The paradoxical observation that ‘Native American Literature’ is relatively a recent phenomenon is dismantled by the literary commotion created by *House Made of Dawn*. The global recognition and appreciation showered on *House Made of Dawn* has demonstrated “a shared consciousness, an inherently identifiable world-view” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 20). It has invited global critical attention to an already existing and increasing amount of fiction, poetry and autobiography published by Native American writers during the past and in the contemporary times. The success of *House Made of Dawn* has demanded for the rereading, re-interrogation and re-evaluation of the novels and short fiction by Zitkala Sa, John Milton Oskison, Mourning Dove, John Joseph Mathews and D’Arcy McNickle. It has also helped new generation of Native writers like Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, Chadwick Allen, Craig S. Womack etc., to rest comfortably on the strong literary and cultural foundations laid by Momaday in differentiating from the tradition of ancient oral singers or story tellers. The success has also proved that Native American writers are capable of melding the elements of oral tradition with western narrative forms to produce hybridized Native American literature. On the foundations laid by *House Made of Dawn* Native American literature is involved in attempting to recover identities invoking the oral tradition only to
probe and contest the contemporary reality. The difficulties of non-Indian readers in understanding Native American culture are answered through artistic negotiation. James Ruppert in *Mediation and Contemporary Native American Literature* (1995) describes the artistic mediation as a flexible standpoint in defusing the epistemological rupture of western cultural tradition. Ruppert brings in the differentiation between the Native and implied non-Native readers. In its initial stages *House Made of Dawn* has invited social criticism. With its mythic storyline, the novel moves the readers from the western world view to unfamiliar Native world. Eventually, the impact of the novel has succeeded in creating a common ground for Native and non-Native readers besides introducing a Native epistemological pattern. Arnold Krupat, in *Ethnocriticisim* (1992), and in *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture* (1996) has argued for ‘ethnocritical’ approach to understand Native American literature with objective of acknowledging the differences between Native and Western conceptions of literature and culture. Krupat’s cosmopolitan approach that considered Native literature as a practice has invited vehement criticism from the Native critics. Ward Churchill and Elizabeth Cook Lynn in *From a Native Son: Selected Essays on Indigenism 1985-1995* have advocated political sovereignty and cultural autonomy. This perspective has led to the consolidation of intellectual affirmation. Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners: Post Indian Warriors of Survivance* (1994) purported to provide authentic images of Native literatures that testified the
historical process of Colonization and ‘Survivance’ of Natives. It is in the light of these contemporary critical perceptions, Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* has to be perceived.

*House Made of Dawn* is widely credited as leading the way for the breakthrough of Native American literature into the mainstream. It was conceived first as a series of poems, then re-planned as stories, and finally shaped into a novel. It is based largely on Momaday’s firsthand knowledge of life at Jemez Pueblo. Momaday lived inside and outside of mainstream society, growing up on reservations. In the novel, Momaday combines his personal experiences with his imagination.

Consistently praised for his exploration of Kiowa concerns and traditions, Momaday is a seminal figure in both mainstream American and Native literature. *House Made of Dawn* is frequently taught in literature courses, and critics note that all his works are of great importance to Native and non-Native students alike. Momaday’s blending of ancient and traditional material with contemporary and modernist techniques has reminded many critics to consider the lives of Natives as the genesis of the human civilization.

The action of the novel *House Made of Dawn* takes place between July 20, 1945, and February 28, 1952. The narration comprises an undated prologue and four dated portions set in the Jemez pueblo of Walatowa, New Mexico (the prologue and sections one and four take place here) and the Los Angeles area (sections two and three).
House Made of Dawn begins with a prologue that invokes the title image: “there was a house made of dawn, it was made of pollen and rain, and the land was very old and everlasting” (1). Abel, the protagonist of the novel, is running through the rain at dawn near Walatowa, New Mexico, his body dwarfed by the winter sky and covered by the marks of burnt wood and ashes.

“The Longhair” (Walatowa, Canon de San Diego, 1945)

The first chapter of the novel titled “The Longhair” begins with the protagonist, Abel, returning to his reservation in New Mexico after fighting in World War II. The war has left him emotionally devastated and he arrives too drunk to recognize his grandfather, Francisco. He raised Abel after the death of Abel’s mother and older brother, Vidal. Francisco instilled in Abel a sense of native traditions and values, but the war and other events severed Abel’s connections to that world of spiritual and physical wholeness and connectedness to the land and its people.

The farmers of Walatowa work all summer in the fields. Abel’s grandfather, the elderly Francisco, is one such farmer. He is found driving a team of roan mares along a road thinking of a race he ran in his youth. The race is for good hunting and harvests, and all the young men of the tribe race along the wagon road at dawn. Francisco remembers how he had won the race by surpassing the speedy Mariano, who had been in the lead and was considered the best long distance runner in the area. Francisco is having this memory in 1945, on the day Abel is returning to the reservation after armed
service in World War II. Around midday, the drunken Abel stumbles off the bus into his grandfather’s arms.

The following day, Abel remembers his brother Vidal and his mother, both of whom died of a disease years ago, when Abel was young. Abel never knew his father, who was Navajo and was considered an outsider by the rest of the Indians at the reservation. Abel recalls his experiences as a member of the Eagle Watchers Society, a small group descended from immigrants of the Tanoan city of Bahkyula. The Tanoans, a forgotten tribe, suffered much persecution and hardships before they stumbled into Walatowa years ago. As a member of the Society, Abel hunts a large and vigorous eagle.

In another part of town Father Olguin receives a mysterious and beautiful woman, Angela St. John, a woman from Los Angeles who has just moved into the nearby Benevides house for rest and relaxation. Angela meets Father Olguin at the church and tells him she needs someone to chop firewood for the wood stove at the Benevides house. Father Olguin replies that he might know someone who can help her.

Abel agrees to chop Angela’s wood for three dollars. He spends Tuesday afternoon at the Benevides house under the pale and thin woman’s watchful gaze. Angela is fascinated by the way Abel throws his entire body into chopping wood, while she is only irritated by his reserve. Abel agrees that he will come back to chop the rest of the wood, but is ambiguous about what
day he will do so. That evening, as Angela burns some of the wood, Father Olguin stops by and invites her to the feast of Santiago.

The saintly Santiago was known for his exploits on his ride southward into Mexico. Along his journey he accepted the hospitality of an old couple, who killed their only rooster to feed him. According to Father Olguin, Santiago had disguised himself as a peon and won a contest at the royal court. As his prize, he wed one of the king’s daughters. The king tried to have Santiago killed, only to be thwarted by the same rooster, which Santiago pulled out of his mouth whole and alive. The rooster gives Santiago a magic sword that he used to slay the king’s assassins.

Ceremonially, the feast of Santiago plays itself out every July 25th, reenacting the events of history. A brilliant horseman, an albino (a person that is born with no color in the hair or skin, which are white), bloodies Abel with a dead rooster during a ceremonial contest as Angela watches.

Four days later, Abel returns to the Benevides house to finish cutting Angela’s wood. Angela has been waiting and her obsession with Abel results in a passionate romantic tryst between them. Angela seduces Abel to distract herself from her own unhappiness, but also because she senses an animal-like quality in Abel. She promises to help him leave the reservation to find better means of employment. Possibly as a result of this affair, Abel realizes that his return to the reservation has been unsuccessful. He no longer feels at home and he is confused. On the first of August, Father Olguin makes another
appearance at the Benevides house, only to realize that Angela has no romantic intentions towards him.

Huge festivities rage through the town as a storm sets in towards the evening. Francisco has spent the evening in the ceremonial kiva, or hut, along with the other holy men in town. Additionally, a bull is running through the streets as part of the ceremony. That night, among many drunken Navajos at Paco’s, the local bar, Abel and the albino have a tense conversation and leave the bar. Abel kills the albino, deciding he is a witch and watches his blood drip in the rain. Abel is then found guilty of murder and sent to jail.

“Priest of the Sun” (Los Angeles, 1952)

The Second Chapter titled “Priest of the Sun” takes place seven years later in Los Angeles. Abel has been released from prison and unites with a local group of Indians. Abel finds himself in Los Angeles, under the care of the Indian Relocation program. The second chapter begins with the Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, the Pastor and Priest of the Sun, delivering a sermon entitled “The Gospel According to John.” Tosamah has a disciple named Cristobal Cruz. A good deal of the priest’s sermon is a retelling of old Kiowa legends he has heard from his grandmother, such as the story of Tai-me.

In contrast with Abel’s daily existence are the sermons that the Priest of the Sun, John Big Bluff Tosamah, delivers in this same section of the novel, the last weekend of January 1952. The sermons contain several stories of the
Kiowa people, such as how the Kiowa came to be and how the Big Dipper was formed in the sky.

Abel lives with another Indian, Ben Benally, in a small apartment, and spends some time working with Ben at a factory. In the present moment of the narrative Abel is found broken and beat up lying semi-conscious on the beach, reminiscing over the events and experiences of the past months in Los Angeles—Tosamah’s sermons among those experiences. Abel recalls Milly, a social worker who comes by the apartment to ask questions and help Abel adjust to life in Los Angeles. Milly, the only daughter of a farmer in Oklahoma has come to Los Angeles for education. Milly, who has blond hair, a plain face, and a constant laugh, is now a social worker on Abel’s case. Sensitive enough to notice that Abel hates the questions on her social-services surveys, she starts visiting Ben and Abel merely on a social level, which causes Abel to begin to appreciate her. Milly and Abel eventually become lovers, and she nurtures him even when he loses his job and starts drinking heavily.

At this point, only fragments of what has happened to Abel are revealed, such as his experience as a fearless and crazy soldier in World War II. Abel also briefly reminisces on one of the ceremonies with the Priest of the Sun that involved the use of the hallucinogenic peyote.

The next day, Tosamah delivers a second sermon—titled “The Way to Rainy Mountain”—that retells the Kiowa story of the origin of Devil’s Tower in Wyoming. Tosamah’s grandmother was about seven years old when she
witnessed the last of the Kiowa sun dances, held in 1887 above Rainy Mountain Creek. Three years later she witnessed the last gathering of the Kiowa as a sun dance culture, known as “Sun Dance When the Forked Poles Were Left Standing.” At this last gathering, American soldiers from Fort Sill rode out and dispersed the Kiowa tribe, preventing them from carrying out the ceremony, which was the essential act of their faith.

In her later years, Tosamah’s grandmother lived in a small house near the point where Rainy Mountain Creek runs into the Washita River. Here, every summer, there was excitement and reunion among the Kiowa. At the end of his sermon Tosamah retells the story of visiting his grandmother’s grave on Rainy Mountain.

Abel, meanwhile, finally gets up from the ditch where he lies on the beach, and slowly makes his way across Los Angeles toward the apartment he shares with Ben.

“The Night Chanter” (Los Angeles, 1952)

The third chapter titled “The Night Chanter” is told from the point of view of Ben Benally, who is Abel’s roommate in the apartment in Los Angeles. It is the day after Abel—badly beaten by unknown assailants and left in a ditch on the beach—has left Los Angeles to return to Walatowa. Ben remembers going up on a hill in the city with many Indians the night before. The group, which included Tosamah and Cristobal Cruz, started playing songs and dancing while Abel and Ben went off by themselves. Abel and Ben made
a pact to meet sometime in the future, just the two of them and two horses among the hills, and to sing the song called “House Made of Dawn.”

