CHAPTER II

_House Made of Dawn_

Momaday's _House Made of Dawn_ represents a watershed in the American Indian letters. Inasmuch as Momaday addresses the spiritual problems of his tribe in his fiction, his role can be compared to that of a holy man "a seer of heart and knowledge" (Lincoln 84). In this endeavour, he draws heavily on myths, rituals and ceremonies that form the raw materials of his fiction which undergo a process of transmutation before they become 'fiction'. In order to make the myth sound convincing, Momaday presents them in an abstract form which constitutes the "fable", the "story stuff" of his fiction. With his artistic intelligence, the novelist lets the "fable" mediate through shifting points of view, which may be called the "sujet" of the narrative. _House Made of Dawn_ is in many ways the supreme specimen of the "artistically ordered presentation" (Wellek and Warren 218) of the mythic and ceremonial cycles.

The chapter explores the process through which Momaday employs certain strategies to effect a transformation from the mythic mode into the fictive mode and explains the different experiences through which the protagonist achieves psychic integration. The first section shows how myths
and ceremonies underpin American Indian fiction and the second explains how the protagonist achieves renewal through ritual.

I

In his analysis of the distinctions between myths and fictions, Frank Kermode offers certain illuminating observations:

Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which pre-supposes total and adequate explanation of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time, illud tempus as Eliade calls it; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, hoc tempus. (Kermode 39)

The novel narrates the psychic dismemberment of Abel, who returns to his village, Walatowa, Momaday's reconstruction of Jemez Pueblo, where he grew up. Drunken Abel fails to recognize his grandfather who has come to receive him. The protagonist passes through a series of excruciating moments and has to participate in certain rituals with special concentration before he
can achieve a sense of renewal and psychic integration. Although the novel speaks of the here and now (Momaday fixes a specific period—the years between 1945 and 1952), events and beliefs of mythic time punctuate the narration. Indeed, as the narrative progresses through *hoc tempus, illud tempus* inexorably impinges on it. Moreover, Momaday introduces three voices representing three different times: Abel representing the immediate, the grandfather the historical, and the novelist the mythic. This he does in order to bring an ordering principle to the fable.

I argue that Momaday, in his fiction, has assumed the responsibility of a spiritual leader, a healer of the Native Americans of today. Like Black Elk, a Lakota healer, he is a *wapiye*, "one who repairs". He would do what the traditional healer would have done—renew "his people by singing the old songs, telling the tribal stories, as natural and necessary as breath to a culture’s continuation" (Lincoln 83).

In keeping with the oral tradition, he adopts the title *House Made of Dawn* from a Navajo healing ceremony of yore. He also uses the expression *Dypaloh*, which has been used in the tribal tradition at the beginning of a tale. Momaday does it not just to maintain the formal trappings of a traditional tale, but to remind his readers of the inevitability of the influence of the
sacred on secular aesthetics in so far as the Native Indian storytelling practice is concerned.

Momaday believes that the American Indians must maintain their distinct cultural identity. Myths, chants, tales have always been the principal repertoire of the ideas, the beliefs and the imagination of the American Indians. An Indian, according to him "is an idea [...], a moral idea"("Words" 97). In his fiction he seeks to realize the idea of being an Indian. In this endeavour he chiefly leans on the racial memory, the rituals, the myths and the oral tradition of storytelling. He offers a fairly comprehensive definition of the oral tradition:

[T]he oral tradition is that process by which the myths, legends, tales and lore of a people are formulated, communicated and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing. [...] Art, for example [...] involves an oral dimension which is based markedly upon such considerations as memorization, intonation, inflection, precision of statement, brevity, rhythm, pace and dramatic effect. Moreover, myth, legend and lore according to our definition of these terms imply a separate and distinct order of reality. We are concerned here not so much with an accurate representation of actuality, but with the realization of an
imaginative experience. [...] Storytelling is imaginative and creative in nature. It is an act by which man strives to realize his capacity for wonder, meaning and delight. [...] The possibilities of storytelling are precisely those of understanding the human experience. ("Words" 103-104)

Expounding the idea of storytelling, Momaday quotes Isak Dinesen's words: "all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them".

In his hunt for the "raw materials", Momaday set out to find a material "that should be at once oral only, unified, and broadly representative of cultural values" ("Words" 105). Being an American Indian himself, and having lived many years on the reservations of the Southwest, he was able to exploit the resources at his command. The technique of employing three narrative voices followed by him in The Way to Rainy Mountain, was cautiously experimented by him in The House Made of Dawn. In this manner he seeks to "transcend the categorical limits of pre-history, anonymity and archaeology" ("Words" 107). It becomes clear that out of his collections from the varied sources of "raw materials" emerge the "fable" which forms the story stuff of his fiction. And his strategies of artistically ordering and manipulating the voices and offering occasional commentaries constitute the
"sujet" of his fiction. Momaday's artistic adventure is comparable to the story of the arrowmaker:

The arrowmaker is pre-eminently the man made of words. He has consummate being in language; it is the world of his origin and of his posterity and there is no other. But it is a world of definite reality and infinite possibility. I have come to believe that there is a sense in which the arrowmaker has more nearly perfect being than have other men, by and large, as he imagines himself, whole and vital, going on into the unknown darkness and beyond. And this last aspect of his being is primordial and profound.

