The **Way to Rainy Mountain** is about the history of journey and migration of Kiowa people. Scott Momaday visualizes the genesis, sufferings and consolidation of his people through a folkloristic journey. He uses the motif of journey to recuperate the dismembered history of Kiowa people. One has to understand the motif of heroic journey introduced through mythology to analyze the thematic concerns of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. The journey of a hero as a motif is an essential pattern of myth. It has evolved into a pattern of life, growth and experience. Critics view the heroic journey as a process of self discovery, self integration and an act of maintaining harmony in life. Besides representing the nuances of life, it provides new insights, perspectives and understanding. While centering the theme on the journey motif, Momaday has subverted the very perception of journey motif rooted in myths and legends from its traditional depiction. Momaday has liberated the journey motif from the western perception of fictional adventures. Portraying the journey motif as the pattern of human experience, Reg Harris and Susan Thompson in their *The Hero’s Journey: A Guide to Literature and Life*, and in “The Hero’s Journey: Life’s Great Adventure” depict the three segments in Hero’s journey pattern: separation from the known world, initiation / transformation in the unknown and return to the known. Janis P. Stout in *The Journey Narrative in American
Literature: Patterns and Departures (1983) identifies five basic recurring patterns of the journey: exploration and escape, home seeking, return, heroic quest and wandering. Stout demonstrates the complex and interwoven patterns of the journey narrative. He illustrates all the inclusiveness of the journey motif in the mainstream American literature. He pursues the theme into the realm of poetry and relates the narratives of fictional journey to the American historical experience.

This pattern of individualism is transformed into the development of a community by Momaday in The Way to Rainy Mountain. He transforms the journey into a pilgrimage and provides an accurate account with the ultimate aim of propagating Pan Humanism and Tribal wisdom. Native mythology becomes a manifestation and demonstration of history. Presenting the genesis of Kiowa tribe in three different voices, Momaday presents the absolute split between representation of Indigene as Other and White as the self. Elucidating the mythological stories in the first part, Momaday’s attempt to historicize the personal experiences can be perceived in the light of Walter J. Ong’s phenomenological philosophy. Walter J. Ong, in Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1982), emphasizes the significance of orality and substantiates the valorization of orality in poems, novels, stories etc. Momaday evinces a profound understanding of the oral tradition in The Way to Rainy Mountain. While offering an analytical portrayal of Momaday, Louis Owens in Other Destines (1992) presents an attempt to revisit the past through the
eloquent remembrance of Kiowa grand mother. This obviously proves the power of the ancients over the word and their attempts to captivate the imagination. But unfortunately, the primordial oral wisdom of the Natives is presented in the negative portrayal with absolute division between the Native and the white. Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation* (1989) has examined the misrepresentation of orality as an essential quality of illiteracy. Projecting orality as an intrinsic part of Native image, Goldie focuses on its perpetual confrontation with writing. Goldie says “The Orality of the Indian, the Maori and the Aborigine seems an intrinsic part of their image, as it is of most representations of Indigenous people…. Orality is the Ongian ideology that Derrida confronts” (107). The attempt of Jacques Derrida in subverting the privilege of ‘Orality’ as the representation of knowledge juxtaposed with ‘Writing’. The speech centered world has been the world of Philosophy and its domination over other subjects of knowledge. The conflict between oral forms of knowledge and the written forms of knowledge proved to perennial and is inflated into the conflict of philosophy and literature. Jacques Derrida in his attempt to subvert the privileges bestowed on binary oppositions in *Of Grammatology* deconstructs the dominance of Orality over Writing and Philosophy over literature. But Derrida sees ‘Orality’ as a burden and the reason for primitivism in the lives of Natives. He sees the conspiracy in disallowing and discouraging ‘Writing’ into the lives of Natives. To Derrida ‘Writing’ is the cite of change but to the Structural Anthropologist Claude Levi
Strauss ‘Writing’ is the world of violence. But Derrida exposes the inherent violent order prevalent in the lives of Natives. However the wisdom of Natives and the repositories knowledge preserved in Orality are not negated but they are shown only as aspects of representation to confront the western perspective of Native culture and its misrepresentation. As an exemplification to the oral transmission of knowledge, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is told in three voices: the voice of Momaday’s father (the ancestral voice, Kiowa oral tradition), the historical commentary and the author’s voice in personal reminiscences. The narrative wheel brings in the aspects of myth, history, memoir, autobiography etc.

Momaday recomposes Kiowa ‘histories’ from the fragments of myth, legends, memory and imagination. Each passage speaks across the other and the collage of perspectives realigns different modes of presenting the theme. Through Momaday’s grand mother Aho the tribal or folkloric memory is presented. The pictorial mode of Momaday’s father Al Momaday illustrates his mother’s stories to her grandson. Momaday draws the resources to the historical and public events through James Mooney’s *Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians* (1898), Elsie Clews Parson’s *Kiowa Tales* (1929), and Mildred P. Mayhall’s *The Kiowas* (1962).

Momaday turns to words to palliate the loss of history and evokes the childhood and makes his grandmother and father to reclaim the fragmented Indian identity. It is through the words he recuperates the small occurrences in
diminished light and establishes continuity through generations of tribal
examines the ways employed by Black Elk and Scott Momaday in retrieving
the Native identity in the chapter “Word Senders”. Lincoln observes that
Momaday moves into the present history with the influence and inspiration of
Black Elk’s vision. Lincoln is of the view: “Black Elk and Scott Momaday
adapting older Kiowa ways to written forms of literature, align as ‘word
senders’ of ‘carriers of the dream wheel’ across the tribal history of Great
Plains” (84). Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life story of a Holy Man of the
Oglala Sioux written in 1932 and translated in 1972 by John G. Neihardt is the
most transitional text that influenced Momaday’s poetry and prose. One can
obviously find the influence of Black Elk in Momaday’s The Way to Rainy
Mountain.

According to Momaday ‘words’ convey identity through personal
vision. He evinces the power of the words in the memory of elder generations.
He illustrates the reconciliation of the self through the sense of time and place,
small occurrences, names and Native objects. Momaday’s focus on the words
in twenty four sections of The Way to Rainy Mountain apparently moves
forward and backward in conceptual time reordering the journey back to the
tribal origins. Words live as visionary spirits and carry resonant meanings
throughout and remerge in the images of four primordial elements. This
preliminary critical understanding sets the way for the genuine thematic perception of *The Way to Rainy Mountain.*

*The Way to Rainy Mountain* is about the journey of Momaday’s Kiowa ancestors from their ancient beginnings in the Montana area to their final war and surrender to the United States Military at Fort Sill, and subsequent resettlement near Rainy Mountain, Oklahoma. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is a slim volume, less than 100 pages in length. But it’s a very unusual work. It gives the reader a comprehensive history of the Kiowa tribe through three poetic voices from mythic emergence to modern times.

The Kiowa tribe emerged from the mountains of Montana soon after horses became available to the people of the northern plains. Early in the nineteenth century they migrated south to Oklahoma, where they fought their final battles with white civilization and were defeated. This is the story which Momaday, whose father was a Kiowa, tells in *The Way to Rainy Mountain.* Yet the book’s impressionistic methods make it less a history of the Kiowa than a personal meditation on that history in which Momaday employs myth, legend, ethnographic and historical data, and his own memories.

Momaday has included a “Prologue” and an “Introduction” which relate the history of the Kiowa tribe that follows to his own experience, particularly to his grandmother, Aho, who gives him the first accounts of the Kiowa that he ever heard. The book ends with an epilogue, in which he recounts a story of a
Kiowa Sun Dance, which he heard from a hundred-year-old woman who actually witnessed it.

Yet the bulk of the book is made up of three movements: “The Setting Out,” which describes the origins of the tribe and their acquisition of a religion and a sense of tribal destiny; “The Going On,” which recounts legends of the Kiowa glory days on the southern plains; and “The Closing In,” in which the old Kiowa freedom is restricted until they and their destiny, in a sense, fall to earth. These three movements are composed of twenty-four numbered sections, each of which includes three very brief pieces: a legend, recollected by the author from the stories of his grandmother; an ethnographic or historical gloss on this legend; and a personal recollection or observation, which is related to the legend or to the gloss or to both.