Ben gradually reveals the events of the prior weeks. It is learnt that Abel had been drinking far too much and finally quit working at the factory to spend all his time at bars. One evening, over a poker game at Tosamah’s, Abel became so enraged with Tosamah that he tried to hit him. Abel was too drunk, however, and merely stumbled, provoking laughs from the others in the room.

From that point on, Abel descended further into drunkenness and poverty until he had a fight with Ben and left the apartment. Abel and Ben had been mugged by a corrupt local cop earlier that week, and Ben implies that Abel was perhaps intending some sort of revenge when he left the apartment. Regardless of whether or not Ben’s guess is correct, Abel returns to the apartment three days later, crashing to the floor of the stairwell, badly beaten and seemingly close to death.

“The Dawn Runner” (Walatowa, 1952)

Abel returns to the reservation to find his grandfather, Francisco, who fell sick and on the verge of dying. Abel tends to his grandfather for days, and the narration switches to the inner thoughts of the stricken old man. When Francisco was younger he had tracked a bear for many miles through the forest. He finally caught up to the bear by a river, and shot. Smeared with the blood of the young bear, he entered the town to be greeted by the men with rifles, whom he gave strips of bear meat. Francisco’s last memory is of taking
Abel to the plain where the race of the dead takes place, telling him to listen to the dead run at dawn.

Abel wakes up in the middle of the night sensing that Francisco has passed away. He immediately dresses the old man’s body according to ceremonial tradition, and takes the body to the local mission, where he leaves it with Father Olguin. The Father does not understand why Abel insists on leaving the body before dawn break, until he finally has an epiphany that explains Abel’s actions.

Abel leaves the mission and travels to the plain outside of Walatowa where the race of the dead takes place. It is just before dawn, and as the sun strikes the rim of the valley, the runners run with the dawn. Abel runs after them, stumbling in his exhaustion but using the song “House Made of Dawn” to carry him forward.

At the opening of House Made of Dawn, Momaday introduces Abel, the protagonist, saying that Abel is running through a desolate landscape by himself. The landscape is “the house made of dawn, made of pollen and of rain” (1). Such a house, in which the wall is the dawn and whose roof is the rain, is a place that is limitless and free. Abel is born into this freedom, and he is the one who has the responsibility to tend to the natural world around him, to take care of it and foster it. Momaday implies the notion of creation and beginnings by starting the novel at dawn. The chapter titles, which indicate sequences of days, indicate that time is the important structuring mechanism of
the novel as a whole. Furthermore, the day the novel begins on July 20 is an important one to the Kiowa people, as it is the day that the Kiowa attempted to hold a sun dance for the last time, in 1890. Indeed, many of the events in Abel’s life are connected to dates that correspond to the decline of the Kiowa tribe.

The first chapter of the novel takes place in the town of Walatowa, with Abel’s grandfather, Francisco, as the protagonist. Francisco’s memory of the race he won when he was young provides a direct connection to Abel’s running in the prologue: to say that the race is part of Abel’s culture and tradition, and that Abel, in running, is following in the footsteps of his ancestors. In this chapter Momaday also sets up an opposition through the description of environmental sounds. For most of the chapter Francisco hears the sounds around him, such as the wind, the sparrows, or the river. As he approaches the junction to pick up Abel, however, he hears something else—the low whine of tires on road, a high-pitched mechanical sound. This sound, so alien to the environment to which Francisco is accustomed, comes from the bus that carries Abel back into town. Francisco is instantly alerted to the fact that Abel is someone who is coming from a foreign, more modern world.

Abel’s otherness has always been a part of him. Waking up the next day, he recalls that he did not know who his father was, but knew that he was Navajo, or a Sia, or something else. It was this different blood that made Abel’s father foreign and strange to the rest of the Indians in the village.
In the climatic moment of the first chapter, when Abel kills the albino, who has previously taunted him at the feast of Santiago, Momaday purposefully leaves out the conversation between the two men. What they say to each other is never revealed, we only know that Abel stabs the albino, and that the albino is completely emotionless and expressionless as he dies.

Momaday describes Abel’s entrance into modern-day America through the symbol of the helpless and vain smelt fish that throw themselves on the beach in the moonlight, only to be casually captured by fishermen. After Abel kills the albino he is sent to prison and then to Los Angeles, where he spirals down from a productive member of society to a helpless drunkard. The central sections of *House Made of Dawn* take place at a point in the narrative when Abel has been badly beaten up and is close to death on the beach. Through flashbacks and the Priest of the Sun’s sermons, Momaday presents with a sketchy picture of what has happened to Abel prior to his awakening on the beach. Intermittently arranged through this section are the musings, longings, and desires Abel recalls as he lies semi-conscious on the beach. Central to these desires is Milly, the social worker whom Abel loves and calls out for help.

The clear counterpoint and foil to Abel is the Priest of the Sun, whose sermons are primarily retellings of the stories and origin myths of the Kiowa. Momaday uses the character of the Priest of the Sun to tell the stories of the Kiowa, stories that represent the heritage from which Abel feels impossibly far
at this moment. Abel says, “he had lost his place… he had known where he was… now [he was] reeling on the edge of the void” (104). For many peoples, the origin myth is the birth story of their culture, and has the power to bestow a concrete notion of who they are as a people and as individuals. By structuring the chapter in such a way-juxtaposing the Kiowa creation myth with Abel’s hopeless alienation and loneliness, Momaday always reminds who Abel is and how far he has degenerated.

Closely paralleling Abel’s degeneration is the story of the demise of the Kiowa as a sun dance culture. On the beach Abel is seen, the modern Indian, washed up on the shore of America’s indifference and cruelty, while in the priest’s sermon, the soldiers of Fort Sill preventing the Kiowa from celebrating their faith through their own ignorance and intolerance. This juxtaposition of present and the past drives home a point Momaday reiterates throughout the novel the destruction of American Indian culture continues to reenact itself in the present lives of many Indians. The past is never replaced, but instead continues to trickle into the future as loss and loneliness.

In the third section, titled “The Night Chanter” Abel is seen through the eyes of Ben Benally, his roommate and an Indian who has been successfully relocated in modern American society. What differentiates Abel from Ben is that Ben tries his best to fit in the society of Los Angeles, while Abel cannot or will not. When Abel first comes to Los Angeles and to the factory, it is Ben who shows him the ropes at work and gives him a place to stay. More
important than Ben’s care for Abel is the kinship the two men share. When Abel returns from the beach and goes to the hospital, he makes a hopeful promise that one day, both of them, rather than assimilating into the culture of the white man, will meet each other under the auspices of the essential context of their friendship. They will join each other on an open plain or in a lush valley, singing the song they both know from their upbringing “House Made of Dawn.”

In the last section of the novel, “The Dawn Runner,” the mystery of the prologue is revealed. An essential aspect of House Made of Dawn is that its narrative structure is circular. Unlike the rest of the chapters, which are clearly dated, the timeframe of the event occurring in the prologue is never specified. It is only at the end of the novel we realize that the scene of Abel running in the prologue actually occurs at the end of the novel, after the death of Francisco.

There are several possible ways to interpret Abel’s dawn run. The first is in the context of one of Francisco’s cherished memories, the time when he won the race in 1889. From what one can understand, the race no longer takes place every year in the way it once did. From the scene in which Francisco takes Abel to listen to the race in the valley, we sense that the race continues to be run by the spirits of the dead runners. Most of the descriptions of the runners imply that they make no sound unless one opens oneself to listening for them.
When Abel decides to run that morning, we know that he is probably incapable of running far, as he is still recovering from the severe injuries he sustained in Los Angeles. Regardless, he runs, and Momaday writes that Abel runs until he cannot feel any more pain. It can be interpreted this to mean that Abel himself dies, but that seems unlikely. More likely is that running with the spirits of ancestors gives Abel the strength to overlook or transcend the battered physical condition of his body. Furthermore, driven by the song “House Made of Dawn,” which is running in his head, he is able to overcome his physical limitations.

The run is also an initiation into another phase of Abel’s life. He could be running with the notion that he would like to run with the spirit of his grandfather. He could also be running with the notion that he is taking on his grandfather’s place in the town, a form of passing the torch from one runner to the other. When compare both scenes of running—the prologue and the novel’s closing pages, we see that the closing is written from the perspective of an ancient culture and tradition that continues on, while the prologue is written from the perspective of the other culture, the American, which can only see a desolate landscape with a lone man running through the dawn.

The bulk of the novel focuses on Abel’s perspective, though Ben Benally narrates the third section. Furthermore, a significant portion of the narrative in the second section is a sermon delivered by Tosamah
Details in the novel correspond to real-life occurrences. Momaday refers in his memoir *The Names* (1976) to an incident that took place at Jemez on which he based the murder in *House Made of Dawn*. A native resident killed a New Mexico state trooper, and the incident created great controversy. Native American beliefs and customs, actual geographical locations, and realistic events also inspired elements in *House Made of Dawn*.

*House Made of Dawn* produced no extensive commentary when it was first published perhaps, as William James Smith mused in a review of the work in *Commonweal* LXXXVIII (20 September 1968), because “it seems slightly un-American to criticize an American Indian’s novel”—and its subject matter and theme did not seem to conform to the prescription above.

On the Surface, *House Made of Dawn* appears to be concerned with the issues of ethnicity, formation of the self, self discovery, displacement connected to traditional ceremonies and the rhythm of nature. Bernard Selinger in the critical article “*House Made of Dawn*: A Positively Ambivalent Bildungsroman” argues that the literary changes experienced by Native Americans are captured by the tradition of bildungsroman. In spite of inheriting the legacy of bildungsroman tradition, fundamentally *House Made of Dawn* acquires ambivalence and questions the very possibility of identity formation. Selinger locates the ambivalence in the very narrative structure of the novel: “The Ambivalence regarding integration and disconnection is also situated in the narrative’s preoccupation with vision and with the notion that
some form of primordial unity and transcendence can be achieved through sight.” (Modern Fiction Studies. 1999. 45)

Early reviewers such as Marshall Sprague in his “Anglos and Indians,” New York Times Book Review, 9 June 1968, complained that the novel contained “plenty of haze” but suggested that perhaps this was inevitable in rendering “the mysteries of cultures different from our own” and then goes on to describe this as “one reason why [the story] rings so true.” Sprague also discussed the seeming contradiction of writing about a native oral culture especially in English, the language of the so-called oppressor. He continues, “The mysteries of cultures different from our own cannot be explained in a short novel, even by an artist as talented as Mr. Momaday” (2).

Overall, the book has come to be seen as a success. Sprague concluded in his article that the novel was superb and Momaday was widely praised for the novel’s rich description of Indian life. Now there is a greater recognition of Momaday’s fictional art, and critics have come to recognize its unique achievement as a novel. Despite a qualified reception the novel had succeeded in making its impact even on earlier critics though they were not sure of their own responses. In more recent criticism there are signs of greater clarity of understanding of Momaday’s achievement. In his review (which appeared in Western American Literature 5, Spring 1970), John Z. Bennett had pointed out how through “a remarkable synthesis of poetic mode and profound emotional and intellectual insight into the Indians perduring human status”, Momaday’s
novel becomes at last the very act it is dramatizing, an artistic act, a “creation hymn.”