("Words" 109)

Momaday, as an artist is prepared to assume the responsibility of being the spiritual leader of the tribe and to take the risk involved in the adventure. In his *House Made of Dawn*, he performs what leaders of his ilk have been doing-- using words to do the wonder.

*House Made of Dawn* focuses on the contemporary life and events. The malaise Abel is afflicted with, is the malaise every other contemporary American Indian suffers from. It is the inability of the Indian to grapple with a situation arising out of the growing distance between the person and his
culture. Momaday finds the panacea in ritual enactment of certain practices that Abel's or for that matter any Indian's ancestors followed.

Momaday is like a medicine singer; fiction in his hands acts like "the conduit of the medicine pipe". He mediates between the timeless spiritual reality and the temporal mundane reality. The "rhythms and tones of drumbeat, dance, used in a ceremony and chant" are comparable to Momaday's manipulation of words in the text, words that carry the piercing power of sacred arrows. Indeed, here he assumes the role of a shaman seeking "a pre-verbal 'Reality' down in the world" (Lincoln 85). Since he seeks to re-create the feelings, the moods and above all the aura associated with the numinous, he sometimes draws on the supra conscious. As he plumbs the depths of such consciousness/visions/mysteries, he inevitably leans on the interior monologue and the surreal. I would argue that Momaday does it as a writer-seer and not as a modernist.

Larry Landrum advances the idea of shattered modernism in his reading of Momaday's *House made of Dawn*. Landrum's interpretation, however, does not adequately address the shamanistic reverberations in the text. If anything, Momaday is a manqué shaman, who takes upon himself the responsibility of providing spiritual leadership to the vanishing tribe called
American Indian. His text therefore should be studied as soundings of shamanism.

Momaday bears close resemblance to a Lakota healer Black Elk whose autobiography *Black Elk Speaks* is a sacred document of American Indians of all hues. An examination of the shamanic power of Black Elk would therefore be an essential pre-requisite for our understanding of Momaday's vision and revision of the pre-verbal reality.

Black Elk is a vision-seeker who opens himself to the reality around him and penetrates deep inside the wakan (holy) and perceives the sacred power. This is characteristic of most medicine men, particularly Luther Standing Bear, Lamb Deer and Frank Fools Crow. A typical Indian vision-seeker can live spiritually and materially in this mundane world. Baptized as Nicholas, he has not abandoned "the Lakota Sense of mystic naturalism" which he combines with the "Christian way of worldly transcendence" (Lincoln 87). Scholars, seers and others associated with the study of such extraordinary experiences aver that it is possible to capture glimpses of the unreachable reality through special concentrations—"strange dream images, a language of many tongues speaking in one, a fleeting sense of witnessing more than the common mind can see, comprehend, or tell" (Lincoln 87). In his autobiography, Black Elk recalls the Earth Mother bringing the sacred
medicine pipe to the tribe. Black Elk's narration of his visionary experience explains the extraordinary in ordinary words:

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all and round about beneath me was the whole whoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw, for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred whoop of my people was one of many whoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the centre grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy. (qtd. in Lincoln 87-88)

If Black Elk seeks eternal return to the origins of time, place and being like a Lakota shaman, Momaday assumes the spiritual responsibility of his tribe, indeed, of the entire Native American community, almost like a Kiowa prophet. In "Man Made of Words", Momaday records his vision:

During the first hours after midnight on the morning of Nov. 13, 1833, it seemed that the world was coming to an end. Suddenly the stillness of the night was broken, there were brilliant flashes of light in the sky, light of such intensity that people were awakened
by it. [...] I went on to say that find the event, the falling of the stars on North America, that explosion of meteors which occurred 137 years ago is among the earliest entries in the Kiowa calendars. So deeply impressed upon the imagination of the Kiowas is that old phenomenon that it is remained still, it has become a part of, the racial memory.

[...] 'The living memory', I wrote and the verbal tradition which transcends it, were brought together, for me once and for all in the person of Ko-Sahn. It seemed eminently right for me to deal, after all with that old woman. Ko-Sahn is among the most venerable people I have known. She spoke and sang to me on summer afternoon in Oklahoma. It was like a dream when "I was born she was already old. [...] Her voice shuddered but it did not fail.