Each section is further divided into three parts. The first part consists of the mythological stories of the Kiowas, the second focuses on the actual history of the Kiowa tribe, and the third part is the author’s own observations from when he retraced the long journey to Rainy Mountain his ancestors had taken. As the book draws to an end, these parts start to combine, the mythology becomes more historical, the history becomes more personal, and the personal tales become more mythological. The Way to Rainy Mountain depicts the epic journey of the Kiowa people over three hundred years ago from Yellowstone out to the Great Plains and Devil’s Tower and southward to Rainy Mountain Oklahoma where they presently live. The book is highly
structured in poetic form with three voices. Momaday declares in the preface of the book:

The stories in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are told in three voices. The first voice is the voice of my father, the ancestral voice, and the voice of the Kiowa oral tradition. The second is the voice of historical commentary. And the third is that of personal reminiscence, my own voice. (ix)

The book begins with the poem titled “Headwaters”, given below:

HEADWATERS

Noon in the intermountain plain:
There is scant telling of the marsh--
A log, hollow and weather-stained,
An insect at the mouth, and moss--
Yet waters rise against the roots,
Stand brimming to the stalks. What moves?
What moves on this archaic force
Was wild and welling at the source. (2)

This poem describes the origin myth and origin of the Kiowa people and how they emerged from the hollow log.

Next is the “Prologue” and then “Introduction.” This is followed by three movements: “The Setting Out,” “The Going On,” and finally, “The Closing In.” A brief epilogue concludes the work.
In the “Prologue” Momaday gives a brief account of origin of Kiowas, their long and mystic journey and downfall of the culture. The “Prologue” begins as follows:

The journey began one day long ago on the edge of the northern Plains. It was carried on over a course of many generations and many hundreds of miles. In the end there were many things to remember, to dwell upon and talk about. . . . For the Kiowas the beginning was a struggle for existence in the bleak northern mountains. It was there, they say, that they entered the world through a hollow log. The end, too, was a struggle, and it was lost. The young Plains culture of the Kiowas withered and died like grass that is burned in the prairie wind. . . . But these are idle recollections, the mean and ordinary agonies of human history. The interim was a time of great adventure and nobility and fulfillment. (3)

It describes the journey of Kiowa people which began long ago on the edge of northern plains. The journey was carried out generations and the beginning was a struggle. These lines explain the beginning, middle and last part of their culture.

The first paragraph of the “Introduction” reveals:

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old
landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. . . Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion or objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. 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. (5)

Now the core three middle sections are unique in that each section consists of a number of short chapters which are two pages long, and each chapter is comprised of three passages. Each of the three passages presents a different perspective. The first passage is a myth or a legend or a tale of the Kiowa people. The second passage is a fact or an observation that relates to the myth or legend or story in some way. The third and final passage is reminiscence by Momaday, either of his own experience or one that relates to his family, and which links up the two previous passages. The three perspectives, then, present a picture, that like a hologram, is three-dimensional and can be viewed from several points.

“The Setting Out”
In the first of these sections, Momaday gives the legend of the origin of the Kiowa tribe, which tells how they emerged from beneath the earth through a hollow log and how some of them were forced to remain underground when a pregnant woman got stuck in the log—an explanation of why the Kiowa have always been a relatively small tribe. This legend is followed by an explanation of the linguistic origin of the tribal name, which derives from a word which means “coming out.” Finally, the author relates this story of origin and self-definition to his own memory of the first time he “came out” onto the plains. The juxtaposition of these three elements, in effect, relates Momaday to his Kiowa ancestors by showing the relationship of the tribes mythic origins to their actual historical experience of “coming out” onto the plains. This was later repeated by Momaday, who, in effect, saw the plains for the first time as the Kiowa saw them.

In richly poetic fashion Momaday presents the mythic emergence of the Kiowa people (as told to him by tribal elders) from a hollow log: “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” (16). Not only do his words replicate, through back vowel sounds of ‘o’ and ‘a’, the actual sound of a hollow log (words coming from the throat), but also the image created replicates leaving the restricted narrow canyon of the Yellowstone River. In addition to the mythic voice, Momaday provides a historic voice describing the origin of the name Kiowa--Kwuda which means, of all things, coming out. The poet’s own
voice of actually traveling the path of the ancient ones gives the reader his own feelings: “I remember coming out upon the northern Great/ Plains in the late spring.” (17)

Throughout “The Setting Out” section of the book, Momaday describes the importance of the natural world (in three voices) to his people. They hunted antelope from the beginning and treasured the best part of the antelope to eat, the udders. They hunted the antelope in olden times by making a great circle of people that closed in on the animals until they were easily killed. Momaday describes seeing antelope on the northern prairies of Wyoming looking like “a succession of sunbursts against the purple hills” (19). Mythic, historic and personal stories are also depicted for dogs, mountains, the sun, spider grandmother, and twin boys.

Chapter II of the first section tells of the time the Kiowas went hunting and killed an antelope. One of the ‘big chiefs” came up and claimed the udders (a delicacy) for himself. At this another “big chief” insisted on having the udders for himself. An argument ensued and one of the chiefs “gathered all of his follows together and went away” (18). They were never heard of again.

In the second passage of Chapter II, Momaday tells that “this is one of the oldest memories of the tribe. There have been reports of a people in the Northwest who speak a language that similar to the Kiowa.” (19)

The third passage is a personal memory of Momaday’s when he “remembered once having seen a frightened buck on the run, how the white
rosette of its rump seemed to hang for the smallest fraction of time at the top of each frantic bound--like a succession of sunbursts against the purple hills.” (19)

And again, in Chapter III, in the first passage it is said that the story of how the Kiowas first got the dog, long before the horse. In the second passage, we get a stronger sense of the importance of the dog when we learn that the “principal warrior society of the Kiowas was the Ka-itsenko, ‘Real Dogs,’ and it was made up of ten men only, the ten most brave” in the tribe. (21)

In the third passage, Momaday writes:

There were always dogs about my grandmother’s house. Some of them were nameless and lived a life of their own. They belonged there in a sense that the word “ownership” does not include. The old people paid them scarcely any attention, but they should have been sad, I think, to see them go. (21)

But the horse was also extremely important to the Kiowa for it gave them the freedom to move that they had never had before.

“The Going On”

This second section of The Way to Rainy Mountain describes in three voices, the zenith of the Kiowa people who became deft horsemen, Cossacks of the American prairies. The reader is provided with heroic stories of being aware of where and who the enemy is. He tells of arrowhead makers who leave their tooth marks on each arrow point they make and his own memories
of an old arrow maker named Cheney whose wrinkled face almost looked like an arrowhead. As in the previous section of the book, “The Going On” relates the importance of the natural world to the Kiowas. The tornado, for instance, is very much part of Kiowa mythology; it was out of a clay horse that a tornado first came to life and grew into a fierce beast with lightning coming out of its nostrils. And Momaday remembers well tornado storm cellars.

“The Closing In”

“The Closing In”, the final section of the book, represents the Kiowa’s eventual defeat by the Euro-Americans perpetually advancing westward. In this section Kiowa concept of “honor” is presented. If something is promised, that something should be honored, but with the white man a promise was not something kept. Momaday relates a legend of times past when two Kiowa brothers were captured by Utes. The Ute Chief promised that if one brother could carry the other across a row a greased buffalo skulls, they would be set free. The brother succeeds and indeed they were set free. Not so at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The Kiowa people surrendered themselves and their horses that were slaughtered one by one. In twentieth chapter of the book, Momaday Writes:

*Once there was a man who owned a fine hunting horse. It was black and fast and afraid of nothing. When it was turned upon an enemy it charged in a straight line and struck at full speed; the man need have no hand upon therein. But, you know, that man*
knew fear. Once during a charge he turned that animal from its course. That was a bad thing. The hunting horse died of shame. (70)

In the second passage, Momaday tells us of Gaapiatan, his grandfather, who sacrificed a fine horse as an offering in hopes that he and his family might escape a smallpox epidemic.