Momaday’s use in *House Made of Dawn* of a fragmented, stream-of-consciousness narrative style, multiple narrative voices, and flashbacks have earned him favorable comparisons with American novelist William Faulkner. Alan R. Velie has observed:

Momaday’s achievement in *House Made of Dawn* is significant. He was able to employ the rhythms and imagery of his verse in creating a prose style that is both lyrical and powerful. It is no mean achievement to make the self-destructive, alcoholic Abel a sympathetic and complex character, or to portray the dusty pueblo of Jemez as a beautiful and exotic place…. *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday’s first literary success, is also his masterpiece. (92)

Critic Kenneth Lincoln in *Native American Renaissance* (1985) identified the Pulitzer for *House Made of Dawn* as the moment that sparked the Native American Renaissance. Many major American Indian novelists such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, James Welch, Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich have cited the novel as a major inspiration for their own work.

*House Made of Dawn* takes its title from a translation of a Navajo song which is part of an extensive religious ceremony. The text of the translation is included in the novel as a song sung by Benally. The house referred to has
been identified as one of the prehistoric cliff dwellings along the upper Rio Grande, and the song alludes to it as the home of the semi-divine personification of the dawn. Throughout the novel, important events and insights occur at dawn or sunrise. Also, throughout the novel Momaday incorporates ceremonial, mythical, and anthropological material from three different American Indian nations—Jemez Pueblo, Kiowa, and Navajo into the texture of the contemporary story of psychological disintegration and renewal. Though *House Made of Dawn* is narratively complex, constructed on a principle of fragmentation and reconstitution somewhat like the modernist poems of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, which Momaday studied with noted American poet and critic Yvor Winters while in college and graduate school. The story has a circular rather than linear or strictly chronological structure. The prologue that begins it actually depicts the closing event of the book, and within each section linear time is reshaped through the wandering thought patterns of the narrators and central consciousness. Moreover, within the story are inserted various non-narrative verbal forms. Besides the translated poem text mentioned above, there is another translated poem, fragments purporting to be the diary of a priest, pieces of bureaucratic/legal documents and testimony, and folk tales and legends. The reader’s attention is repeatedly drawn away from the story and toward the author’s literary devices.

In *House Made of Dawn*, place functions not only as setting but also as character; the landscape of Jemez not only contextualizes but also provides
criteria for evaluating human events occurring “taking place” there. Several critics like Dickinson-Brown, Schubnell, Trimmer, have acknowledged the fundamental importance of the landscape in the novel.

In the pretextual principle of Momaday’s statement, a human being’s life is, or ought to be, an event indivisible from the landscape in which it takes place. One consequence of this proposition is that separation from the land leads to disease spiritual illness, alienation, and uncertainty. Such separation can be brought about by outside forces; it may also come about through a failure of vision, an individual’s inability or unwillingness to remain one with the land and the spirit or life of the land. Abel, the protagonist of Momaday’s novel, suffers both of these kinds of separation.

Properly, the relationship between the life of the individual and the life of the land is one of intimate and indivisible reciprocity. The land holds and is held by the People living there, and the People hold and are held by the land, and the terms of engagement become encoded over time as the characteristic cultural traditions of the People. As Momaday casts it and as Abel sees it, both the snake and the eagle are avatars of place, manifestations of the life of the land itself. At Walatowa (Jemez) the hold of the land manifests as the “snake spirit” of the land, while the human ability to hold the land manifests as the “eagle spirit” informing Abel’s vision for much of the novel. In large measure, the plot of House Made of Dawn is shaped by the conflict between Abel’s willingness to hold the land in his vision on the one hand and his resistance to
being held by the land on the other. Throughout the novel but particularly in chapter one and four (both set at Walatowa), the eagle and snake motifs point the way not only to an understanding of the life of the land but also to an understanding of Abel’s own separation from that life and his consequent spiritual sickness. To be whole in his life at this place, Abel must become willing to be held by the land, which is to say “possessed” by it as much as he would possess it. The eagle holds the land whole and entire in its vision. Eagle medicine is about possessing the land, and this Abel is willing to do from the outset. Snake medicine, however, is about being possessed by the land, and Abel needs a good dose of this medicine to make his spirit whole. A return to wholeness and healing, for Abel, depends on his ability to accept both of these aspects of place by making room in his vision of his own identity for both avatars of holding both eagle and snake. In the structure of the novel, Angela, the albino, and Martinez all function as agents of the snake spirit of the land, and Abel’s several encounters with these figures prepare him to surrender to the hold of the land in chapter four.

In addition to presenting Abel’s own ceremony of recovery, the novel also offers the characters of Francisco, Tosamah, and Ben Benally to model three other strategies for coming to terms with the disease of separation. These strategies are useful insofar as they preserve a vision of wholeness of constellated harmony between individual identity, cultural identity, and landscape. However, when such visions are grounded in human memory but
not in the immediate experience of place, they lack the land’s power to heal and make the individual whole. Within this context, Abel’s function as the protagonist of this novel is to redeem the faith of the People as represented by these Jemez, Kiowa, and Navajo “visionaries” in their native land as a source of well-being and healing. To carry out this function, Abel must reunite himself with the landscape that happens to be, for him, the source of life, and there become willing as well as able to cease imposing some prefabricated vision upon the land and derive, instead, an appropriate vision and identity from the land.

In that most fundamental sense of the term used in Momaday’s epigraphic statement, an event “takes place” in the prologue to the novel. This event, Abel’s running in the Winter Race, and in so doing becoming the “Dawn Runner” of the end of the novel “takes place” in a universe where mythic time and ordinary time are not so much separate as versions of one another. The first and last words of the novel, Dypaloh and Qtsedaba, announce that the story being framed is a specifically Towan or Jemez story while the first and last sentences of the story so framed “There was a house made of dawn”; and “House made of pollen, house made of dawn” paraphrase the opening lines of a traditional Navajo chant. Taken together, these two framing devices identify the spirit of the land as a reality that precedes, and with the event of dawn comes to inform, the landscape of the contained story.
The second context which needn’t be too strictly differentiated from the first, is the literal, in the sense of geographically physical place in which the event occurs. In this sense, “There” is that tract of the earth, “the land [that] was very old and everlasting” and “still and strong,” becoming apprehensible to Abel with the coming of the dawn (1). A page later, in the subtitle to Part 1, we learn that this place is called “Walatowa, Cañon de San Diego.” At this place, “Abel was running,” his own personal existence looking “very little and alone” when contextualized within the place, and the immense life force of the place, in which he runs. (2)

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, the initial spiritual context implies that the power to heal dwells immanent in this physical landscape. At the particular time this event (Abel’s running) begins to occur, however, the healing power inherent in the landscape remains to be seen. Abel’s experience of this place at this time, as Momaday records it, is focused initially on his own pain and on the other runners rather than directly and exclusively upon the land itself. Not until he is well in motion, not until “Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind” can he “see at last without having to think”; what he comes then to see, finally, is himself running within the context of the land: “The road curved out in front of him and rose away in the distance. He could not see the town. . . . The road curved out and lay into the bank of rain beyond, and Abel was running . . .” (1-2); “He could see the canyon and the mountains and the
sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hills at dawn. He was running . . .” (212)

Structurally, then, the prologue, with its wintertime setting and the Winter Race being run, functions chronologically and spatially both to fix a point that the novel will cycle around to meet again at the very end and also to fix, at the center of this structural circumference, the image of Abel in motion, his vision clearing and finally becoming acute with this ageless dawn (first light of this day, first light also of this new season by Jemez reckoning). The rest of the novel can be understood to constitute the story of Abel’s preparation for participation in this landscape and in the race; the race itself. The formal structure of Part 1 of the novel reiterates the idea established in the prologue that, seen properly, the identity of the land precedes and informs human existence. Again in Part 1, the landscape of Walatowa is introduced prior to any mention of the people who live or have lived there. Momaday is doing much more here than providing the conventional element of “setting” for his novel, the landscape, as it is described, has a life of its own that precedes and also contextualizes the other, secondary forms of life, including human lives that have learned to coexist with the nature of this place over the centuries.

As the chapter heading implies clearly enough, the subject (and mode of vision) of this section of the story is the “Longhair” Way, an implied strategy of coexisting with the land that is approximately as old as human history is at
this place. The mode of the Longhair, to be understood as the traditional modus vivendi of Jemez culture, is embodied in the figure of Francisco, who is a “grandfather” both literally and figuratively to Abel. Francisco functions to transmit to Abel the kind of knowledge of this place that has for centuries enabled human beings to live gracefully here.

Francisco’s existence conforms rather closely to the shape and spirit of Walatowa, and perhaps this is why his is the first human form Momaday presents in the post-prologue body of the novel. He was alone on the wagon road. The pavement lay on a higher parallel at the base of the hills to the east. The trucks of the town and those of the lumber camps at Paliza and Vallecitos-made an endless parade on the highway, but the wagon road was used now only by the herdsmen and planters whose fields lay to the south and west.

We learn that as a younger man Francisco ran the Winter Race on this same road, the most traditional path connecting the spirit of Seytokwa (an earlier Jemez settlement site) to the more contemporary Middle at Walatowa, even having once won the race by outrunning “Mariano, who was everywhere supposed to be the best of the long-race runners” (7), in the year 1889. Further confirming Francisco’s status within the novel as a well-acclimated native (in all senses) of Jemez, he appears to have Bahkyush as well as Jemez blood in his veins, he has served both the Catholic Church and the Squash Kiva in important capacities, and he has been honored formally as a hunter, as a ceremonial drummer, and as a runner. Further, Francisco’s presence in the
structure of Part 1 brackets Abel’s in much the same way as the Winter Race at sunrise brackets the story of life at Walatowa, once again suggesting that the Longhair Way precedes and contextualizes Abel’s own.

Since one of Francisco’s functions in the novel is to teach Abel the Jemez “Longhair” way of living in harmony with the land, perhaps one of the signs of Abel’s sickness early in Part 1 is that none of the six episodes he recalls of his life at Jemez prior to World War II is a memory of being in psychological harmony with the land. As revealed later, however, Francisco has taught his grandson much of what he needs to know; as Francisco lies dying at the end of Part 4, he recalls six episodes from his life at Jemez, two of which deal specifically with showing Abel how the People have come to relate to the land in this place. The first episode recalls how Francisco took Abel and Vidal out when “they were old enough” to learn how to live their lives according to the “house of the sun,” to learn “where they were, where all things were, in time” (197); the other recalls the time he took only Abel north of the village to the “round red rock” to hear the sound of ancestors still running “the race of the dead” (206). In both episodes, Francisco is teaching Abel old truths of the tribe, truths that are anchored at very specific places on the land. These are places Abel will return to and become part of by becoming the “Dawn Runner” at the end of the novel. First, however, Abel must correct his vision of the spirit of these two places and, by extension, of the spirit of the land bounded by these two sites.
Actually Abel’s exposure to White culture during World War II is the cause of his felt dislocation and disease. But Momaday clearly establishes early in Part 1 that Abel’s disease is his unwillingness to be held by the land, that is, his resistance to the snake spirit of the place, predates any of his recorded encounters with either corrupting Anglos or the horrors of the war. During the first sunrise of his return to Jemez after the war, Abel “climb[s] the steep escarpment of the hill” across the highway to the east of the village to re-establish in his experience the reality of the place called Walatowa and Momaday’s own words regarding the identity of self with its landscape. This thumbnail sketch of “everything in advance of his going” (23) is composed of six recalled incidents, each of which involves some loss, uncertainty, or other source of pain. Coming back from breaking a horse at a ranch in the Jemez Mountains, Abel was arrested by a vision of two eagles, a male and a larger female, metaphorically dancing with a snake. The episode is recounted as though it were to be understood as a personal power vision. This particular vision sets the context for Abel’s own felt identity prior to World War II, as well as how Abel sees himself in relation to others for most of the rest of the novel. As Abel recalls it:

They were golden eagles, a male and a female, in their mating flight. They were cavorting, spinning and spiralling on the cold, clear columns of air, and they were beautiful. They swooped and hovered, leaning on the air, and swung close together, feinting
and screaming with delight. The female was full-grown, and the span of her broad wings was greater than any man’s height. . . .