("Words" 97)

Momaday's writing is to a considerable extent inspired and informed by Ko-Sahn's utterances. He attributes it to racial memory. I would, however, argue that it is indigenous cultural memory, constantly honed and shaped by time. To the extent that it is spiritually nuanced, Momaday's work becomes a ceremonial text.
Myths and ceremonial tales form the core of the Native American oral lore. Momaday appropriates these basic ingredients as he sets out to write a novel about the Native Americans. He makes the point clear:

I set out to find a traditional material that should be at once oral only, unified and broadly representative of cultural values [...] I have lived many years of my life on the Indian reservations of the Southwest. From the time I was first able to comprehend and express myself in language, I heard the stories of the Kiowas, those "coming out" people of the Southern planes from whom I am descended. ("Words" 105-106)

Momaday's House Made of Dawn has certain elements of a ceremonial text and yet it is a work of fiction. Here, the responsibilities of the artist and duties of the spiritual leader of the tribe are reconciled. If Momaday gives a detailed description of the beliefs and practices of the Kiowas it would contribute towards making the book a mere documentary. But this is not his intention. As an artist he would certainly like to address a wider audience, an audience that includes (but not limited to) the members of the tribe. Thus like
all great artists, he transmutes the raw materials. If the dominating myths and
the inspiring ceremonies are the raw materials, the novel as a whole is the
finished product.

An informed reading of the text reveals how the mythic and
ceremonial cycles foster a sense of renewal through ritual. Momaday, a true
artist that he is, manipulates the mythic lore in such a way that it never
appears obtrusive. True, myths and ceremonies are the essential
underpinnings of the novel, but he never uses too many of them, nor does he
make it too obvious--myths and ceremonies in his fiction are there like
raisins in the bun.

Homi K.Bhabha, advancing his theory of narrating the nation says that
an image of the nation "emerges as a historical idea in the west". In a
somewhat similar fashion Momaday characterizes an American Indian as "an
idea".

He says, "it is a moral idea, for it accounts for the way in which he
reacts to other men and of the world in general. And that idea, in order to be
realized completely has to be expressed" ("Words" 97). Writing, to Momaday
is a cultural compulsion. Assuming the role of the spiritual leader of the
tribe, he seeks to achieve "the impossible unity of the nation [Indians of all
tribes are indeed a nation in so far as they do not believe in
his fiction is a reconstruction of the American Indian discourse of the nation. In the process of his narration of the American Indian Nation, he exploits a complex of matrices of cultural apparatus. Indigenous cultural memory forms the bedrock of his narration. He narrates culture as a process of self-generation. For without this, the Native lore would wither away. Curiously enough, Momaday presents the past in terms of the contemporary. Inevitably, his narration hinges on history, which is an accumulation of a series of irregular histories. Principally he draws on the oral tradition, which is replete with such irregular histories. The myths, ceremonies, tales, with which the narrative is interspersed, are designed to re-charge the ethnic memory of the contemporary American Indian. In the process, Momaday re-creates and re-orients the American Indian sense of cultural inheritance and the newer possibilities of literary expression.

*House Made of Dawn* is an ambitious text. It is the first of the Native American texts or fiction that aims at formulating the theory of Native American fiction, differing in style and substance from the Anglo-American tradition that shaped the mainstream fiction. It is a book where the characters are imbued with a sense of the sacred even as they live in a relatively secular culture. If America is a nation of nations the book embodies the trials and travails of forming a sense of nationhood that differentiates the native
Americans from other Americans. The work seeks to "technologize" the word. Put another way, it explores the possibilities of infusing the performative aspects of the oral lore into one that pre-eminently belongs to the print culture. Momaday, as has already been said before, takes upon himself the impossible and somewhat an anachronistic position of a spiritual leader. He combines his priestly aspirations with his writerly ambitions. And it is here that his task becomes all the more daunting as he seeks to reconstruct a new American Indian Nationhood (not entirely in the sense Bhabha uses the term). Momaday's narration of the nation gives literary, cultural and even political expression to the poignant yearnings of the nation "the modern Janus" (Tom Nairn qtd. in Bhabha 2), the American and the Indian conflated as the American Indian.

One of the reasons why myths and ceremonies are central to his narration is that it is through these tools that he can go back to the years of the yore. In his book, Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson says:

[I]f nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and [...] guide into a limitless future what I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self
consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which as well as against which it came into being. (qtd. in Bhabha 1)

Momaday’s fiction can be studied as a mode of cultural signification. As he explores the different ways and means of narrating the nation, he delves deep into the "sentiment preserved in a radical memory". Momaday locates and establishes "the cultural boundaries [...] so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' threshold of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production" (Bhabha 3,4).

In his representation of the American Indians, Momaday has no wish to present facts like an ethnographer; he is also not interested in decoding and re-coding, and presenting "partial truths" in James Clifford's sense of the term. He addresses his readers in the manner of his spiritual forebears—he is chiefly interested in effecting a sense of renewal through his depictions of the ritual. Here, he delves into "the archaeological sites of memory " (Tony Morrison qtd. in Reyes 179). In the process, he transmutes the materials coming out of such archaeological findings. Like any writer of fiction he mixes *figure* with *fingere*, as Robert Scholes would describe it. He then places the text in relation to the context of the contemporary social, political, ideological and cultural situation of the Native Americans. Attempts to call
him a modernist, a writer who mixes the real with the surreal, a representative of the marginalized, an interpreter of all that is arcane in the Native American lore, would only belittle his stature and ignore the spiritual fervor that guides his writing. He is fundamentally, and quintessentially, a writer of the human condition who believes that memory is more real than the reality. His fiction engages in a dialectics of memory and desire. Mixing memory and desire to construct a text, which in many ways can be read as a ceremonial text, a sacred text of the American Indians.