In the third passage, then sums up by saying he thinks he knows what was in Gaapiatan mind--that he will give up something he values highly if his family might be spared.

In the epilogue, the Kiowa golden age, according to Momaday, lasted little more than 90 years: “The culture would persist for a while in decline, until about 1875, but then it would be gone, and there would be very little material evidence that it had ever been” (85). Momaday writes that there were still a few who remembered, but he wrote this in the late 1960s, over 50 years ago. Perhaps today Momaday himself is a significant resource of information for he has known some who had direct experience of the Kiowa culture in its last days. The book ends with the following poem:

RAINY MOUNTAIN CEMETERY

Most is your 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. (89)

In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday traces his ancestral roots back to the beginning of the Kiowa tribe. While Momaday seems to have always known about his ancestry, the death of his grandmother prompts a deeper and more personal exploration of his family background. In order to get as close as possible to his roots, Momaday returns to his Grandmother’s house where the spirit of the Kiowa tribe is very strong and present.

There is a hint of non-fiction to this book that allows the reader to surmise that N. Scott Momaday is also the narrator. Under this assumption, the narrator is a man who has left his family’s homeland to make his own life elsewhere. However, the narrator has remained in contact with his family largely due to his relationship with his grandmother. Grandmother’s death prompts the narrator to return to her home and take a spiritual journey through his ancestry.

The narrator spends time revisiting Kiowa stories. As he works through each story, the narrator learns about his ancestors and in turn about himself.
Although the book does not focus on the narrator’s personal journey, the reader can see some growth from beginning to end.

All of the Kiowa stories feature some aspect of nature. The reader quickly comes to realize that Kiowa tradition holds a strong respect for the land on which they live. Rather than take the earth for granted the Kiowa understand that without proper conservation practices, the land will eventually desert them. Indeed this principle comes true when the buffalo herds are almost destroyed. Without the buffalo for food, clothing, and housing the Kiowa are at a loss for how to exist. The tribe is forced to abandon their old way of life and adopt the practices of the encroaching white men for survival. However, the new way of life is difficult to accept and before long the Kiowa fade away.

Despite their military defeat and their despair, the Kiowa person has his story, a story of his people, and he has Nature. Momaday writes that a man “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” (83). This book has a living fiber to it. Along with its prologue and epilogue written in prose, this epic poem spins through the reader’s mind like a kind of prayer wheel, always coming full circle.

The manner in which cultural landscapes are created interests Momaday, and the whole of his book The Way to Rainy Mountain may be seen as an account of that process. During their migration journey the Kiowa people
“dared to imagine and determine who they were…. The journey recalled is among other things the revelation of one way in which these traditions are conceived, developed, and interfused in the human mind” (4). The Kiowa journey, like that recounted in emergence narratives of other tribes, may be seen as a movement from chaos to order, from discord to harmony. In this emergence the landscape plays a crucial role, for cultural landscapes are created by the imaginative interaction of societies of men and particular geographies.

In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* Momaday tries to reunite himself with his American Indian (Kiowa) heritage by embarking on a journey to Rainy Mountain in Oklahoma where he would then visit his late grandmother’s grave. It is based on an accurate journey where Momaday recalled what he saw to be his ancestors’ trip from Montana down to Oklahoma. And it was an important journey for him as a human being in the sense of standing on the lands that they stood on, looking out across the desert or the prairie as he went down toward Rainy Mountain. Many immigrants come to this country and the first generation struggles to make it. The second generation has it a little easier, and then the third generation wants to revisit the life of the grandparents, to go back and see where they came from, who they were when they were in the old world. And so between generations, the revival of history, family history, and cultural identity are important to human beings.
Momaday begins his essay with a detailed and descriptive review of Rainy Mountain, description that engages the reader. “Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh…,” writes Momaday (5). While this sentence is a wonderful example of his gifted ability to be descriptive, when Momaday tries to paint the reader a picture of his grandmother as a child, he travels off the path by giving the reader a history lesson when he mentions, “…the Kiowas were living the last great moment of their history” (6). Momaday, early in his essay, confessed, “I want to see in the reality what she had seen more perfectly in the mind’s eye, and traveled fifteen hundred miles to begin my pilgrimage” (7). A pilgrimage has been said to be a spiritual quest for some kind of moral importance. Others believed it to be a journey to a shrine of importance based on ones faith or beliefs. Momaday provides very descriptive passages of the landscape he encountered to his special place, that of the Kiowa culture, such as: “The skyline in all directions is close at hand, the high wall of the woods and deep cleavages of shade…Clusters of trees, and animals grazing far in the distance, cause the vision to reach away and wonder to build upon the mind” (7). Momaday has been able to engage the readers’ imagination here, and has connected with them on a personal level to draw them further into his story.

It was not until the ninth paragraph Momaday finally gave a glimpse of what his grandmother had been like as a child when he said, “As a child she had been to the Sun Dances; she had taken part in those annual rites,… she
was about seven when the last Kiowa Sun Dance was held in 1887 on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek” (10), abruptly after which, Momaday steers the story in to another history lesson with, “Before the dance could begin, a company of soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe.” (10)

Finally in the tenth paragraph, Momaday elaborates for the readers the connection between himself and his late grandmother, when he says:

I remember her most often in prayer. She made long, rambling prayers out of suffering and hope, having seen many things…the last time I saw her she prayed standing by the side of her bed at night, naked to the waist, the light of a kerosene lamp moving upon her dark skin…I do not speak Kiowa, and I never understood her prayers, but there was something inherently sad in the sound, some merest hesitation upon the syllables of sorrow. (10)

For instance, Momaday shares, “When I was a child I played with my cousins outside, where the lamplight fell upon the ground and the singing of the old people rose up around us and carried away into the darkness” (12). Momaday finally had given the reader some clue of real emotion that he himself had felt in stead of others such as the Kiowa, or his grandmother.

The ending of the story contains the end of Momaday’s pilgrimage. Again, he described the landscape in beautiful detail as he reached his
grandmother’s grave, only to conclude the story with, “Here and there on dark stones were ancestral names. Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away” (12). His conclusion felt abrupt and shortened, causing this reader to question the real point Momaday was trying to convey all along.

In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* Momaday takes the reader down a beautifully descriptive journey that contained his pilgrimage to his grandmother’s grave. Momaday provided sufficient detail in describing the landscape along his pilgrimage. Due to the emotional disconnection, his ability to fluently keep the reader interested, however, is debatable.

Of American Indian and ancient Greek oral traditions, classics scholar William Arrowsmith of Johns Hopkins University opines, “Mere anthropological transcription of myths and ceremonies in customary form is not enough, for this oral poetry depends upon performance in which tone, pause and gesture...are crucial ingredients in the narrative art and in the inflected meaning.” (“Regionalism as Resistance,” a 1978 lecture).

As the twenty-four sections which compose the book’s three principal movements unfold, significant changes in tone and content become noticeable. In “The Setting Out,” the legends have to do with the acquisition of power, often understood in terms of language. The Kiowa name themselves in terms of their miraculous origins; they acquire dogs when the first dog speaks to a hunter and saves him from his enemies; a Kiowa girl ascends into the sky and marries the Sun, who becomes the father of her son; the son becomes, in time,
a set of miraculous twins who provide the Kiowa with one of the principal elements of their religion; and the Kiowa discover Tai-me, a strange half-animal, half-bird creature who becomes a primary element of the Sun Dance.

In “The Going On,” the stories are all concerned with the Kiowa’s great freedom on the southern plains and with the horse, which made that freedom possible. Two stories have to do with escape from enemies. One tells of how the “storm spirit” understands the Kiowa language and always passes over the tribe, another is of a hunter’s escape from a magic buffalo when a mysterious voice tells him of the animal’s weak spot, and the last is the story of a fantastic journey of Kiowa warriors far south into Mexico, where they see “small men with tails,” presumably monkeys.