She carried a rattlesnake; it hung shining from her feet, limp and curving out in the trail of her flight. (17-18)

The dance of the eagles, staged in the sky above the Valle Grande takes on the ritualized motion of some exotic ka’t’sina performance in Abel’s eyes, the comings and goings of the two eagles linked to the image of the helpless snake. He sees the female eagle rise until she is “small in the sky,” and he sees her “let go of the snake,” which falls “slowly, writhing and rolling, floating out like a bit of silver thread against the wide backdrop of the land.” He then sees the male take up the ritual by “sliding down in a blur of motion to the strike,” hitting the snake and “cracking its long body like a whip,” then repeating the motion of the female by rising and “let[ting] go of the snake in turn.” As the eagles end their dance and the snake falls back to the earth, “Abel watched them go, straining to see, saw them veer once, dip and disappear.” (18)

Abel finds this vision “an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning” (15). What makes it so, is not that he sees eagles which are in fact a common sight at Valle Grande, but rather that he sees them moving in a special relationship to culebra, the snake. As Abel sees them, eagle and snake are antithetical creatures; it is the conjunction of these antitheses in a single dance that accounts for the “awful, holy” quality of the event. But the sight of eagles so intimately involved with a snake clearly makes Abel feel uneasy, and
Abel’s own participation in the event, the quality of his witness privileges the role of the eagles. As Abel understands it, the aerial dance of the eagles is about showing off their mutual superiority over the snake; when the male eagle lets go of the snake in the air, Abel’s attention locks exclusively onto the eagles until they disappear from view, as though the rattlesnake were of no concern or consequence anymore; and when later (after he has “brooded for a time, full of a strange longing” [19]) he finally decides to tell what he has seen, he seeks out old Patiestwea, head of the Eagle Watchers Society, rather than an elder of the Snake Society.

It probably comes as no surprise to most readers that the protagonist of a novel devoted to recovering Native American identity and should identify provisionally with the eagle rather than the snake. Within the broad, pan-Indian cultural context of the novel, the eagle is a conventional metaphor for Native American vision in general, and certainly Momaday’s eagle functions that way in this novel: “The eagle ranges far and wide over the land, farther than any other creature, and all things there are related simply by having existence in the perfect vision of a bird” (57). Such a holistic vision of place combined with a vision of his own place in the pattern of the land is precisely what Abel lacks, and this lack is what accounts for the “longing” and alienation he so frequently feels. Abel’s identification with the eagle is also consistent with Jemez historical and cultural tradition. According to Joe Sando, “Jemez still uses the eagle as its symbol or logo” and as a sign of ownership
and while the Jemez People currently abide at the place they call Walatowa, other important places where they have lived include Seyshokwa, “eagle living place,” and Seytokwa, “eagle cage place.”

Perhaps the most obvious flaw in Abel’s vision for most of the novel, a flaw manifests in his initial response to the Valle Grande experience, is that Abel is willing to identify with only part of the ceremony he sees being enacted in the air above “the right eye of the earth.” Beginning with his earliest memories and continuing throughout the novel, Abel perceives the snake spirit as a spirit enemy rather than as a potential ally; instead of trying to make a place for this figure or the spirit it represents in his concept of himself or the place he wishes to identify with, Abel attempts to avoid or destroy snake medicine and its avatars whenever he encounters them. Insofar as Abel’s disease arises out of his separation from the land, then, it would seem that his disease is caused even more specifically by his own continued alienation from the snake spirit of the land. The fragments of memory preceding the eagle vision in Abel’s sunrise meditation, all of which encode experiences of fear and of alienation, bear out this contention. A recurring presence in this ensemble of diseasing memories of Abel’s life at Jemez, an ensemble that includes memories of some of his most intimate encounters with the living land of Jemez is the figure of snake.

Precisely what function snake energy does have in the overall welfare of the place called Walatowa is hard to see, not only for Abel but also for most
critics of the novel. Many critics are quick to spot the association of the snake spirit with the albino in the “Longhair” chapter, and several of them point to the further relationship between the albino and Martinez, both of whom Abel identifies as “culebras.” According to Tosamah later in the novel, during his trial Abel identifies the albino as a snake (149); according to Ben, Martinez is commonly known among the Native American community in Los Angeles as “culebra” (141). Culebra is Spanish for “snake.” Both the albino and Martinez represent the intrusions of a white that is, Euro-American spirit that has invaded, and diseased, Abel’s consciousness as well as Jemez culture.

In Abel’s recorded experience, avatars of the snake spirit of the land fail to cooperate with his will, the way the snake in his vision was made to cooperate with the animal embodiment of perfect vision and spiritual mobility, the eagle. Unlike either of the two eagles he sees sporting with their snake in the sky over the Valle Grande, throughout the novel Abel lacks the ability to exercise casual control over culebra. Rather, the pattern of Abel’s confrontations with culebras and, more importantly, with the energy or spirit of place that is embodied in the figures of snakes and their allies in the novel is, until the final movements of the novel, the pattern of Abel’s failures to live gracefully and in harmony with the land, its spirit, and the manifestations of that spirit he encounters in the course of the novel.

Images of Abel’s faulty vision both physiological and spiritual abound in the novel and the relationship between faulty vision and illness is
established in the novel’s opening portrait of Abel returning from the war, getting off the bus stuporously drunk, “he fell against his grandfather and did not know him. His wet lips hung loose and his eyes were half closed and rolling” (9). Another major indication of Abel’s faulty vision, both before and after his time in the Armed Forces, is his lack of speech. The following passage, for instance, has become something of a locus classicus of Momaday critical study:

He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it. And yet it was still there, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past and the words had taken hold of the moment and made it eternal. Had he been able to say it, anything of his own language—even the commonplace formula of greeting “Where are you going?”—which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself; but he was dumb. Not dumb—silence was the older and better part of custom still—but inarticulate. (58)

This passage is to mean that Abel is sick because he is “inarticulate,” as though words in themselves might heal him, an interpretation that, on the surface of it, seems generally in line with Momaday’s own frequent
pronouncements regarding the generative power of language. However, is that Abel’s inarticulacy is Symptomatic of his disease, his sickness lies in his fear of being possessed by the land (such possession equated in his thinking with disease and death, as in the cases of his mother and Vidal, or with crippling, as in the case of Francisco) and in his consequent desire to escape or resist the hold the land has on his own existence; for Abel to enter fully into the life of this place (including the Tanoan verbal community of this place) would be to accede to such possession. Before Abel can “show him whole to himself” in language, he must become “whole,” must have a whole self to show (articulate). But he will never be “whole” at this place until he surrenders to being held by the land, “possessed” by it as fully as he would possess it. The eagle holds the land whole and entire in its vision: eagle medicine is about possessing the land. Snake medicine is about being possessed by it, and Abel needs a good dose of this medicine to make his spirit whole.

Bracketed by images of Francisco living in the Longhair way, Part 1 records Abel’s unsuccessful attempt to “return” to the life of Jemez Pueblo immediately following World War II. After recalling his six prewar memories, Abel continues to stand at this high place on the land “for a long time, the land still yielding to the light,” without thinking or moving--waiting, it appears, for some vision that will tell him he belongs here. By evening, even though Abel still has established no human connection with his grandfather or with any
other human, he finds himself beginning to feel “at home,” a feeling he gets from merely seeing the land and people living there.

At this place, Abel’s view of the land, and of the life of the land, is the view an eagle might have; and while reattaining this perspective on life goes far towards calming Abel’s spirit, the calm he feels is significantly provisional and qualified. What is missing from this vision of harmony is the figure of Abel in it, part of it rather than detached from it--part of it in the way that Francisco and “others” appear to be part of the source of that “scent of earth and grain” that alleviates, temporarily, Abel’s feeling of disease. Even Abel’s calmest moments, we see, are qualified by an element of dangerous self-detachment from the land, Abel’s response to his sense of the terrifying “hold” of the land that is the common tenor of his pre-war memories of life at Jemez. Abel’s struggle with the albino dramatizes both this flaw in his vision of place and the concomitant futility of his strategy to possess his life by resisting or else proving himself superior to the pull of the life in the land the snake spirit that he fears.

 Appropriately, the setting for Abel’s attempt to work his way back into the rhythms of Walatowa by participating in the annual gallo or “rooster pull”, is “the Middle” or central plaza of the village, an “ancient place” where the earth and the dwelling places built around it seem to blend into one another.

The albino, on the other hand, comes to this place easily mounted on a “dancing,” “high-spirited,” “fine black horse of good blood,” is “powerful and
deliberate in his movements,” and seems to know exactly how “the game” is to be played (43). So well does he play the game, in fact, that even Angela St. John begins to see the spirit of his role in this drama. Most obviously, the albino’s mastery of the horse and the rooster aligns him with the spirit of Santiago/San Diego, the Catholic patron saint of Jemez whose day (July 25) this is and whose story Father Olguin provides as pretext (39-40). Just as importantly, the albino’s performance (at least from Angela’s point of view) aligns him with a spirit that predates Catholicism at this place. As though witnessing the transformation of a human being into a living ka’t’sina, Angela watches the albino become an extension of the land itself, while the features of his face (hairless; the skin of his head tight everywhere except about the jowls and the “blue and violet” “thick, open lips”; the human eyes replaced by “the small, round black glasses [that] lay like pennies close together and flat against the enormous face” [44]) become those of the snake who lives within and with that land. Perhaps moved by that “wonder and regard” with which Abel only later comes to see this figure, “the townspeople gave him room” and the other riders, “too, parted for him, . . . respectful, wary, and on edge” (44). Like the Longhair figure whom Father Olguin and Angela pass on their way to the Middle (39-40), the albino is both a natural and indispensable part of the ancient drama that the Feast of Santiago commemorates and perpetuates within the context of the Jemez ritual calendar. Like the “certain, rare downfall of rain” that even Angela can hear in the sound of the drums preceding the gallo,
on this occasion Albino comes to hold “sway in the valley, like the breaking of thunder far away, echoing on and on in a region out of time” (41). While such moments of snake spirit preeminence are perhaps “rare” in the overall pattern of life or ceremony at Jemez, they are also “certain.”

Seen as part of a ceremony designed to reactivate dormant life-energy by calling in the blessing of rain for the Pueblo, the rooster pull in which the albino figures so prominently is clearly efficacious, the snake spirit comes to carry the prayers of the Pueblo to the dyasa, and the rains that have been withheld from this place for months return. The immense embankment of the storm had blackened out the whole horizon to the north.

More immediately, though, the albino’s gallo performance functions as an invitation to Abel, an invitation to re-become part of the life of the People. Perhaps a better interpretation is that the albino, in his ceremonial capacity as the personification of culturally integrated life of Walatowa (Catholic San Diego, Pecos dancing horse, and Jemez snake spirit), singles Abel out as being the one most ill and therefore the one most needful of participation in a reintegrative ceremony. In refusing to engage the albino (by actively helping to dismember the rooster), then, Abel in effect perpetuates his own disease, prolonging his separation from the regenerating life at Walatowa.