Wolfgang Karrer in his article "Nostalgia, Amnesia and Grandmothers" considers the uses of memory in the writings of Albert Murray, Sabine Ulibarry, Paula Gunn Allen, and Alice Walker. Curiously enough, he has excluded two of the equally influential writers whose writings in many ways meet the genre expectations of the memory novel. The two novelists excluded are Momaday and James Welch. It is my intention here to point out how in Momaday's fiction both memory and counter-memory interpenetrate in the process of his story making.

In a somewhat arbitrary generalization, Lipsitz differentiates the world of men from the world of women in the following manner:

The world of men [as Zora Neale Hurston would view it] is a world of objectivity and action. It is the world of history, of events
and of progress. The world of women [...] is contrastingly a world of subjectivity and sentiment. It is a world of myth, of stories and of cycles. Men confront their dreams as entities outside themselves, as stories with clear resolutions knowable to all. Women experience their dreams as created constructs, as stories subject to revision under the pressures of conflict between desire and opportunity. (211,212)

A discerning reader who follows the 'fabula' and the 'sujet' of Momaday's fiction can discover the world of myths, stories, and ceremonial cycles that pattern his fiction. Momaday's memory is however, tempered by history. Here he is somewhat akin to Hayden White, who discounts the authenticity of historical narratives. Momaday's fiction, tempered as it is by racial memory, can at best be called insidious history -- he seeks to narrate the non-liner experience within a historical perspective. As we go into the text we shall notice the interaction of memory and history in the novel. Lipsitz differentiates myth from history saying "if myth enables us to live with one pain naturalizing it, history encourages us to ease our pain by understanding it intellectually and analytically". Lipsitz believes that neither myth nor history can present our experiences. This is not really true, as Momaday manipulates myth and history, he does not offer us a meta-narrative but a native narrative. In native narration myths, rituals, ceremonies form the
centerpiece. His narration of the Kiowa nation in particular and the nations of other tribes in general follows the indigenous style of emphasizing the repetition pattern.

Anyone familiar with the oral lore of the Native Americans can see that repetition is not merely a strategy of story telling but it is a ritual practice. And Momaday knows it too well. Critics have touched upon the different myths that act like signposts in the narrative. None, however, addresses the question of the resources of memory that facilitates the operative style of fictional configuration.

I would advance the argument that Momaday uses certain myths and rituals in the text as mnemonic images in order to preserve the spoken and the sung discourse. Chants, I would go so far as to suggest, contribute towards making House Made of Dawn, a sound construct—a non-notative musical piece with rich and powerful evocations. If anything, it is memory,—racial/rhetorical, that moulds the mood in the book. Momaday does it because "unless the sounds are held by human memory, they are lost, for they cannot be written down" (Isadora qtd. in Enders 451).

According to the theatrical tradition, memory mediates between conception and performance, it blurs the distinction between "the written and the spoken work" (France qtd. 452). A reader exposed to the storytelling
practices of the Indians of the yore should be able to discern that in *House Mode of Dawn*, Momaday acts like a storyteller keeping in mind the readers as auditors. Writing, to Momaday is a performative experience.

My argument brings together what the dominant ideology has sought to shatter: it rejoins racial/rhetorical memory, chant, ceremonial poetry to stress the power of myth in "nation" formation and spiritual suasion. I would further argue that in *House Made of Dawn* Momaday reveals his mastery of "mnemonic scripting" (Enders 453) that facilitates performance -- a virtual performance of the "native" lore.

Reading Momaday's fiction in the light of the performative traditions that inform it, I argue that, memory, the bedrock of oral lore, fashions the form and facilitates the textual affiliation. Indeed, memory acts, so powerfully upon the psyche of the protagonist that it triggers a vision that helps spiritual healing.

*House Made of Dawn* is meant to be a sacred text, and Momaday assumes the role of a medicine man to offer the prescription for the survival of the American Indians in the contemporary situation. Such a reading of the text differs from the other interpretations. Vernon K. Lattin, for example, thinks that in this text Momaday offers an alternative to Christianity and to a
way of life that draws man more and more towards secular and technological conveniences (Lattin 632).

According to another critic the novel "warns native Americans that they may lose more than they gain if they assimilate into the American mix" (Trimmer qtd. in Raymond 61). As has already been stated, my argument points towards the view of Momaday being a latter-day storyteller cum medicine man, a spiritual healer like Black Elk and others.

II

Since the burden of the thesis is renewal through ritual, I would first explain why the protagonist needs a renewal. Renewal pre-supposes decay; as we meet the protagonist for the first time in the novel we see him in a desperately decaying state. It recalls the "re-location" years, a time when the displaced Indians were seeking replacement symbolically. Abel the protagonist is also displaced and he must re-locate himself and locate his sense of place. His departure from the Pueblo leads him to alienation and estrangement (25). At war he "seemed apart from the land" (27), after the war he returns babbling, inarticulate, and drunk. He cannot even recognize his own grandfather. In Los Angeles, Abel is "too damn dumb to be civilized" (135), thus psychologically, physically, morally and culturally, he is a wreck, a wreck beyond redemption.
According to the Jemez Pueblo convention storytelling must have a sacred beginning. True to the tradition, Momaday begins the book formally with a title "Dypaloh".