Finally, in “The Closing In,” there is a steady decline from the freedom and power of the middle section to stories of death and deprivation. A Kiowa manages to save his brother from the Ute only by his great bravery, but a great war-horse dies of shame when his rider turns him away during a charge against the enemy. Momaday’s grandfather, in a rage, shoots an arrow at a rogue horse and accidentally hits another horse. Most telling of all, for no apparent reason—except that the Kiowa no longer seem to respect their ancient religion—the Tai-me bundle, which contains the effigy which represents the god, falls to earth.

Each of the legends is understood in relation to a similar, illuminating event in the author’s own experience. For example, the legend of the
acquisition of the god Tai-me by the Kiowa is glossed with Momaday’s story of the time he actually saw the Tai-me bundle, and the story of the hunter who miraculously escapes from a magical buffalo when a mysterious voice speaks to him is paralleled by Momaday’s story of how he and his father, walking in a game reserve, are chased by a buffalo.

Because the Kiowa always were a small tribe, the stories which Momaday tells about them often emphasize a preoccupation with their numbers, and particularly with the danger of tribal disunion. One of the earliest tribal memories is of a quarrel between two chiefs over a slain antelope, which causes one of the chiefs to lead his people away into the darkness of prehistory, never to be seen again. This story is accompanied by that of an antelope drive which succeeds because all the people unite in a common effort.

Yet balanced against the threat of disunion are the grandmothers who appear again and again in the book. The death of Momaday’s grandmother Aho brings him back to Rainy Mountain. Spider Grandmother assures the survival of the twin sons of the Sun. The Talyi-da-i is associated with Spider Grandmother and with Keahdinekeah. Momaday’s father’s grandmother. Momaday’s grandfather’s grandmother Kau-au-ointy and the ancient Ko-sahn, who describes one of the last Sun Dances, are other examples. The grandmothers maintain tribal traditions, and they stand for harmony and tribal unity in the face of all the forces which threaten it.
At the same time, the element which provides Momaday with the means for uniting his own present with the Kiowa past, once Aho is dead, is language. The stories he tells imply, and his own commentaries say explicitly, that the book’s ultimate subject is language, which, in his view, is the one miracle making power available to humanity. His grandmother’s strange word zei-dl-bei (meaning “frightful”) was her way of confronting evil. Again and again in the book language is seen in this way: Kiowa are saved from their enemies by the power of language, the god Tai-me gives himself to the Kiowa with a promise, an arrow maker saves himself and his family by using the Kiowa language, the storm god does not attack the Kiowa because he knows their language.

Eventually, however, language loses this redemptive power for the Kiowa, and, not coincidentally, this is the time when the traditional religion of the tribe also can no longer save them. Momaday’s juxtaposition of these two events with the general decline of the Kiowa as an independent tribe is related to his conception of language itself. Just as the Kiowa emerge from myth and legend to enter the historical record, so words lose their original metaphoric power and lapse into mere denotation. From that stage the Kiowa language would fall into cliché and die, were it not for the power of the poet, who saves it by making poetry out of stale language, that is, by breathing new metaphorical life into it. Momaday, therefore, may be said to have taken the fragments of Kiowa experience which he remembered from his grandmother’s
stories or discovered in his reading of history and ethnography and put them into a new artistic whole. The three movements of the book, therefore, suggest a structure of beginning, middle, and end, the birth, life, and death of the Kiowa tribe, but it is the artist’s task to create a fourth stage of their journey, beyond the cemetery at Rainy Mountain, in the work of art that is Momaday’s book. Furthermore, to understand Momaday’s vision of the Kiowa, one must take account of the Kiowa religion as Momaday defines it. That religion is understood in relation to two objects of veneration: the ten bundles of the Talyi-da-i (“Boy Medicine”) and the Tai-me bundle. The Talyi-da-i originates in the myth of the boy who was the result of a Kiowa woman’s encounter with the Sun and who was reared by Spider Grandmother and miraculously split in two. When one of the twins disappeared into the waters of a lake that is, became part of the natural world, the other converted himself into the ten bundles of the Talyi-da-i as a kind of Eucharistic gift to the Kiowa.

The other myth that produced the Kiowa’s religious vision is of the advent of Tai-me, the strange creature who became the god of the Sun Dance. In a sense, Tai-me remained with the Kiowa in the form of a stone effigy which was kept concealed in a bundle and only exposed to the people once a year, when it was suspended from a pole in the Sun Dance lodge. In this effigy form Tai-me is a spiritual presence of the Sun itself, just as the buffalo bull, which is sacrificed for the occasion, is the embodiment of the Sun’s physical
presence. In other words, the relation of the Sun to the buffalo and to Tai-me is a kind of trinity.

Yet it should be noted that the American Indian religious vision is based upon quaternity rather than trinity. Again and again in American Indian cultures there is, for instance, an emphasis on four directions, four reasons, four stages of life, or four symbolic colors, quaternities which are often seen to be images of one another. The Kiowa hunters could not be certain of success in the hunt if they did not prove themselves worthy in the Sun Dance; the Sun Dance is based upon a quaternity composed of the Sun, Tai-me, the sacrificed buffalo, and the buffalo herd itself.

At the same time, the relationship of the Tai-me effigy to the sacrificed buffalo of the Sun Dance resembles that of the ten bundles of the Talyi-da-i to the twin who returned to nature by entering the lake, just as the Sun—the spiritual father of the twins—is related to the maternal Spider Grandmother, who in their lives is associated with the natural world.

*The Way to Rainy Mountain* is a remarkable example of the way traditional tribal materials can be used to achieve a new combination of the traditional and the personal by a literary artist who is sensitive to those materials and determined not to violate them. The most notable achievements by American Indian writers are works which are simultaneously products of a tribal culture and contributions to it. Momaday succeeds in attaining both these
ends. At the same time it is a deeply personal work, a product of its author’s effort to achieve a sense of what it meant to him to be a modern Kiowa.

Beyond the book’s significance as an influence on a whole generation of young writers, it must be considered a remarkable achievement as a testament to the uniquely human power of language to work miracles. As such, it is not only a remarkable personal document and a distinguished work of Kiowa literature but also a work of universal significance.

Defying generic description, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is an abbreviated history of the Kiowa people, a reworking of Kiowa folklore, a mixture of legend, historical fact, and autobiography. More precisely, it may be considered a kind of prose poem derived from traditional materials which are perceived personally, an exercise in self-definition made possible by a definition of the Kiowa experience. Ultimately the book’s subject must be understood as language itself—its origins, its power, its inevitable collapse, and finally, its re-birth as art.

The structure which outlines the progress of language in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is basically that of the relationship of the three main divisions of the book, a structure to be understood in the conventional terms of beginning, middle, and end, or perhaps, more precisely, the origins, heyday, and final decline of the Kiowas as an independent people. Furthermore, the structure of each of the twenty-four sections which compose the three divisions must be understood as three visions of the Kiowas—that of Kiowa
legend (the stories of Aho, the author’s grandmother), of Kiowa history (usually facts found in the writings of James Mooney), and of the author’s own perception of himself as an inheritor of the Kiowa experience. These three elements—Kiowa myth, Kiowa reality, and personal vision may perhaps be understood as Kiowa soul, Kiowa body, and Kiowa (that is, the author’s) mind.

Language and religious vision are related, for, as the author says, “the word is sacred.” When Aho saw or heard or thought of something bad, she said the word zei-dl-bei, “frightful.”… It was … an exertion of language upon ignorance and disorder. (33)

A word, therefore, possesses power. “It comes from nothing [and] gives origin to all things.” Indeed it gives man his only real power to “deal with the world on equal terms” (33). The myths in “The Setting Out” all deal, for the most part, with the power of language to work magic:

I. The Kiowas emerge from a hollow log into the world and name themselves Kwuda, meaning “coming out.”

II. Two chiefs quarrel over the udders of a slain antelope, and one of them leads his people away into oblivion, to be named the Azatanhop, “the udder-angry travellers off.”

III. In a time when dogs can talk, a man surrounded by enemies is saved by reciprocity with a dog, which says, “If you will take care of my puppies, I will show you how to get away.”
IV. A Kiowa girl climbs a miraculous tree in pursuit of a miraculous bird and encounters a young man, the sun, and tells her she is to be his wife.