Although Abel’s vision apparently undergoes no change as a result of his first contest with the albino, the performance does play a part in transforming Angela’s vision of how life should be lived at this place (and
consequently her role in the novel with respect to Abel). Abel is thus provided with two versions of snake energy to contend with.

Abel is representing the spirit of Walatowa and its inhabitants, against Angela, a personification of the “invader,” its “enemy”. After all, Angela earlier in the novel is explicitly aligned with the Catholic presence at Jemez she comes from Los Angeles; she lives “above” the Pueblo in a “large white house”; she is constantly described as being “pale”—not in the sense of being ill but in the sense of being strikingly Caucasian; and during their first encounter in Section 3, her attitude toward Abel, a mixture of social contempt and sexual fascination, encodes stereotypical, culturally supremacist assumptions. Prior to witnessing the albino’s performance, Angela imagines spiritual fulfillment (her own and humanity’s in general) will be manifested, if ever, in some quality of perfect, far-ranging vision.

After witnessing the albino’s performance in Section 4, however, the quality of Angela’s vision seems significantly altered. Returning to the Benevides house the night after the gallo, she has become “alive to the black silent world of the canyon” (55), and so comes to see the house itself as a vital extension of the living land and herself as an occupant or inhabitant of both.

This vision of herself dwelling in the land, of her will being but an extension of the earth, aligns Angela with the albino as a figure of earthbound energy. When she determines to invest this energy in contest with Abel—”this house,” she decides at the end of Section 4, “would be the wings and the stage
of a reckoning” (54)--Angela becomes in the novel a second, female avatar of
the snake spirit informing also the figure of the albino. By this time also,
Angela’s sense of her own detached superiority, reflected in her earlier
impatience with Abel’s refusal to cooperate with her will, has given over to the
strategy of “a long outwaiting”—the way of the Longhair, as it is the way of the
land itself. This new quality of quiet self-composure derives in turn from her
new sense of dwelling not in a “big white house” but rather in the “black
organic mass” of the landscape. Her existence now has become fully and
surely defined within the context not of her earlier Christian/Apollonian ideals,
but of the land itself. When Abel finally does arrive, Angela knows it, but
significantly she no longer seems to need visual confirmation of what she
knows to be reality: “Then she heard the sudden swing of the gate, and she
knew that it was he. Just then she had no need to see him, and she sat still,
listening” (60). During the daylight hours she moves only to go to the baths,
and there goes “limp” in the warm water, sighing “all her strength away” for
several hours; she continues in this curious state of suspended life until “The
last line of light had risen to the rim of the canyon wall, and even then it was
dying out upon the blood-red rock above the trees,” until “The enormous dark
that filled the canyon was strangely cold, colder by far than the night would
be” (61). These and myriad other details in this section insist that at this point
in the novel Angela’s behavior and the quality of her vision are as
characteristically reptilian as they are human. The discomfort she initially feels
in Abel’s presence is the coiled caution not merely of Angela in the presence of Abel, but also of a snake in the presence of an eagle.

For his part, Abel comes to this encounter with ambivalent feelings about the land and his identity relative to it. As he moves up the valley from Jemez Pueblo towards the Benevides house at Los Ojos (Jemez Springs on today’s maps), he reflects on his “failure” to become fully reintegrated into the life of this place, a failure attributed at least in part to his inability to “enter into the old rhythm of the tongue” (58). He then remembers the sound of that language: “it was still there, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past” (58). Thinking about language thus steers Abel towards thinking about those who, as he sees it, have been possessed by--and in the process, destroyed or crippled by--the land. Not surprisingly, his response to this brush with the idea of poisoning possession is to “quit the pavement” and to seek the solace of his eagle vision.

In several important respects, the pattern of Abel’s confrontation with Angela at the Benevides house recapitulates the pattern of his own earlier power vision. Like the eagles in his vision, Abel uses Angela to test and prove the ability of his own life to dominate hers; and as though confirming Abel’s and eagle’s superiority, Angela (like the snake in his vision) submits to his will, moves apparently helplessly to the rhythms Abel imposes upon their sexual dance. The crucial point here is that Abel imposes this pattern upon the event: “he knew what he was doing” (65), and “she had no will to shrug him
off” (62). Consequently, whatever he might have learned about the spirit of the land informing Angela’s being at this time, and whatever modification of his vision of himself in relation to the spirit of the land might have resulted from such insight, go unrevealed to Abel, precisely because he wills the event to unfold so as to validate and confirm his pre-conviction that life is to be sustained only “above,” not “within,” the ground.

From Abel’s perspective, perhaps Angela’s surrender during their sexual encounter redeems, at least partly, his felt humiliation at the hands of the culebra albino; at any rate, he succeeds in his own eyes in making Angela the personification of defeat and loss of will, so that his triumph of will over her thus constitutes a personal triumph over his old antagonist, the snake spirit of the land. Thus encouraged and empowered, Abel finds himself ready, to re-confront the albino.

As though to preface Abel’s re-encounter with the albino, the fifth section of Part 1 ends with a reminder that Abel’s strategy for dealing with culebra energy is incompatible with the traditional Jemez way. At dusk, the same time that Abel is testing his will against Angela, Francisco is visited in the fields by the “whispers” of “some alien presence close at hand” (65-66). Significantly, just as Angela registers Abel’s presence without having to see him, Francisco knows without seeing what is there, even though he has no name for it, and this presence arouses in him none of the fear that characterizes
Abel’s remembered response to images of darkness, whisperings in the air, and felt but unseen presences.

This movement of the rain across the land and of human responses to it also implies a context for evaluating Abel’s subsequent confrontation with the albino. Whereas both Angela and those participating in the ceremony in the village welcome the rain and draw strength from it (and indeed identify with the underground spirit by enacting its re-emergence from within the earth), Abel confronts the spirit associated with the rainstorm (as manifested in the albino) with the intention of destroying it rather than identifying with it.

The episode describing Abel’s encounter with the albino at Paco’s (four miles south of the Pueblo) has attracted about as much or more critical attention as any other episode in the novel. It has been variously explicated as a showdown between Abel and the spirit of the “invaders,” understood as The White Man or as Catholicism; as a confrontation between Abel and Jemez witchery; and as an encounter between Abel and some projected part of himself, a reading that goes far towards explaining a certain homoerotic dimension of the encounter. Each of these readings is consistent, I think, with some of the details of the episode; however, in identifying the albino (and hence Abel’s notion of culebra) as a basically social or else psychological force. These interpretations of the albino figure tend to overlook the real power--and the source of that power--that Abel appears finally to recognize in the albino’s form. The albino begins to change before Abel’s eyes into the
animal representative of the life within the land. As before during the *gallo*, Abel’s own panic at the moment of confrontation renders his will to grace ineffectual before the power of his adversary, and what begins as perhaps a ceremonialized assertion of the superiority of eagle medicine disintegrates into crude butchery. The “terrible strength” (83) of the albino’s hold has its origins not only in the land itself but also in the peculiarly earth-bound vision associated with snake energy: the albino “seemed to look not at Abel but beyond, off into the darkness and the rain, the black infinity of sound and silence” (82), out of which all life first emerges and to which all life finally returns. Transformed by his vision, the “translucent pallor” of the albino’s face takes on unmistakably snakelike features, so that at the moment of their closest encounter Abel feels “the scales of the lips and the hot slippery point of the tongue, writhing” (82). Despite Abel’s terror and resulting loss of self-control, once he has cut his way free of *culebra’s* grip he cannot help adopting a pose of worship before the “old deity of the earth” that has here touched him and that informs, even in death, its human avatar.

In the instant before [the albino] fell, his great white body grew erect and seemed to cast off its age and weight; it grew supple and sank slowly to the ground, as if the bones were dissolving within it. And Abel was no longer terrified, but strangely cautious and intent, full of wonder and regard. He could not think; there was nothing left inside him but a cold, instinctive will to wonder and regard. (83)
Despite the terror with which Abel comes to regard the snake spirit in this episode, he continues to see both that spirit and its avatars as inimical to human life. Abel’s early vision of freedom, conceived in terms of independence (and hence separation) from both the land where his life “takes place” and the Jemez culture that has evolved there, thus continues to preframe his *modus vivendi* for a period of six years following his confrontation with the *culebra* albino. As he thinks during his trial, and re-thinks just prior to acquiring the vision that will re-shape his life, it was very simple. It was the most natural thing in the world. Surely they could see that, these men who meant to dispose of him in words. They must know that he would kill the white man again, if he had the chance, that there could be no hesitation whatsoever. Abel’s blindness (and consequent disease) presented more concisely. “What the white man was” is an incarnation of the snake spirit and, as such, an embodiment of that crucial connection between the power inherent within the land to generate life and the return of rain to sustain that life from above. To regard that messenger spirit as an enemy and then to “kill such an enemy” would be to interfere with the cycle of life itself. Fortunately, destroying the albino does not destroy the spirit informing him (the collapse of the albino’s physical form implies the return of his spirit back into the earth); still, it remains for Abel to discover or invent a better, less diseasing way of coming to terms with the life of the land.
Part 4 of the novel records Abel’s final capitulation to such a new vision; Parts 2 and 3, both set in Los Angeles, record the story of Abel’s unsuccessful attempt to sustain his eagle vision on foreign ground, a process framed and counterpointed by two other time-tested Native strategies for dealing with life’s dependence on the land: John Big Bluff Tosamah’s Kiowa vision and Ben Benally’s Navajo vision. Like Abel, Tosamah and Ben find themselves “reeling on the edge of the void” (96), removed from the landscapes of their origin and thus cut off physically from the life spirit that, as Momaday sees it, both generates and sustains individual as well as cultural identity. The overall picture produced in these two sections is of three representative “relocated” Indians trying their best to adapt to a foreign culture, a culture itself removed from the land and hence inimical to the life of the spirit. Portraying the struggles of Tosamah and Ben allows Momaday to drive home the point that might be lost had he focused exclusively on the character of Abel. The disease Abel suffers from, though it manifests in a variety of symptoms, is a common disease that can be cured only by recovering an experience of place and of identity with and within that place. In the cases of Tosamah, Ben, and finally Abel, the common prerequisite to healing is a clear vision of a landscape, followed by a willingness to make the contours of that landscape the contours of one’s own identity. In both Tosamah’s and Ben’s visions, felt wholeness of self, whether remembered or immediately experienced, depends on the ability and willingness to see the
land whole, to hold to oneself—and, just as importantly in Abel’s case, to be held by that place from which vision derives.

“Tosamah, orator, physician, Priest of the Sun, son of hummingbird” (109, 127), as the several appellations suggest, the figure of Tosamah fulfills a variety of roles in Part 2 of the novel. His two sermons, strategically framing Abel’s stranded agony, serve to gloss Abel’s otherwise solitary effort to “think where the trouble had begun, what the trouble was” (105). In his capacities as “orator” and “physician,” Tosamah offers in his Saturday sermon an eloquent, ideologically grounded diagnosis of the contagious disease afflicting those who live in the “white man’s world”; in his capacities as “Priest of the Sun” and “son of hummingbird,” he points in his Sunday sermon, by the example of his personal re-emergence story, a way out of the diseasing and eternally shadowy night time of the “white man’s world” back into the naturally illuminated sacred world, where clear vision and consequently spiritual wholeness is possible.