The cultural focus of the novel centers around the myths, rituals, ceremonies that punctuate the text at certain crisis-points. I shall try to show how these myths shape the textual configuration.

Abel's decaying state represents a kind of psychic dismemberment, his alienation from the different moorings, spatial, temporal and moral. Roger Dixton Brown says that he is a "fragmented personality", "a misfit" (31). Curiously enough, the book also follows the idea of fragmentation. In his episodic narration, Momaday offers historical parallels and mythical analogies that determine the pace of the narrative.

Momaday's prologue to the novel begins with the traditional, formal opening of many "native" narratives -- "Dypaloh". In certain ways it can also be read as an epilogue which points to the ambiguity of Momaday's style of narration. It also has something to do with the fragmentation of the thematic strands. My purpose here, however, is to show how notwithstanding such fragmentation, the novel enacts the psychodrama of the protagonist's renewal through ritual.
There are echoes and fragments, flashbacks and flash-forwards, ethnic materials like oral tales, snippets of poetry, historical documents that form the essential ingredients of the book and provide a skeletal framework to which Momaday fleshes out contemporary events and characters.

The protagonist's decay and dislocation is clearly evident as when an emotionally drained Abel is described as follows:

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 the old rhythm of tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it [...] had he been able to say [...] anything of his own language [it] would have once again shown him whole to himself, but he was dumb. (58)

The description clearly shows Abel's alienation from his own culture, which has caused serious dislocation -- dislocation, which accentuates his psychic dismemberment. Indeed he is so alienated and so helpless that he craves for a psychic/mnemonic grasp of his ancestral culture. This aspect of his narration has been pointed out earlier:
He was alone, and he wanted to make a song out of canyon, the way the women of Torreon made songs upon their looms of colored yarn, but he had not got the right words together. It would have been a creation song, he would have sung slowly of the first world, of fire and flood and of the emergence of dawn from the hills. (57)

These lines are a mere echo of what Momaday had said in the prologue:

*Dypaloh*: There was a house made of down. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colours on the hills, and the plain was bright with different colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. The land was still and strong. It was beautiful all around. (1)

These lines emphasize the protagonist's desperate need to reach (mnemonically) the world of the pre-contact days. The kind of memory that would assuage his feeling is what Momaday would call "a blood recollection", perhaps this is what he means when he espouses the theory of racial memory as one of the principal means of narrating the mythopoeic imagination.
The miserable state Abel finds himself in reflects his problem of having lost "cultural identity" (Velie 52). More than anything else, Momaday presents myths, ceremonies and rituals that fall into focus of his cultural identity. Chief among the myths/ceremonies associated with his cultural moorings are the Festival of Santiago, Feast of Porcingula, the prayers/sermons of Father Olguin, descriptions of Peyote beliefs, Tosomah homily and of course the Novajo chant. If these are the primary rituals/ceremonies/ beliefs, Momaday also integrates into the text certain secondary mythical and ceremonial elements. My principal argument however, remains that it is these rituals that enable a psychically dismembered Abel to achieve renewal. Momaday also makes use of the Native American oral lore in his attempt to dramatize the trickster figure in the text.

Certain critics have identified Bluff Tosomah as a trickster figure. True he behaves as a trickster would behave, but his role in the novel is only minimal. Much has been said about the Albino. Lincoln, like others, considers him an evil figure, there are others who would go so far as to bring in similarities between the Albino and Melville’s idea of evil as portrayed in

*Moby Dick*. Velie argues:
Momaday owes a debt to writers like Faulkner for use of stream of consciousness and limited point of view -- for instance in the scene in which Abel lies half dead on the beach after Martinez beats him. Also apparent is the influence of Melville's symbolism in the significance Momaday makes of the whiteness of the Albino. (53)

He further says how Abel is regarded as a red victim of the white in America. There is yet another reading, which relates Abel to the Bible's first victim. My attempt here would be to examine if the Albino could be a trickster figure.

The trickster is a type of mythic figure "distinguished by his skill at trickery and deceit it as well as by his prodigious biological drives and exaggerated bodily parts" (Sullivan in the Encyclopedia of Religion 45).

The trickster's distinction lies not so much in the color of his skin as certain quality of his exploits and the indecorous dimensions of his bodily parts and biological drives. Given the extraordinary abilities of the trickster to assume unusual form, I would advance the argument that the ambiguity concerning the colour of the Albino's skin and the religious reflection that the figure compels, it is reasonable to study the figure of the Albino in the light of the trickster lore.
The skill of the Albino is best revealed in the chicken pool ceremony where he so easily outmaneuvers Abel. One familiar with the skill and dexterity with which a trickster operates knows it for sure that the tricksters are almost always invincible. Momaday does not give details about the ancestry, upbringing or the cultural mould of the Albino. But the Albino is made to bear the full weight of the religious experience that the text generates. If Tosamah can be read as a trickster for his "generative power" (Owens 109), the Albino too could be considered a trickster in so far as his appearance in the text triggers the religious imagination of the characters in the text as well as the informed readers of the text. My reading of the Albino, particularly his ambiguous and somewhat enigmatic role with novel, leads me to think that the magic and meaning associated with the figure of Albino can be better explained if he is considered a trickster.

