- don't take anything without giving something back.²⁴

Such a philosophy originates from what Native Americans indirectly referred to as the *Original Instructions*, or 'the first truth' that Momaday, while using an environmental metaphor to rouse all right-thinking people, expresses in his notion of the land ethic as, a matter of "reciprocal appropriation" in which man incorporates the landscape into his own fundamental experience.

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