V. The woman quarrels with the sun-husband, attempts to return to earth with her child, and is killed when the husband tells a magic ring to pursue her.

VI. The woman’s son is captured by the spider grandmother, who quiets him with a song.

VII. The boy disobeys his grandmother’s warning never to throw the ring toward the sky, and it falls on his head and divides him into twins.

VIII. Caught in the cave of a giant who builds fires to smoke them out, the twins are saved by the grandmother’s formula, thain-mom, “above my eyes.”

IX. When the twins kill a snake, the grandmother spider tells them they have killed their grandfather, and she dies, leaving them alone.

X. A man whose children are starving hears a voice and sees Tai-me, who says, “Take me with you, and I will give you whatever you want.”

XI. Two hungry brothers find meat outside their tipi. One says they should eat it, but the other says it is “too strange a thing.” The foolish brother eats the meat and turns into a water monster, and the wise brother visits him with news of the Kiowas.

The pattern in these stories is one of language producing power. The Kiowas name themselves in terms of their miraculous origins and name their lost friends. The first domestic dog intervenes through speech to save them.
The sun speaks and a culture hero is born. The culture hero is captivated by the spider’s song and is saved by a magic formula. The deity Tai-me gives himself to the Kiowas in a spoken promise, and so on.

But in addition to this, the stories in “The Setting Out” define the religious identity of the Kiowas, understood in terms of the Talyi-da-i, the “boy medicine,” and Tai-me. The former, it should be noted, is the earlier form of the religion of the sun, and the Tai-me religion seems to have been imposed upon it, re-defining it and enhancing its meaning. The crucial event in the story of the twins and the spider grandmother was what occurred after her death, when one twin walked into the waters of a lake and disappeared forever, and “the other at last transformed himself into ten portions of ‘medicine’ thereby giving his body in Eucharistic form to the Kiowas” (IX). The ten bundles of “boy medicine” are the Talyi-da-i. The story of the coming of Tai-me, who is both animal and bird—and yet neither—is a story of how the Kiowas acquired the being who represents the spiritual presence of the sun. The Tai-me figure, therefore, is kept under wraps and is exposed only at the sun dance, when the spirit of the sun is physically present to the people. At the same time, the sun dance requires the sacrifice of a buffalo, which, the author says in his “Prologue,” is “the animal representation of the sun….“ In other words, the sun, the source of all life, is present to the Kiowas both as flesh (the buffalo) and as spirit (Tai-me). At the same time, the twin sons of the sun separate, one
returning to physical nature, disappearing into a lake, the other becoming a
eucharist which is divided among the people.

The relation of the twins to each other can be understood when their
story is compared to that of the two brothers who find the meat outside their
tipi (XI). The brother who eats the “strange” meat becomes a monster and
must go live in a lake. This story is separated from that of the Talyi-da-i (IX)
by the story of the coming of Tai-me (X). Considering the importance of Tai-
me to the sun dance and considering that the buffalo can only be killed for the
life of the people when they have been made worthy of it by the ritual of the
sun dance, the meaning of the food left for the two brothers and the
consequences of eating it are clear enough. The meat is from nature, not from
Tai-me, and the brother who eats it is absorbed back into nature while the
other brother, in a sense, becomes a Kiowa. What we have here is a basic
theme: the people originate in nature, from which they must separate to
become a people. They come through a hollow log to name themselves, they
acquire a eucharist and, in a sense, a Holy Ghost, and they discover themselves
as a people by means of a myth of separation from the natural world, in which
they continue to recognize their animal origins. This is presumably what is
meant by the myth of the domestication of the dog. As in the myths of so many
peoples, it is a story of a time when animals could talk; but we are not to
assume that this was a time when dogs could speak Kiowa but a time when
Kiowas could only speak the language of animals—that is before they were Kiowas.

In “The Going On” the stories are concerned with the prosperity of the Kiowas, prosperity understood in terms of escape from enemies and from natural disaster, of reconciliation of tribal conflict and dismissal of those who do not adhere to tribal law. Above all, they are concerned with freedom and with the horse, which makes freedom possible.

XII. A Kiowa family escapes from enemies when the wife sets fire to their tipi (hut).

XIII. An arrow-maker saves himself and his wife by his skill and by his use of the Kiowa language.

XIV. The Kiowas make a horse of clay which turns into Man-ka-ih, the storm spirit, which understands the Kiowa language and always passes over them.

XV. The quarrel of Quoetotai and Many Bears over the wife of the latter is peacefully resolved.

XVI. A hunter whose life is endangered by a mysterious buffalo with steel horns is saved by a voice which tells him the buffalo’s weak spot.

XVII. A blind man is deserted by his wife, a “bad woman,” and she is “thrown away.”
XVIII. Some adventurous Kiowas, curious as to where the sun goes in the winter, go far to the south, where they encounter “men [who] were small and had tails” (presumably monkeys).

All of these stories deal, in various ways, with the great success of the Kiowas after they have discovered themselves as a people with a tribal identity, and the historical and personal sketches balanced with them usually amplify the sense of freedom and power revealed in the legends. The references to Catlin’s paintings of the Kiowas, particularly of the heroic Kotsatoah (XV); the author’s memory of running from the buffalo in Medicine Park and feeling “just then what it was to be alive” (XVI); the story of Kauau-ointy, the author’s great-great-grandmother, a Mexican girl who endured her captive status to become eventually a person of importance with great wealth in cattle (XVII); Mooney’s statement about the freedom made possible by the horse (XVIII); and the author’s memory of the freedom associated with his grandmother’s arbor (XVIII). At the same time, some of these reflections are ominous in nature: the destruction of the ceremonial tipi (XII). The hard lot of Kiowa women, including the woman whose feet were frozen as she waited outside the tipi of the man who had stolen her from her husband (XVII); and the reference to the old Kiowas, years after the last wild buffalo are gone, pursuing an old bull for the entertainment of white people (XVI).

Finally, in “The Closing In,” there is a steady decline from the freedom and power of the middle section to death and loss.
XIX. By a great act of skill and bravery, a Kiowa saves his brother from the Utes, who award him horses.

XX. A warrior turns his fine horse aside while charging his enemy, and the horse dies of “shame.”

XXI. Mammedaty sees a miraculous thing, the head of a boy above the grass, but it disappears when he goes to look for it.

XXII. Mammedaty, angry at a rogue horse, shoots an arrow at it and accidentally hits another horse.

XXIII. The Tai-me bundle, for no apparent reason, falls to earth.

XXIV. A woman in a beautiful dress is buried on the plains, but no one remembers where her grave is.

The historical and personal passages reinforce these images of loss and defeat. The defeated Kiowas lose most of their horses and must eat others because buffalo are scarce, a horse is sacrificed to ward off the white man’s smallpox, a great horse is stolen from the Kiowas (“a hard thing to bear”), a medicine bundle becomes heavy when it is not shown proper respect, and so on. In all of these stories the content is increasingly historical, and the defeat, humiliation, and loss which they detail is made inevitable by the inability of the people to work their magic by means of the old language formulas. A word saved the twins from the giant, and the storm spirit passed overhead because the Kiowa language controlled it, but now, for reasons which cannot find explanation in language, things seem to go wrong.
Accompanying this story of the origins, rise and fall of the Kiowa people is the story of the author’s discovery of himself as a Kiowa. In each of the twenty-four sections, divided among the three divisions of the Kiowa journey, the legend and its historical definition receive a personal interpretation. The journey of the Kiowas from the mountains of their origins to the final place of rest in the Rainy Mountain cemetery parallels the author’s 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 author’s first sight of the plains, a reflection of the Kiowa emergence from the confining mountains to the open plains where they would find definition as a people devoted to the sun, produces the discovery that “I will never see the same again” (I). The story of the girl who ascended into the sun’s world by a tree reminds the author of seeing a bird in a tree seeming to ride across the sky. The story of the division of the boys into twins is redefined by the author’s story of seeing his reflection in the water of the Washita River broken by a frog’s leap. The death of the spider grandmother reminds him of seeing Keahdinekeah, his father’s grandmother.