The idea of a trickster figure is very much in the mind of the novelist when he describes the activities of Santiago in the book which have distinct echoes of the performance of trickster:

He rode on for many days and at last he came to the royal city. The day the king proclaimed that there should be great celebration and many games, dangerous contests of skill and strength. Santiago
entered the games. He was derided at first for everyone supposed him to be a peon or a fool. But he was victorious and as a prize he was allowed to choose one of the king's daughters. (38)

The chicken pull ceremony takes place soon after. Father Olguin gives another description of the miracles performed by Santiago that are reminiscent of the activities of a trickster. He says "now by miracle Santiago brought forth from his mouth the rooster, whole and alive, which the old man and woman had given him to eat. The rooster warned him at once of what the soldiers meant to do and gave him the spur from its right leg. When the soldiers turned upon him, Santiago slew them with a magic sword " (39). Paul Radin, an authority on the trickster lore gives details of such miraculous performances by the trickster. By extension, Santiago's miraculous feat, particularly his dexterity in "many games, dangerous contests of skill and strength", can be connected to what the "white man" does in the chicken-pull contest. Now let us turn to a description of the "white man" who, I would argue, bears faint traces and echoes of a trickster:

The white man was large and thickset, powerful and deliberate in his movements. [...] He got hold of the rooster and took it from the ground. Then he was upright in the saddle, suddenly, without once
having shifted the centre of his weight from the spine of the running horse. [...] as if the white man were its will and all its shivering force were drawn to its bow. A perfect commotion, full of symmetry and sound. And yet there was something out of place, some flaw in proportion and design, some unnatural thing. [...] The white man looked down the Middle toward the other riders and held the rooster up and away in his left hand while its great wings beat the air. [...] Angela saw that under his hat the pale yellow hair was thin cut close the scalp; the tight skin of the head was visible and pale and pink. The face was huge and mottled white and pink and the thick, open lips were blue and violet. The flesh of the jowls was loose, and it rode on the bone of the jaws. There were no brows and the small, round glasses lay like pennies close together and flat against the enormous face. The Albino was directly above her for one instant, huge and hideous at the extremity of the terrified bird. (Italics mine 43-44)

The italicized parts underscore the Albino's similarities with certain tricksters, particularly the unnatural and exaggerated physical parts and the splash of colours that accentuate his bearing. Later on, when we find Abel fatally knifing the Albino, the act chimes with Santiago's slaying the soldiers with a magic sword. I have already suggested that Santiago's action
is not dissimilar to the activities of tricksters of the oral tradition. Thus, it would not be entirely an exaggeration to associate the Albino with the trickster. Rather, such a reading clears out certain misinterpretations of this strange-looking white figure/man.

The Albino evokes the impression of a trickster in his encounter with Abel:

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 his lips and the hot slippery point of the tongue, writhing. [...] The white immensity of flesh lay over and smothered him. (82)

Here, the Albino creates the illusion/impression of a snake. One who is familiar with the trickster lore knows it that the trickster can transform himself into any animal, even a reptile. Towards the conclusion of the chapter the Albino assumes the shape of a fish: "The white hairless arm shown like the underside of a fish, and the dark nails of the hand seemed a string of great black beads" (84).

A non-Indian reader cannot possibly perceive the subtlety involved in these descriptions. Clearly, Momaday intends to present the Albino as a trickster.
An artist that he is, he shuns presenting the figure of ethnographically, he allows the trickster figure to appear in the text as the $\delta$ echo of an echo. Momaday does it for yet another reason. Himself a Native American, he uses fiction as a mode of self-examination. John Updike, one of the foremost of the contemporary American novelists, commenting on fiction's subtlety says: "fiction is nothing less than the subtlest instrument for self-examination and self-display that mankind has invented yet" (Updike qtd. in Meyer 576).

I have said earlier, Momaday, like Black Elk, assumes the role of the spiritual leader of the tribe. He seeks to understand and apply the ideas of the oral tradition to his text. Thus, in his depiction of the Albino, Momaday experiments with the idea of subtle fictional recreation of the trickster. Perhaps, he suggests that in our everyday life there is a possibility of encountering a trickster in a different guise. This way he instructs and reminds the Native Americans of their native culture. In this connection it would be pertinent to follow what Meyer says: "Myths can be a window onto a culture's deepest perceptions about itself, because myths explain what otherwise seems unexplainable: a people's origin, purpose and destiny" (2010). It is precisely for this reason that Momaday takes upon himself the responsibility of being the spiritual leader/medicine man of not only the Kiowas but of the entire "native" community.
In the ceremonial game, Abel tries but fails to pull a rooster out of the ground. If anything, this indicates Abel's failure in his attempts to align himself with the tribal tradition. To make matters worse, the event intensifies his gloom. But it can also be said that it makes him conscious of the Jemez culture. While it accentuates his sense of dislocation it also emphasizes his need for location in culture. In order to achieve this he has to participate in ceremonies inspired by different myths.