Tosamah stands out in the novel for the complexity of his character and thought. While some of this complexity doubtlessly arises from the autobiographical nature of his persona (the text of his Sunday sermon, for instance, reappears verbatim as a statement of cultural autobiography in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*), part of it can also be understood as a consequence of his role as a spokesman for collective Native American concerns. Momaday characterizes Tosamah’s public persona (as head of the “Los Angeles Holiness
Pan-Indian Rescue Mission,” a chapter of the then-illegitimate Native American Church) as a mélange of “arrogance and agony” (91), of “Conviction, caricature, [and] callousness” (92); such psychological ambivalence is an almost inevitable byproduct of ideological cultural dualism. Within its specific historical context, the figure of Tosamah also functions in part to personify the nationalistic and Pan-Indian spirit of AIM, the American Indian Movement, which took root in urban soils during the early 1950s, when unprecedented numbers of Native Americans from many different tribes, especially returning war veterans, were forced into cooperation by the Relocation Acts and which was flourishing in the late 1960s. Despite all such complexities, or perhaps because of them, Tosamah’s initial function in the novel is to provide with an additional context for understanding Abel’s disease, a context that relates Abel’s individual failure of vision to the more familiar issue of the spiritual malaise of Western culture generally.

As Tosamah, preacher and physician, paints the picture in his Saturday sermon, the spiritual sickness affecting most of Western culture is caused by separation, not just from the land, but more generally from “the Truth.” His portrait of St. John is of a man who once had a dawn vision who labelled what he saw “the Word,” and who went on to value words about the Truth more highly than the Truth itself: “‘The perfect vision faded from his mind, and he went on. The instant passed, and then he had nothing but a memory’” (93). One important corollary of Tosamah’s compelling diagnosis is that, “true” or
not, John’s articulated memory of his dawn vision (and by implication any remembered moment of wholeness, including Tosamah’s own memory of daybreak at Rainy Mountain and Ben’s memories of the landscape of *diné bikéyeah*, the Navajo homeland) has power, the power to blind one to the fact of one’s own separation and disease. Such memories balm the suffering that accompanies separation from “the Truth”: they do not, however, cure the disease.

A second consequence becomes more apparent when we consider the immediate context of Tosamah’s Saturday sermon. Like Abel’s own agonized attempt to diagnose for himself “what the trouble was” (97), Tosamah’s attempt to do so for his congregation of the Relocated seems to be related by juxtaposition to the image set up in the first paragraph of Part 2 of the novel. Tosamah’s sermon on “The Gospel According to John” is that while words do indeed have power, the power they have is healing power only when the words direct attention back to the human need to experience the event of indivisibility with the world. Words used to any other purpose merely sustain the disease of separation.

Whereas Tosamah’s Saturday sermon serves to diagnose the potential for disease in flawed vision (and suffers from the disease in analyzing it) and to set the stage for Abel’s night journey towards a new vision, his Sunday sermon, anticipating Abel’s motion in the direction that will eventually return
him to Walatowa, focuses on the healing power inherent in the land’s capacity to satisfy the human need for identity.

Like much of the structure of the novel, Tosamah’s Sunday sermon forms a narrative circle, beginning and ending at Rainy Mountain, where the journey of the Kiowa people concluded about a hundred years ago. According to Tosamah, “Loneliness is there an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. At the slightest elevation you can see to the end of the world” (127). It seems a place where Abel in Part 1 might have become at home without changing his eagle vision, and Tosamah’s identification with this place, where loneliness and panoramic vision are gifts of the land’s own contour, goes far towards explaining many of Tosamah’s affinities with Abel.

Acknowledging the shaping role of a landscape in an entire culture’s evolving sense of identity, Tosamah tells that “There are things in nature which engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devils Tower is one of them. Man must account for it. He must never fail to explain such a thing to himself, or else he is estranged forever from the universe” (131). While this passage clearly serves in the novel to confirm the power of language as a preserver of cultural identity, it is important to recognize that the power of the legend created by the Kiowas “at the base of the rock” becomes, in the story thus created, inseparable from the power of the landscape itself. The need expressed in the story is the need to hold this place, and be held by it.
According to Tosamah, the act of identification with Devils Tower changed the identity of the Kiowa forever: “Whatever they were in the mountains, they could be no more” (131). As Tosamah describes the event, the land imposes itself upon the observer, and the People’s willingness to acknowledge and shape to that presence accounts for the subsequent cultural “golden age” of the Kiowas.

At the end of Part 2, Tosamah is still in Los Angeles, a thousand miles from the physical landscape he identifies with spiritually. His memory of that landscape is a temporary analgesic for the disease of separation from the land that he and his congregation suffer but no cure for it; though he may well function as a holy trickster, as a “physician” he leaves something to be desired. Even so, true to his role as “son of hummingbird,” Tosamah in his sermon prepares the way for Abel, pointing as he does to a return to the landscape of one’s origin, a landscape revealed, at sunrise, to be the “center of the world’s being” as well as one’s own.

Whereas Tosamah’s identity as a Native American seems to be as much a product of articulation as of nature (recalling, perhaps, the figure of “The Man Made of Words”), Ben is presented as having been born (like Abel) into the landscape. Unlike Tosamah, whose public persona oscillates between “conviction, caricature, [and] callousness” in concert with his alternating conceptual frameworks, Ben’s constancy of character and voice reflect the constancy of his faith in the power of the land as a source of life and identity.
As misplaced as this faith may be geographically in a city like Los Angeles, this attribute of his character qualifies him to become the closest thing in the novel to a spokesman for Abel’s own unarticulated hopes and fears.

Ben’s monologue (interspersed with soliloquy) recounts Abel’s history from the time Abel is brought to the factory to work alongside Ben until the night of the day (“February 20,” 1952 [139]) Abel leaves Los Angeles on a train to return to Walatowa. Surrounded by the city of Los Angeles but temporarily up above it, out of earshot of its sounds, Ben and Abel become part of a congregation of the Relocated, bent on trying to recreate from memory the sound and motion of the old sacred way: “All we could hear was the drums and the singing. There were some stars, and it was like we were way out in the desert someplace, and there was a squaw dance or a sing going on, and everybody was getting good and drunk and happy” (145). Within this context, says Ben, “I guess we were thinking the same thing”; Ben thinks, on Abel’s behalf as well as on his own:

He was going home, and he was going to be all right again. And someday I was going home, too, and we were going to meet someplace out there on the reservation and get drunk together. It was going to be the last time, and it was something we had to do. We were going out into the hills on horses and alone. It was going to be early in the morning, and we were going to see the sun coming up. It was going to be good again, you know? We were
going to get drunk for the last time, and we were going to sing the old songs. We were going to sing about the way it used to be, how there was nothing all around but the hills and the sunrise and the clouds. We were going to be drunk and, you know, peaceful--beautiful. We had to do it a certain way, just right, because it was going to be the last time. (145-46)

This passage is echoed in the final paragraph of Ben’s monolog: just as the vision of the landscape of Jemez frames Part 1 of the novel (and as the landscape of the Winter Race frames the whole novel), Ben’s vision of a return to the reservation landscape frames his narrative account of Abel’s failure to adapt to Los Angeles and its alien rhythms.

A more traditional, ceremonialized version of the dream Ben and Abel share here, a dream of being “all right again” at sunrise, in the Old Way, is the chant way episode Ben then sings, solo, for Abel and himself. No matter how well Ben might remember that place, and no matter how well Abel might imagine such a place, the chant cannot of itself make Abel whole. Even so, the Night Chant, like Tosamah’s Sunday sermon, points the way to healing for Abel, and it is a measure of Ben’s openhearted sympathy for Abel that he offers Abel not only his best coat but also his best song to help him on his way.

Ben’s sympathy for Abel springs in part from his recognition of similarities in their ethnic rather than geographical backgrounds, and Ben’s disagreement with Tosamah’s version of Abel’s motives for killing the albino
grows out of this basis of sympathy. As Ben points out, Tosamah’s specifically Kiowa cultural background prevents his being able to understand important elements of Abel’s Jemez-grounded vision, in particular Abel’s vision of the powers inherent in the land that, improperly manipulated, give witchery its power at places like Jemez or Wide Ruins.

The dependence of healing on place becomes even more apparent when Ben tries to imagine Abel “awake and all right” (169): even to imagine Abel thus, Ben places him, in his mind’s eye, not in a hospital but rather “way out there someplace by now” on a train in the mountains near Williams or Flagstaff, heading in the direction not only of Walatowa but also of the Navajo Reservation. In the passage that follows, the act of imagining Abel’s return to the land recalls to Ben his own experience of returning to the land after having been away from it for a few years. Here, the event of sunrise brings with it the clear vision of identity with the landscape, a vision that makes time itself part of the landscape and portrays the miracle of identity as an event preceding both language and the need for language:

And at first light you went out and knew where you were. And it was the same, the way you remembered it, the way you knew it had to be; and nothing had changed. The first light, you thought, that little while before sunup; it would always be the same out there. That was the way it was, that’s all. It was that way on the day you were born, and it would be that way on the day you died.
. . . There was no sound, nothing. . . . At first light the land was alone and very still. And you were there where you wanted to be, and alone. You didn’t want to see anyone, or hear anyone speak. There was nothing to say. (169-70)

Clearly, as with Tosamah, Ben’s ability to live at all gracefully in the alien “sea” of Los Angeles depends on his keeping in mind such memories. Just as clearly, though, such memories (as well as the words encoding them) are not in themselves cures for the disease of alienation. Their healing power comes from a specific place and a felt identity with that landscape. In order to cure, such memories and words must be revalidated by (and within) the landscape--the original “Truth”--of which the words, and the memories, are but imperfect versions.

Without the landscape of Jemez to teach and sustain him, Abel (like Tosamah, like Ben) has only memory to refer to as a source of identity in Los Angeles, and with his memory grounded as it is in his felt need to conquer the culebra within and without himself, Abel finds himself compelled to re-enact his old life on alien ground. The pattern of his power struggle with the forces operating in Part 1 of the novel is reiterated in the pattern of his experience of Los Angeles, where Martinez replaces the albino, Milly replaces Angela, and Ben Benally replaces Francisco as avatars of the power-allies Abel found himself wrestling with six years earlier. Abel’s failure to control or adapt gracefully to these co-actors in his drama shows once again the potentially
self-destructive limitations of his eagle vision and his need for a better vision in which to frame his own hopes and fears.

Although Ben says that he and Abel “talked a whole lot, him and me” (153), nothing Ben tells us of Abel or himself suggests that Ben knows of Abel’s vision of himself as in identity with the eagle, and consequently Ben’s analysis of Abel’s failure to adjust to life in Los Angeles, while perhaps sociologically revealing, is more Ben’s story than Abel’s. Understood in terms of his own eagle vision of himself, however, Abel’s life in Los Angeles must seem, simply, as pitiful and shameful to him as that of the eagle he captured in his youth. Like that eagle, Abel is at least metaphorically “bound and helpless” in this place, “drab and shapeless in the moonlight, too large and ungainly for flight,” a condition that surely “fill[s] him with shame and disgust” (22).