The basic pattern of this parallelism emerges without need to detail it. What should be clear is that the author becomes a Kiowa by relating his memory and his experience to the Kiowas of myth, legend, and history. When he recalls looking up at a bird in a tree which seems to ride across the sky, he
in effect, becomes in his imagination the woman who climbed the tree in pursuit of a mysterious bird and encountered the sun. The water of the Washita which reflects the author’s image may be related to the water into which the other son of the sun disappeared. The author’s relation to his grandmother Aho is a reflection of the twin’s relation to the spider grandmother, and the progress of the author to his discovery of the Kiowas parallels the progress of the boy who became in time the *Talyi-da-i*. The magic word of the spider grandmother *thain-mom*, which saves the twins from the giant, is paralleled by Aho’s word *zei-dl-bei*, for both words are “an exertion of language upon ignorance and disorder” and a means of confronting “evil and the incomprehensible” (VIII). This pattern of relationship continues through the book. As grandson of Aho the author says, “I know of spiders,” having discovered them as the sun’s son discovered the spider grandmother (VI). The origins of the *talyi-da-i* are in the death of the spider grandmother; the author’s journey toward self-discovery begins in the death of Aho (“Introduction”). The man who became the water beast by eating bad meat is known by the author because his own grandfather, Mammedaty, once saw evidence of the water beast’s existence. The story of the arrowmaker is reinforced by the author’s memory of the old arrow-maker Cheney. The escape of the hunter from the steel-horned buffalo is paralleled by the author’s memory of running from a buffalo in Medicine Park when “our hearts were beating fast and we knew just then what it was to be alive.” (XVI)
The book, therefore, which is built of small pieces of myth, legend, and history, achieves structural unity in spite of its apparently fragmentary nature. But this unity is reinforced by two motifs which sound again and again in the fragments. They are equally important because, taken together; they are the source of the tension in the Kiowa story. On the one hand, there is the preoccupation with what might be called human duality, division, as reflected in stories of divided brothers, of tribal division, of loss. On the other hand, there is the constant presence of the grandmother, the unifying force.

In the first story in “The Setting Forth,” we see why the division of the Kiowas was both a danger and a necessity. Before the people went through the hollow log to emerge into the world there were more of them, but not all of them “got out” because a pregnant woman got stuck in the log. “After that, no one could get through, and that is why the Kiowas are a small tribe in number.” This juxtaposition of fertility and tribal birth, on the one hand, and of threat to the life of the tribe, on the other, is crucial. It suggests both the positive and negative aspects of the duality which is one of the book’s basic themes. If the people are to prosper, indeed even to survive in the hostile natural environment of the plains and in the inevitable military conflicts with other tribes, they must “increase and multiply,” and in the case of the Kiowas they must enrich their population with captives. But the greater the number of Kiowas the greater the likelihood of conflict and disharmony.
Many of the stories, therefore, deal with the subject of how the Kiowas acquired power through numbers. One of the tribal names, *Gaigwu* (Kiowa), is “a name which can be taken to indicate something of which the two halves differ from each other in appearance,” and this is related to the custom of Kiowa warriors of cutting the hair close on one side of the head and letting it grown on the other—thus, in effect, symbolically doubling each man. When the twin sons of the sun were magically divided, they “laughed and laughed” and the spider grandmother, though her problems were doubled, cared for both of them. The wife of Many Bears is the source of the quarrel between her husband and Quoetotai, and her husband is nearly killed. But when the lovers return after fifteen years with the Comanches, Quoetotai calls him brother and presents him with a gift of horses. The betrayal of Kiowa by Kiowa is always punished, as when the woman who abandoned her blind husband was “thrown away” (XVII). A man saves his brother from the Utes, who reward his courage with a gift of horses. Furthermore, danger to the tribe is warded off by the acquisition of supernatural power when the tribe is enriched by union with Tai-me. The acquisition of dogs and of horses, of which the Kiowas owned more than any other tribe, is the acquisition of power and wealth, which compensates for the small population of the tribe.

Yet division, which creates power, also poses a constant threat to tribal survival. One of the earliest tribal memories is of the quarrel of the two chiefs over the antelope, which caused the eternal loss of the *Azatanhop*. The killing
of the snake grandfather causes the death of the spider grandmother and the final separation of the twins, and the eating of the bad meat causes the separation of the two hungry brothers. A man steals a woman from her husband and then leaves her outside his tipi until she freezes. And throughout “The Closing In,” there is a chronicle of losses, of separation from the wealth and freedom which the horse represents, and of the fall of the Tai-me and sun dance religion.

This theme of separation is appropriate for a book which is designed to bring the divided past and present of the Kiowas together and to unite Kiowa myth and Kiowa reality in one unified vision. Furthermore, the author’s real journey is his own—the story of the process by which his separation from his Kiowa identity was healed by his own journey to Rainy Mountain.

The life of the Kiowas, from their mysterious beginnings to their final decline as a society and culture, is therefore understood in terms of what might be called the grandmother principle, for it is the grandmothers who strive to maintain the unity which is constantly threatened and which ultimately dies. The death of Aho, the living presence of that principle in the memory of the author, requires that the unity of Kiowa past and present, of Kiowa myth and reality, and of the Kiowa experience and the experience of one modern Kiowa, Momaday, is to achieve in the only way that remains once the old vitality of the culture has fallen into memory—by the ordering intelligence of the artist, which restores life to the myths of the Kiowas as it makes yet another
contribution to the ever necessary process of restoring life to language itself. Language, in Momaday’s vision, is the magical element in human experience, speaking to people in moments of need out of the need itself, as Tai-me spoke to the Kiowas, and this truth is common to the wisdom of the Kiowas and to the vision out of which Momaday has produced a profoundly civilized work of literature. Seen in this way, we must recognize that all peoples, whether consciously or not, are on the way to Rainy Mountain. We discover ourselves in the knowledge of our origins; standing in the cemetery we achieve wisdom in the presence of those who lived and died to give us life; and we put together the fragments of our lives only by means of language, in the realm of art—beyond Rainy Mountain.

In this book, Momaday constructed a unique platform from which to view the cultural history of the Kiowa Indians. It is a platform that reflects Momaday’s own background, sense of purpose and subsequent approach to the subject.

For Momaday, the “way” to Rainy Mountain not only represents the actual migration of the Kiowa, and the development of their culture, but also his own personal journey of retrieval. The way in which he perpetuates “the history of an idea, man’s idea of himself” is quite innovative. Momaday presents three different “visions” of the Kiowa experience, which are to be termed the “Kiowa,” the “historical,” and the “personal.” The Kiowa vision is comprised of a succession of myths passed down to Momaday in the oral
tradition from relatives and other “tribespeople.” They serve as Momaday’s principal source of material. These myths are colorful and imaginative in their explanations, and they are wonderful stories in their own right. However, beneath the surface, they reveal the motivations of their creators. Some myths convey moral lessons. Others give a clue as to social and gender roles. In their entirety, however, the Kiowa myths reveal the foundations for a cultural value system.

The “historical” vision provided by Momaday is a more factual representation of the Kiowa experience. On occasion, the historical accounts relate, albeit indirectly, to the preceding myth. For example, after Momaday told of the Kiowa “creation myth” that described how the Kiowa came into the world through a hollow log, he followed it with a more “historical” account of the origin of the Kiowa’s name. Said Momaday, “They called themselves Kwuda and later Tepda, both of which mean ‘coming out’....’Kiowa’ is thought to derive from the softened Comanche form of Gaigwu”(17). More often than not, however, the historical accounts correlate to each other; woven together, they serve as a separate narrative. While Momaday does include anthropological studies and artist’s observations to broaden and confirm the Kiowa impressions of their own cultural history, he strays from this pattern by including such accounts as the Kiowa’s surrender to U.S. authorities at Fort Sill in 1879. Ultimately, the historical accounts provide another perspective
from which to view the Kiowa experience, as well as an opportunity to speculate on the significance of that experience in a greater scope.