Chanting in the sun is one of the important activities of the American Indians. Momaday gives a brief description of corn dance at Kochiti through the eyes of a white woman Angela who, is fascinated by Abel:

Angela thought of Abel, of the way he had looked at her like a wooden Indian his face cold and expressionless. A few days before she had seen the corn dance at Kochiti. It was beautiful and strange. It had seemed to her that the dancers meant to dance forever in the slow, deliberate way. There was something so grave and mysterious in it, those old men chanting in the sun, and the dancers so [...] so terribly serious in what they were doing. [...] Their eyes were held upon some vision out of range, something away in the end of distance, some reality that she did not know, or
even suspect. What was it that they saw? [...] To see beyond the landscape, beyond every shape and shadow and colour, *that* was to see nothing. That was to be free and finished, complete, spiritual. [...] She set her mind at ease and looked into the fire. It has gone to embers and, there were only the intermittent blue and yellow flames, small and going out. (36-37)

The description is intended to evoke a sense of numinous feeling.

Abel's sexual encounter with Angela takes place at a critical moment in his life. Although ruinously acculturated, Abel still bears the "Native" attitude towards sex. It has already been pointed out that Abel has not been able to integrate himself with the community. He is portrayed in the text as one whose morale has reached the lowest ebb -- he lacks self-confidence and he feels beaten by life. At this juncture, he meets Angela. It is evident that it is Angela who leads him to the act. Critics however, are mostly silent about the holy associations and the healing power of his sexual intimacy with Angela, which is a powerfully ritualized moment. The experience is explicable in terms of Momaday's idea of "blood memory". Sure enough,
what was going to be a perfunctory operation; surprisingly turned out to be a sacred act. I would argue that here Abel is unconsciously affected by “blood memory” (racial memory). He does what an American Indian would do — he makes it a sacred experience. From Abel’s point of view, the whole act could be considered as a ceremony. In fact, he seeks to “sacralize” what has been “de-sacralized”. The following lines are charged with ceremonial overtones:

Oh no, Oh no! she thought, but he knew what he was doing. His tongue and tips of his fingers were everywhere upon her, and he brought her back so slowly, and set such awful fire to her flesh, that she wanted to scream. At last he raised up and she set herself for him. She was moaning softly and her eyes rolled. He was dark and massive above her, poised and tinged with pale blue light.

And in that split second she thought again of the badger at the water, and the great bear, blue-black and blowing.

These lines underscore Abel's capacity for renewal; they suggest his self-confidence, even his self-esteem is re-awakened. This is clearly a momentous event in his journey towards self-renewal.

Abel's ceremonial congress with Angela has other ramifications. Angela's name is “identifiable with Mary, our Lady of the Angels, who
happens to be the patroness of the Bahkyush people of Waladowa, a patroness they also refer to as Porcingula” (Owens 105).

In his interpretation of Abel's sexual intimacy with Angela, Owens argues that the act unites Angela's physical and spiritual selves. I hold that it is the other way round. The words Momaday associates him with evoke the image of a bear: "[H]e was dark and massive .[...] She thought again of the badger at the water, and the great bear, blue-black and glowing" (64). Badger and bear are looked upon as powerful healers by the Jemez people. If Abel is able to effect a cure, he also in the process, acquires almost talismanic power, this is by no means a small achievement for a person who has only recently failed miserably in re-locating himself in his own community. I would, therefore, view the peak experience achieved by Angela and Abel as spiritually revivifying.

As the text progresses, we are given an account of the feast of Porcingula. In a ceremony like this, the lady of the Angels is raised at the center of the north side and adjacent to the kiva. In this ceremonial participation the whole community is inspired by the carnival mood. Francis, Abel's grandfather gives a detailed description of it:

He felt the whirlwinds which ran upon the roofs and heard the distant bleating and lowing of the livestock, milling about on the
weather's edge. And under him the great rafters of the kiva vibrated with the sound of thunder and drums. He looked south and west in the direction of the sunlit field; they lay out like patchwork in the pool of light; and beyond, the black line of mesa was edged with light.

Abel, throughout the ceremonial proceedings, appeared to be uninvolved but he was by no means unaffected by it. Soon after the Porcingula feast, Abel kills his tormentor, the Albino. Momaday, the artist, would not establish a direct connection between the two, but it is possible to read the ceremony as one that re-acquaints him with his tradition and prepares him for the eventual psychic integration. Abel's humiliation at the chicken pull ceremony underscores his alienation from the ceremonies that strengthen and sustain the members of the community. The Albino has been described as an evil. My reading of the enigmatic figure has been that of a trickster whose function it is to disturb the equilibrium and at the same time to jog the racial memory of the tribe. Slowly but surely, Abel is seeking and to some extent achieving a re-integration with his own tribe. Given the intimacy, it is but natural for critics like Owens to find homoerotic suggestion between the two. My interpretation, however, is that the Albino is Abel's other self—the evil
self that has up until its killing, had over powered him. Having killed the Albino, Abel has done away with the splintered part of the self. Now Abel should be in a position to seek a new alignment that would bring balance, harmony and equability in him.