What holds Abel’s spirit in bondage this time is neither the hold of the land nor his fear of that hold; rather, Abel suffers his dependence upon the whim and will of strangers. The parole officers, “Relocation people,” rehabilitation counselors, and welfare workers assigned to Abel’s case, even as depicted through the relatively acquiescent and forgiving lens of Ben’s narrative, are a persistent burden on Abel’s spirit; their impersonal yet intimate questions threaten to turn Abel’s life into words, while their plan for Abel is to reduce him to a stapler on a factory assembly line. Even in Ben’s eyes these figures represent and acquire their own power from a force as powerful and as blindly unremitting as any force Abel ever encountered within the landscape of
Walatowa, and, as Abel must believe, it is a force as bent on subordinating his energy to its own as the *culebra* spirit was at Jemez. Hence, Abel not very surprisingly responds to Los Angeles, and to those who claim identity with this place, in much the same he earlier responds to personifications of the snake spirit of Walatowa--first by attempting to resist, then by attempting to subordinate or destroy the agents of the force he fears.

Substituting Martinez for the albino and Milly for Angela, we can begin to see how the pattern of Abel’s failure in Los Angeles replicates almost exactly the pattern of his earlier failure in Jemez. In both cases, Abel is in a spiritually weakened state (from his tour in the Army, from his six-year imprisonment), attempting to re-enter the life of the people around him (the Pueblo, the Native American population of Los Angeles) when he first encounters his antagonist. In both cases, his antagonist is at home on the ground where Abel first encounters him (the albino proving himself at the *gallo*, Martinez depicted by Ben early in his narrative as “The Man” who is not to be messed with), and in both cases Abel finds himself taken by surprise in the first encounter and “beaten,” metaphorically or literally, by his opponent. In both cases, Abel broods for a time over his “failure,” then he determines to seek out and destroy his antagonist.

Formally, the narrative line of the novel leaps almost immediately from the moment of Abel’s last encounter with the albino at the end of Part 1 to the moment we find Abel lying in the night, at the beginning of Part 2, physically
broken, semi-conscious, “among the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth,” the proverbial fish out of water on the coast of Southern California subsequent to his final encounter with the sadistic cop Martinez. Understood as a structural device, this narrative leap conflates the two events, and thus the figures of the albino and Martinez, as though insisting that these two encounters are both versions of some more essential encounter (and that these two figures are both manifestations of some common entity). Time and space collapsed, Abel finds himself on “January 26,” 1952, confronting the same mystery he faced on “August 1,” 1945 (the mystery of the life-force or spirit he has come to see as the informing spirit of *culebra*), again, or perhaps still, astonished by his own inability to release himself from its power. Just as at Walatowa the land is forever, here at the edge of the land “forever is the sea” (101). What follows, in the content of Part 2 framed by Tosamah’s two sermons, can be seen as a second “vision quest” for Abel, an event lasting three nights during which Abel’s old fears and feelings of “sadness and longing,” as well as his old need for some strategy for controlling those feelings, become attached to new images and reconstellated into a new, more viable vision of life and his role in that life.

Understood as an event, Abel’s acquisition of this new vision probably begins on the night when Abel, “crazy drunk and ugly,” determines to seek out a final showdown with Martinez; as Ben tells us, “He was going out to look for *culebra*, he said; he was going to get even with *culebra*” (183). Apparently the
spirit he seeks to destroy is even less cooperative in the form of Martinez than it was in the form of the albino, for next view of Abel finds him, two nights later, fainting in and out of consciousness and numb with cold and pain. (99)

A second important element of this moment is that the “sad, unnamable longing and wonder” associated earlier with the deaths of Vidal and his mother (along with his anticipation of the inevitable loss of Francisco) get re-anchored here to the image of the grunion, “among the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth” (89). By the end of this event, Abel imagines Ben and Milly replacing the grunion, presumably as recipients of his own capacity for longing and wonder, and finally Abel can “see” himself there too:

In his pain and weariness he saw Milly and Ben running on the beach and he was there on the beach with Milly and Ben and the moon was high and bright and the fishes were far away in the depths and there was nothing but the moonlight and the long white margin of the sea on the beach. (126)

By the end of this event, Abel has finally become capable of seeing himself in the landscape of his vision rather than “above” it and, further, has come to identify with the “victim” rather than with the “raptor” element of his previous eagle vision. Perhaps just as importantly, he comes to see this image of his own “sad, unnamable longing and wonder” not as the cause of that longing and wonder (as earlier he identified culebra) but rather as a (fellow) miserable experencer of it.
As though to seal the connection between the fish in his vision and the *culebra* he carries with him in memory, a few pages later Abel recalls to mind his own history of sickness, along with the memory of “the disease which killed his mother and Vidal” (100); this fragment is followed immediately by an image recalling the pale flesh of Angela and finally the image of the albino. Abel finds himself remembering that image of *culebra* clearly now: “After six years he could remember the white man’s body, how it lay limp and lifeless in the night rain, bright like phosphorous almost; the angle of the body and its limb; the white shining hand, open and obscene” (101). This vision of the dead albino, once juxtaposed with both the images of the phosphorescent grunions and of Angela’s touch, combines with them to yield for Abel a new vision of the life-force he has come to know as *culebra*. This comprehensive readjustment of Abel’s understanding begins to manifest immediately in his awareness that “something was going on” both within and without his consciousness, something demanding of him that same attentive “wonder and regard” he felt six years earlier watching the transformation of the albino in the rainy night.

Not to be overlooked in this process of return is the episode, recounted by Ben in Part 3 (186-87), of the final encounter in the novel between Abel and Angela during Abel’s stay in the hospital. Seen as part of a re-emergence pattern, Angela’s visit, like the courtroom episode that precedes Abel’s imprisonment earlier, puts Abel’s eagle-vision-inspired life “on trial” once
again, and once again Abel is made to suffer someone else’s version of his life.

Here in her namesake city of Los Angeles, using the strategy of a St. John, Angela uses words to finish what Martinez set in motion with his nightstick, forcing Abel once again to accept that life informed by the spirit of *culebra* is more powerful than the life he has lived inspired solely by his eagle vision. By specifically requesting Ben to stay to hear what she tells Abel (186), Angela (like the albino during the *gallo* episode in Part 1) makes a public demonstration of the personal power she has acquired from her previous identification with the *culebra* spirit of Walatowa. Rather than using a rooster or a nightstick to chastise Abel’s spirit, Angela inflicts upon Abel the story she has made out of their earlier sexual encounter. Not only does her story cast Abel as bear rather than as eagle, but it also makes the bear seem a marginal element of the story.

The expression of Native American culture through storytelling is an important aspect of the novel. Many historical and cultural stories are told by the different priests in *House Made of Dawn*. The character of the Priest of the Sun sermonizes many of the Kiowa legends Momaday has addressed in his other works, such as *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Momaday had learned these stories as a child, and in this novel the method of transmission is the same orally though now in the context of a sermon. Similarly, the Priest of the Sun had learned the stories from his grandmother, who was a storyteller, she knew her way around words and she never learned to read or write. The priest of the
sun goes on to say that the difference in language between the two cultures, Native American and the “white man’s world,” is the value placed in words. In the white man’s world there are words by the millions, on pamphlets, papers, receipts, advertising, and so on. For his grandmother, on the other hand, the word was a sacred object, attached to a story close to her thoughts and her experience. Words could never be sold, and she would never throw her words away. In this context of the sacredness of just a few meaningful words, Abel’s mysterious reserve and quietness make sense.

In the third section, “The Night Chanter,” Ben Benally dwells on the conflict between the pace of life in a more rural setting of the reservation such as Walatowa or the Wild Ruins where he grew up and city life as a factory worker in Los Angeles. Life in L.A. is “all around you and you can’t get a hold of it because it’s going on too fast….” (73). There is no such thing as taking it easy or having a festival day in Los Angeles—the only way of life is working twelve hours a day and than going straight to the bar and drinking to unwind. The aim of all this work is to get a piece of something: a house, a car, anything. Back at home on the reservation, however, a completely different pace and set of goals dominate. When Abel cuts wood in the novel’s opening section, he takes his time, coming back three days later to finish his job. On the reservation, however, that is accepted, as there is a feast and ceremonies that take precedence in the meantime. Material goods, which take such precedence in the modern society of L.A., can be traded for or worked out in different
transactions on the reservation. Whereas Ben is able to reconcile these two vastly different paces of lifestyle in the city and reservation, he sees that Abel is unwilling or unable to do so, and likely never will.

Throughout the novel Momaday creates parallel between the locations of Walatowa and Los Angeles. One strong parallel element, like the one between Angela and Milly, is the doubling of the priests or spiritual leaders. Father Olguin and Tosamah, the Priest of the Sun, both tell stories of the past, act as examples to follow, and help those around them. They act as the center of social activity from which events in the novel spiral forth.

A recurrent literary device Momaday uses is the flashback. In the novel, flashbacks are often triggered by a place or an object in the landscape, such as when Francisco passes the place called Seytokwa in the novel’s first section, “The Longhair.” Passing the place causes Francisco to remember the races held there when he was young. Another similar flashback occurs for Abel after he sees an eagle fly overhead and remembers the Eagle Watchers Society he became a part of when he was young. These pervasive flashbacks highlight the inextricable connection between past and present, and emphasize the repetition and handing down of events and traditions through the generations.

The moon often lends its light in a pragmatic but enchanted way in the novel. It symbolizes a sinister luck, the smelt fish throw themselves on the beach in the light of the moon, allowing any fisherman to pick them up with his hands; furthermore, the light of the moon allows the entire community to
work all night on the farm, as Francisco recalls. Like the fish, the geese Abel and Vidal hunt are distracted by the moon, allowing Abel to successfully shoot one of the birds.

The rain in various scenes of *House Made of Dawn* symbolizes a form of convergence that results in dramatic events. It rains when Abel and Angela first make love; it rains after Francisco dies, and when Abel leaves Los Angeles to return to Walatowa. Abel’s murder of the Albino, arguably the climax of the novel—happens during a torrential rain that spreads the albino’s blood all over the surrounding earth.

One of Abel’s most notable childhood experiences was his membership in the Eagle Watchers Society. He sees an eagle carry a snake across the sky, and after telling the leader of the society of what he has seen he is allowed to go with the society on an eagle hunt. After he captures a magnificent eagle and another member captures a second eagle, they let one of the birds go and watch it fly off. As Abel watches the eagle disappear, he is filled with longing, as for him the eagle is symbolic of an unknown form of freedom.

An ethnography-of-communication perspective is suggested regarding selected occurrences of non-verbal behavior in *House Made of Dawn*. Several of the novel’s speech events involve silence as a discursive prescription for negotiating ambiguity in interactants’ role expectations. In addition, the novel seems to imply that silence as a response to Anglo-American hegemony
represents a strategy of empowerment which allows indigenous communities to resist by simply outwaiting.

A stylolinguistic approach, according to Roger Fowler, attempts to apply to a literary text the methodologies modern linguistics makes available, including such subfields as sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, which focus on the intersection of language and culture. What has rarely been suggested, however, is that part of such a perspective should include a consideration of the significance of non-verbal behavior such as gestures, eye gaze patterns, and even silence in the exploration of cultural issues and psychological processes. Thus, as culturally constructed signs, non-verbal phenomena such as silence not only have meaning but also clear rules regarding combinations with speech and other signs as well as contextual conditions for appropriate use.