Finally, Momaday presented a personal “vision” relying largely on his memory and on his imagination. Many of his memories are of his grandparents and of his playful life as a child. Most of his images, however, are of the environment itself: the land, the wildlife and the weather. The reasons for Momaday’s “personal” recollections are again speculative.

However, near the end of the book, Momaday reveals at least one of his intentions. Momaday says, Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth....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. (83)

Collectively, Momaday accomplished what he sought to achieve by looking at the cultural history of the Kiowa from as many angles as he could. In so doing, what he imparted was a rather multi-dimensional picture of where the Kiowa came from, how they developed as a culture, and how they exist today in one man’s memory and imagination.

*The Way to Rainy Mountain* glorifies the Kiowa culture and describes its traditions. N. Scott Momaday in his reminiscence demonstrates nostalgic longing for a time that cannot be salvaged and is gone forever. The author reminds us of lost tribes, lost religions and lost hope.
A person’s heritage is a very important aspect of himself. If a person’s heritage is somehow lost or destroyed, that person will be missing a very big component of him. The author uses his grandmother as a symbol for lost religion, hope and traditions. From his heritage only his grandmother was connected to Kiowas. After, she passed away; the author does not discern any connection between him and his heritage. The author employs nostalgic tone, to convey a mood of lost heritage. Through the use of different rhetorical devices, the author conveys his thesis precisely. Diction also plays a vital role in creating a nostalgic tone in the excerpt. The diction that renders the symbol of the author’s grandmother is sophisticated and complex. The author employs a great deal of vocabulary to convey his descriptions of the Kiowa culture and his grandmother. The author uses ornate diction to describe his grandmother’s sorrow and anguish when the Kiowa culture was vanishing.

For example, in the excerpt the author writes, I do not speak Kiowa, and I never understood her prayers, but there was something inherently sad in the sound, some merest hesitation upon the syllables of sorrow. The author recalls this even via allusion. The words that convey his grandmother’s anguish are sad, hesitation and sorrow.

The description conveyed that the author’s grandmother belonged to the last Kiowa culture. The author portrays his grandmother as a woman of faith and religion. Momaday esteems his grandmother vastly. His demeanor toward
his grandmother is very appreciative and melancholic. After, his grandmother’s death, the world for the author would never be easy to adapt to.

*The Way to Rainy Mountain* is framed by two of Momaday’s best-known poems, “Headwaters” and “Rainy Mountain Cemetery,” which mark the book’s physical and spiritual movement through Momaday’s life as well as his understanding of the Kiowas’s historic progress. “Headwaters” describes “A log, hollow and weather-stained,” from which the Kiowas emerged into this world. (2)

The book begins in 1965, the year Momaday sets out for the Kiowa landmark, Rainy Mountain, where his grandmother, Aho, who has died the same year, is buried. Aho was born in 1880, at the close of the Kiowas’ golden age, when their religious practice of the Sun Dance was forbidden and their migratory lifestyle stymied by the U.S. Cavalry. Momaday realizes that Aho’s death may mark the loss of something great: the memory, first, of his tribal family; and second, because he himself is a part of Aho’s tribal reminiscences, the chance for a broader and deeper understanding of himself. “I wanted to see in reality what she had seen in her mind’s eye, and traveled fifteen hundred miles to begin my pilgrimage” (7). With this, Momaday embarks on his attempt to piece together his people’s past.

His journey is graced with a mix of the tribe’s official history and his family’s personal narratives about life in the past and in the present, explaining how the tribe and the author himself came to be.
Mythic retellings of the sun’s child and his development and of the coming of Tai-me (the sacred Sun Dance doll) offer insight into the tribe’s subsistence and survival methods. Such Kiowa tales “constitute a kind of literary chronicle. In a sense they are the milestones of that old migration in which the Kiowas journeyed from the Yellowstone to the Wichita” (Hobson 170-71). They recount Kiowa history and remind tribal members how they came to their present state, spiritually, historically, and physically. The stories act as cultural signposts, directing Kiowa people through their past and into their future.

Throughout the text, the second voice, that of official history, helps flesh out the ancient tribal stories, offering a factual account of the Kiowas. This factual account occasionally provides dates and draws on the findings of anthropologists and historical scholars. Finally, the personal voice, which assumes a poetic rhythm and a deeply reflective tone, describes the author’s reactions to the land he sees and recounts personal and familial stories he recalls as he makes his way through tribal history.

The second section, “The Going On,” offers an account of the Kiowas’ golden age, from approximately 1740 to 1875, when the Kiowas become dominant on the southern plains and develop warrior skills and social systems conducive to the harsh environment. Like the rest of the book, “The Going On” is divided into three sections and explores how arrows are made, the
complex relationships between men and women, the harsh weather of the plains, and the Kiowas’ relationship to the buffalo.

Throughout the third section, “The Closing In,” the three voices begin to mingle with one another. The mythic or tribal passages, for example, include discussions of Aho and Mommedaty, Momaday’s paternal grandmother and grandfather, whose lives and stories have become a part of Momaday’s individual, as well as his tribal, identity. When Momaday discusses the Tai-me bundles, or the sacred medicine bundles, central to ancient Kiowa religion, he pulls his grandmother Aho into the tribal section, making her a part of the tribe’s collective history:

_Aho remembered something, a strange thing. This is how it was:_

_You know, the Tai-me bundle is not very big, but it is full of power. Once Aho went to see the Tai-me keeper’s wife. The two of them were sitting together … when they heard an awful noise, as if a tree or some very heavy object had fallen down. It frightened them, and they went to see what on earth it was. It was Tai-me-Tai-me had fallen to the floor. No one knows how it was that Tai-me fell; nothing caused it, as far as anyone could see._ (80)

The personal stories Momaday told of his grandmother in the first part of the book become tribal stories as Momaday moves toward the Kiowa present. Similarly the historical voice becomes more entwined with the personal and tribal accounts, this time in connection with his grandfather: “For
a time, Mommedaty wore one of the grandmother bundles … on a string tied around his neck [personal and tribal] … If anyone who wore a medicine bundle failed to show it the proper respect, it grew extremely heavy around his neck [historical]” (81). The tribal, historical, and personal sketches, which complement each other in the beginning of the text, meld together toward its close, showing Momaday’s integrated idea of himself as an American Indian.

The last personal narrative sums up the journey Momaday have just taken: “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” (83). By knowing the earth from whence his people came and recounting their perceptions of the world, Momaday has come to understand himself.

*The Way to Rainy Mountain* relies heavily on tribal history and stories, the cruxes of native identity. In addition to tribal stories, which were passed through the generations verbally, pictographically designed, calendars also preserved Kiowa history. Prior to the reservation period, when the Kiowa people were forced onto a specific territory, these tribal calendars, which were created by specialists in the tribe, highlighted important events in the Kiowas’ past. Many of them may have been buried with their keepers or otherwise lost through history. Thankfully James Mooney, an ethnologist of the nineteenth century, acquired three of these tribal timepieces. Mooney describes them in

These calendars reflect the tribe’s closeness to the land, their ideas about themselves, and the events that changed them. The pictographs, or ancient drawings, which depict the major events of each winter and summer, are arranged in a continuous spiral starting in one corner of the page or animal hide and moving inward as the years marched on.

Their survival threatened, the Kiowas dispersed on hearing the news, going to their respective dwellings, leaving the unfinished medicine pole and lodge standing. This was the tribe’s last attempt to practice the Sun Dance.

Oral tradition is always one generation away from extinction, Momaday notes, making its future precarious and its telling cherished. In his words, this tradition is the process by which the lore of a people is “formulated, communicated, and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing” (Hobson 167). Momaday insists on factoring it into his portrayal of the past. His memoir’s combination of tribal, official historical and personal stories suggests a new way of understanding, or imagining, past events.