One of the intriguing figures Tosamah, the priest of the sun, is regarded by some as "Momaday's mouthpiece" (Kerr 176). While it is true that the priest assumes the role of a leader, he is not meant to be Momaday's spokesman. However, his treatment of the Peyote cult echoes Momaday's strategy of survival of the American Indian in today's situation. The Native American church, of which Tosamah is the priest, retains certain rituals and practices that are not exactly Christian. Indeed, such practices, Momaday would feel, are the mainstay of the Native American church. Curiously enough, certain Peyote services, which appear to be sacrilegious, turn out to be sacred. The priest preaches two sermons: the Gospel according to St. John and the one relating to the elegiac history of the Kiowa.

The priest emphasizes the magical power of words in Native American culture. He also recounts the story narrated by his grandmother. As his grandmother would say: "The Kiowas were a sun dance culture and Tai-me was their sun dance doll, their most sacred fetish, no medicine was ever more powerful"(96). He then recounts a Kiowa story learnt from his grandmother.
The story says how Tai-me can come to the rescue of the Kiowas suddenly and unexpectedly. Kiowas believe that Tai-me has existed for hundreds of years not in the printed word but by the word of mouth. If there is any similarity between Momaday and the priest it is their profound faith in "words" and the myth that comes out of words.

Early in the chapter I have pointed out how Momaday aims at a fusion of myth and history. This is especially important for the Native Americans particularly for persons like Abel who have lost connection with the native culture. This he achieves with the help of his dialectical imagination, which mediates between myth and history. *House Made of Dawn* is a product of the interaction between myths (including, but not confined to Kiowa myths) and history.

Having been involved with the holiness of the peyote rituals, Abel is ready to take a leap into Native American faith. But he does not achieve it soon. He is engaged in a fight against a sinister force in the person of a policeman who beats him severely. In the end however, he comes back and prepares himself for a final redemptive action. Abel cannot possibly relieve himself of the burden unaided. He sorely needs the help of a spiritual healer. Such help is available to him from his grandfather.
In Native American culture the role of the father is minimal, but the role of the grandfather is of crucial importance. Francisco, Abel's grandfather helps him achieve psychic re-location in a remarkable manner. Baine Kerr, has certain pertinent observations in this regard:

Abel's grandfather acts as the alembic that transmutes the novel’s confusions; his retrospection marks off the book's boundaries, points of reference and focal themes: the great organic calendar of the black mesa--the house of the sun [...] integrating the ceremonies rendered in the Part One and the source place by which Abel and Vidal [Abel's brother] could "reckon where they were, where all things were, in time". The summoning of the highest of Indian graces and abilities in Francisco's bear hunt, his passion for the witch spirit Porcingula; his fear and loss with their stillborn child, his participation in ritual, his "perfect act" in drumming for the dancers, which determined his stature and enabled him to heal.

(171-78)

Before his death, Abel's grandfather recollects and makes Abel participate imaginatively in the ritual bear hunt, a ceremony that is associated with the sacred, the mysterious and the magical powers. In the chapter "The Night
Chanter", which forms the centerpiece of the novel, concentrates on "Beauty way and Night Chant":

Tse'gihi

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 a 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 for 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. (146-47)

The chant emphasizes the incantatory magic formula of the American Indian. It further underscores the significance of words in their culture. Momaday feels that modern American Indians can take the magic formula as a prescription for survival. Assuming the role of a latter-day medicine man, Momaday calls upon the American Indians to re-locate themselves in their native culture and the chant is only one of the brilliant specimens of their invigorating oral tradition.

The book punctuates with Francisco’s recollections of his ceremonial runs. One of the important messages for his grandson is delivered on his death bed where he narrates how he overcame his physical and psychical setbacks and "ran beyond his pain" (188). Abel takes the message and when the old man finally dies he knows what he should do. He prepares his grandfather for a proper burial and does everything that a Native American should do. Then comes his own running -- dawn running. It is a race with other ceremonial runners where Abel runs "beyond his pain".

There are many who say that Abel’s running is a desperate act, one might even say that it is a run onto his death. But I hold that it is not so, for
the novel shows how slowly but surely the novelist builds up his story on a sure footing to lead the protagonist to self renewal. His participation in the different rituals has strengthened his sagging morale. A discerning reader should be able to see how through different stages the protagonist gains in physical, moral and above all spiritual confidence. It can be said that the rituals in the novel are meant to be his confidence-building measures, preparing the protagonist for the psychic integration. Finally, we see the protagonist is not only renewed but also re-invigorated and re-located in his culture.