In traditional Kiowa life, verbal stories were used to address various tribal needs. Sometimes such accounts taught appropriate behaviors; other times the accounts offered serious insight into sacred religious beliefs. In either case, the art of storytelling was exceptionally refined and difficult to master.
Stories, such as the Kiowa tale describing Devil’s Tower—which became America’s first national monument in 1906—and the Big Dipper, explain how parts of the world came to be. “Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock,” says the text (8). In the legend, a boy becomes a bear and chases his seven sisters to the stump of a tree. At the tree’s command, the girls climb its trunk, whereupon they are lifted into the air and carried into the sky to become the stars of the Big Dipper. This tale is of particular importance to Momaday, for it is the source of his first Kiowa name, Tsoai-talee, or Rock-Tree Boy.

Tales such as these connect the Kiowas to the world, giving them a sense of place, helping to specify how the tribe relates to its environmental surroundings. “From that moment, and so long as the legend lives,” Momaday writes, “the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky” (8). As long as the oral tradition is passed from one generation to the next, the Kiowas, like other native peoples, will be able to define themselves in their own voices, using their distinct world views.

Momaday sees all his work as connected, all part of one tribal, literary, and artistic opus. In an interview with Joseph Brachac, Momaday states:

I think that my work proceeds from the American Indian oral tradition, and I think it sustains that tradition and carries it along…. I’ve written several books, but to me they are all parts
of the same story…. My purpose is to carry out what was begun a long time ago; there’s no end to it that I can see. (187)

Critic Wallace Stegner lauded the memoir, saying the writer’s “recreation of Kiowa myth and history, that is something no white man could ever have given us.” (110)

The book received brief mention in a variety of major publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New Yorker*, typically without being featured in many. Those who reviewed the memoir tended to praise it for its pious, stately language and captivating dignity. In The *Southern Review*, Kenneth Fields lauded the text as “far and away his [Momaday’s] best book” (Fields 196). Ten years after its publication, the late Michael A. Dorris, the then chair of Dartmouth College’s Native American Studies Department, named *The Way to Rainy Mountain* one of the finest books available on Native Americans.

Momaday addresses the need for psychic integration in his book which he admonishes that once in his life a person ought “to give himself up to a particular landscape” of his choosing and “to look upon it from as many angles as he can” (83). Giving one’s self up to landscape is astutely reflected in much of the fiction and non-fiction of the contemporary American West.

The young man’s grandmother had never undergone the journey that she so often told stories about, and yet she seemed to have experienced it through the memories of others that had been passed down to her. She seemed to see
the journey even more vividly than her grandson, who had actually undergone the journey.

_The way to rainy mountain_ was a long and hard one for the Kiowa people. Despite the hardship, they became stronger along the way, learning new skills, and gaining a new religion. The young man’s way to rainy mountain also taught him many things. The journey gave him a greater understanding of the 1,500 mile long pilgrimage undertaken by the Kiowa and a mental picture of the places described by his grandmother. The grandmother’s journey was a journey of the mind. She learned of the great pilgrimage through the stories and memories of others. They took on a form that was quite lifelike to her though she had never experienced them in person.

All of the journeys in the story had their ending at Rainy Mountain. For the young man, his journey ended at his Grandmother’s grave. He looked back once to see the Rainy Mountain, and that was the end of his journey. For his grandmother her journey ended where it began, at the Rainy Mountain. She was born there, saw the last sun dance of the Kiowa there, and died there. The journey of the Kiowa also ended at Rainy Mountain. It was there that the Kiowa society reached its height before the deicide of 1890. Everyone has their Rainy Mountain, the end of their journey, but it is the way to Rainy Mountain that really matters.

The references to “Mooney” in the second parts of several sections are to the anthropologist James Mooney, especially to his work _Calendar History_.
of the Kiowa Indians, first published in 1898. These excerpts are intended to suggest ways of reading and understanding *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and Momaday’s purposes for writing the book. Obviously, the old storytellers are Aho, Ko-sahn, Mammedaty, and the nameless Kiowas, epitomized in the arrow maker. They control tribal images, exemplify the book’s structure, and demonstrate Momaday’s theory of oral tradition evolving toward literature.

The American Indian vision of reality, as has often been said, is traditionally structured in four parts. The four directions and the four seasons are models in space and time for patterns in myth and legend, in political and social structures, in religious practice, and in everyday life. The book’s three divisions “The Setting Out,” “The Going On,” and “The Closing In” and the three-part structure of each of the twenty-four sections that make them up suggest that Momaday has chosen to ignore traditional Indian methods in this book. In fact, the book reveals subtle four-part patterns. But more important, Momaday’s decision to give the core of the book and its twenty-four sections a three-part structure is related to what is probably his primary intention—his conception of language.

The story of the Kiowas is an evolutionary process from the myth of the birth of the tribe through a mossy and weather-stained hollow log to the final poem about Rainy Mountain cemetery, which condenses all the periods of Kiowa history into two stanzas. Momaday says, “The first word gives origin to the second, the first and second to the third, the first, second, and third to the
fourth, and so on. You cannot begin with the second word and tell the story, for the telling of the story is a cumulative process, a chain of becoming, at last of being” (*Names* 154). This philosophy explains why *The Way to Rainy Mountain* proceeds chronologically and geographically from the beginning, but the story is a series of concentric circles as time and lives go on, finally, as Momaday describes it, closing in on the essence of “being” that identifies him as a Kiowa.

A recurring pattern in all Momaday’s writings reveals that the structure of sacred events is rooted in both mythic and ordinary reality. Through the use of repetition, parallelism, and symbolism (devices from oral tradition) Momaday retells portions of his people’s sacred stories and finds his place in them. The journey that he undertakes is his means of achieving personal wholeness or spiritual balance. What interests Momaday is the process of coming to know the sacred, the ultimate source of knowledge.

Experiencing *The Way to Rainy Mountain* requires a kind of “fierce reading” analogous to James Welch’s concept of “fierce listening” (*Fools Crow*), as readers are required to enter the text and actively participate in the creation of its meaning. As Joan Henley explains in her article “Exploring the Ways to Rainy Mountain,” we must read the book not only horizontally (that is, linearly, chronologically), but vertically as well, making meaning by discovering the interconnections between the parts of each section. (48)
The first part of each section may be called the “panhuman,” in that it deals with universal human experience, here particularized in terms of the Kiowa through the stories’ functions. These stories from Kiowa tradition represent the tribal wisdom handed down from generation to generation. Along with the frequent intervention of the supernatural in the lives of the Kiowa, Momaday’s use of language associated with myth characterizes these stories. Phrases like “This is how it was” and “This is why” gives the stories authority, as do expressions like “Long ago” and “Once.”

Again, language is specific to the mode. That is, the narrative voice speaks of the group, rather than for the group, and contrasts with the language of the mythic narrative level, using expressions like the following: “It was once a custom” (17). “According to ancient custom” (19) and “Tradition has it” (21).

In the third narrative mode Momaday voices his personal vision as a Kiowa, through sections that express memories, sensory impressions, and portraits of family members. Together they may be characterized as the author’s responses to the natural world, people, and places evoked through memory and language. In so doing, Momaday makes intimate connections to his Kiowa spirituality, historical past, and the natural world.

As Momaday explains in “The Man Made of Words,” knowledge is expressed through language, and yields power to the possessor, as in the
following phrases: “now I see the earth as it really is” (17). “I know of spiders” (27). “In my mind I can see that man as if he were there now.” (47)

Section XX provides another example, where the second mode describes the sacrifice of a fine horse to ward off the smallpox and in the third narrative Momaday projects his imagination in understanding the motives of his ancestor for making the sacrifice. In section XXII, also dealing with horses—like the buffalo a symbol of tribal power and identity for the Kiowa—the historical and personal modes actually fuse.

Sections XXI and XXII deal with Momaday’s grandfather, Mammedaty, who had been introduced earlier. The interfusion of first and third modes in these sections is remarkable and suggests a great deal about Momaday’s view of Kiowa identity as he connects personal memory with tribal legend in the actual person of Mammedaty. In a parallel way, the figure of Aho, Momaday’s grandmother, synthesizes both mythic and historical levels of narrative in section XXIII, which recounts supernatural occurrences associated with the Tai-me bundle.