Critics of Momaday’s novel *House Made of Dawn*, such as Scarberry-Garcia, have frequently identified the discursive silence exhibited by the protagonist, Abel, as indicative of his estrangement from self and home. Presumably, his alienation stems from the psychological shocks experienced in combat during World War II and his incarceration following the slaying of a suspected sorcerer. While the textual evidence for Abel’s “inarticulateness” as symptomatic of what currently is called post-traumatic stress syndrome is certainly quite valid, an ethnography-of-communication assessment of selected occurrences of his non-verbal behavior and that of other Native characters in
the novel invites an additional interpretation based on the role of silence as a strategy of caution, resistance and outwaiting.

Abel finds himself in several social situations in which the status of the focal participants is ambiguous. In the speech event excerpted in the attached appendix, Angela St. John, a wealthy Anglo woman from Los Angeles who is sexually attracted to Abel, attempts to approach him with small talk, the expected discursive convention for an English speaker in dealing with strangers. For Abel, the ambiguity in this speech event stems from his unfamiliarity with the interlocutor, Angela, who is not only of a different ethnicity but also appears to be approaching him in a somewhat hostile manner. With regard to meeting an Anglo stranger, Abel is forced to deal with two overlapping communicative situations—meeting a stranger and considering a possible sexual encounter—in the same speech event, in which his expectations of the focal participants’ social identities have not been sufficiently developed in order to predict the types of responses. Hence, Abel’s Native upbringing leads him to extreme caution by looking at her without the trace of a smile, and giving her no clear way to be contemptuous of him.

Even Angela’s tactic of almost bullying him into a verbal response by serving up the quasi-ultimatum, “you will have to make up your mind, you see, or else I may not be here when you come” only intensifies Abel’s retreat into the Native communicative convention of standing aside and “hanging on” in silence, which seems so “easy” and “natural” for him. By not allowing
“himself to be provoked,” Abel gains control of the interaction and watches “from far away something that was happening within her.” Ironically enough, Angela misinterprets his reserve, which “was too much for her,” as a curious powerlessness on his part, as she misconstrues his standing “dumb and docile at her pleasure, not knowing, she supposed, how even to take his leave.” However, Abel is only following the discursive prescriptions of his culture, for which “silence was the older and better part of custom still” (58). As the novel later reveals, Abel is fully aware of Angela’s implicit sexual advances, even though at the time she is mislead by “the way he had looked at her—like a wooden Indian—his face cold and expressionless” (36). During their second encounter, Angela begins to understand the strategic nature of Abel’s silence:

He followed her silently into the house and through the dark rooms. She turned on the light in the kitchen, and the sudden burst of it made her shrink ever so little. She gave him coffee and he sat listening to her, not waiting, gently taking hold of her distress, passing it off. She was grateful—and chagrined. She had not foreseen this turn of tables and events, had not imagined that he could turn her scheme around. (62)

Although Angela may not yet fully understand the function of non-verbal communication as a subtle form of what the narrative voice refers to as “resistance and overcoming,” she does begin to submit to it. Admitting, in her defeat, that “[s]he had no will to shrug him off,” Angela now even regards
Abel’s silence as attentive and sympathetic “listening” which seems to be “gently taking hold of her distress.” However, what she apparently does not realize at this point is that, while he does not appear to be “waiting,” Abel is, nevertheless, applying a strategy of “outwaiting,” into which the members of his speech community have long been socialized. (58)

During Abel’s murder trial, his strategy of silent outwaiting as a form of subtle resistance and overcoming also remains unrecognized by the officers of the court: “When he had told his story once, simply, Abel refused to speak. He sat like a rock in his chair, and after a while no one expected or even wanted him to speak. That was good, for he should not have known what more to say.” (102)

Killing a sorcerer who had threatened him was for Abel a “simple” and “the most natural thing in the world” (102). However, the futility of explaining the imperative of lethally confronting one’s enemies to men who lack such a cultural context in their language moves Abel to simply outwait them in silence.

His “natural” strategy to stand aside and outwait the actors actually empowers Abel to detach himself from the court proceedings and watch “from far away” as they clumsily attempt to explain to themselves the Native “psychology of witchcraft” (34, 102).

For Abel, who finds himself relocated to Los Angeles, a foreign and potentially hostile environment, “It was a long time before he would talk to
anyone.” Benally recalls; however, “after a while we talked a whole lot, him and me, but it was about things that happened around here” (153). That “it was a long time before he would talk about himself—and then he never said much” is fully understood by Benally, who clearly identifies with that discursive preference when he adds, “I guess it’s that way with most of us” (153). Benally accepts Abel’s verbal caution as proper behavior and finds comfort in it as he acknowledges that “we were kind of alike, though, him and me” (153). In addition, there is the coincidence of Benally’s turning out to be Abel’s distant kinsman through the Coyote Pass (Jemez Pueblo) Clan, whose origin can be traced to Jemez Pueblo refugees’ fleeing the turmoil of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and finding sanctuary among the Navajo.

The Native discourse strategy of initial verbal reticence helps Benally and Abel connect in a way which Basso insightfully characterizes as “directly related to the conviction that the establishment of social relations is a serious matter that calls for caution, careful judgment and plenty of time” (73). Therefore, following this proper initial phase of carefully assessing the potential of their friendship, Benally and Abel can now proceed to a deeper level that involves their understood mutual investment in the sacred Southwestern landscape upon which lie the aesthetic and mythic locations vital to their tribal and personal identities. A further speech event in which not only Abel but also members of his extended family are expected to approach each other with caution occurs after his homecoming from military service during
World War II. His grandfather, Francisco, “could feel the beat of his heart” as he anxiously waits for the bus to arrive. (9)

Understandably enough, even the next day, Francisco and Abel feel compelled to avoid each other, as the narrative voice informs that “[n]othing had yet passed between them, no word, no sign of recognition.” (30)

Other Native characters in the novel also engage in behavior which reveals the discourse strategy of silence. For instance, as Angela enters the bathhouse to take a mineral bath at the hot springs near Jemez Pueblo, “the attendant said nothing, but laid out the towels in one of the stalls and drew the tub full of smoking mineral water” (61). In the scene before Tosamah, Pastor and Priest of the Sun of the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission, begins his sermon “The Gospel According to John,” his disciple, Cruz, facing a Native congregation “stepped forward on the platform and raised his hands as if to ask for the quiet that already was” (90). Perhaps, the most poignant reference to silence not only as a Native discursive prescription but also as a symbol of dignity occurs in Tosamah’s sermon entitled “The Way to Rainy Mountain,” in which he pays homage to the aged Kiowa visitors at his grandmother’s house whom he remembers as “men of immense character, full of wisdom and disdain” and who “dealt in a kind of infallible quiet and gave but one face away; it was enough.” (134)

An attempt has been made to appeal to an ethnography-of-communication perspective regarding the significance of such non-verbal
behavior as silence in the exploration of cultural issues and psychological processes. Although the novel’s numerous critics’ conclusion of Abel’s taciturnity as symptomatic of post-traumatic stress syndrome is not disputed, an additional interpretation based on the role of silence in traditional American Indian communicative strategies is suggested. Several of the novel’s speech events in which silence emerges as a discursive pattern can be analogized to situations captured by the sociolinguistic taxonomies descriptive of reticence among Western Apaches and Navajos. The relevant settings include the meeting of strangers, approaching a romantic relationship, returning home after a prolonged absence, exposure to someone in an altered state and responding to external authority. These conditions seem to have in common the loss of predictability in the interactant’s role expectations. Thus, the Native culture demands a cautious stance which surfaces as a prescription for silent “turn-taking.” In addition to endorsing sociolinguistic insights, the novel seems to offer the uplifting view that such a discursive strategy empowers Native individuals in confronting Anglo-American hegemony. By choosing to stand aside silently, members of indigenous communities can exercise caution through non-verbal responses which enable them to detach themselves and to outwait imminent strife.

Native American oral traditions are not monolithic, nor are the traditions with which Momaday works in House Made of Dawn, Kiowa, Navajo, and Towan Pueblo. Yet there are, he suggests common denominators. Two of the
most important of these are the Native American’s relation to the land and his regard for language.

By imagining who and what they are in relation to particular landscapes, cultures and individual members of cultures form a close relation with those landscapes. Following D. H. Lawrence and others, Momaday terms this a “sense of place”. A sense of place derives from the perception of a culturally imposed symbolic order on a particular physical topography.

We come round, then, to another of the “common denominators” Momaday finds in oral traditions: attitude toward language. Of Kiowa oral tradition Momaday writes in The Way to Rainy Mountain: “A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things” (33). It is this concept, remarkably like one text version of the Navajo origin giving “One Word” as the name of the original state of the universe, which forms the center of Tosamah’s sermon on St. John’s gospel in House Made of Dawn. It is only through words that a man is able to express his relation to place. Indeed, it is only through shared words or ritual that symbolic landscapes are able to exist.

House Made of Dawn opens and closes with the formulaic words which enclose all Jemez pueblo tales—dypaloh and qtsedaba, placing it consciously in that oral tradition. As many oral narratives, the novel is shaped around a movement from discord to harmony and is structurally and thematically cyclic. The prologue is dominated by the race, a central theme in the novel as
Momaday has suggested [in an interview appearing in Puerto del Sol 12 (1973)]:

I see *House Made of Dawn* as a circle. It ends where it begins and it’s informed with a kind of thread that runs through it and holds everything together. The book itself is a race. It focuses upon the race, that’s the thing that does hold it all together. But it’s a constant repetition of things too.

That racing is a conspicuous feature of Jemez ceremonialism. The winter race Abel runs in the prologue and at the end of the novel is the first race in the Jemez ceremonial season, an appropriate ceremonial beginning. But the race itself may be seen as a journey, a re-emergence journey similar to that mentioned in connection with Navajo and Kiowa oral tradition. Indeed, the language echoes a Navajo re-emergence song sung in the Night Chant, from which the title of the book is taken.

These journey and emergence themes begin to unfold in the following scene as Francisco goes in his wagon to meet the bus returning Abel to Walatowa after WWII. The wagon road on which he rides is parallel to the modern highway on which Abel rides. The two roads serve as familiar metaphors for the conflicting paths Abel follows in the novel and Momaday reinforces the conflict by parallel auditory motifs as well. As the wagon road excites in Francisco memories of his own race “for good hunting and harvests,” he sings good sounds of harmony and balance. At the same time the
recurrent whine of tires on the highway is constantly in the background until “he heard the sharp wheeze of the brakes as the big bus rolled to a stop in front of the gas pump....” The re-emergence theme is suggested in the passage by the presence of the reed trap—recalling the reed of emergence, and the fact that Abel returns “ill.” He is drunk, of course, but he is also ill, out of balance, in the manner of a patient in a Navajo chantway.

Abel’s genealogy, the nature of his illness, and its relation to the auditory motifs mentioned above are further defined in the seven fragments of memory he experiences as he walks above the Cañon de San Diego in the first dawn following his return. At the same time these fragments establish a context for Abel’s two prominent encounters in Part I with Angela Grace St. John and with the albino Juan Reyes Fragua.

Abel’s genealogy is complicated. He did not know who his father was. “His father was a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 97) which made Abel somehow foreign and strange. The ties Abel does have to Walatowa are through his mother whose father, Francisco—both sacristan and kiva participant—is the illegitimate son of the consumptive priest Fray Nicolas V. Through Francisco, Abel is a direct descendant of the Bahkyush, a group of Towan-speaking pueblos who immigrated to Jemez in the mid-nineteenth century.

In the confusion of war among soldiers who recognized him only as a “chief” speaking in “Sioux or Algonquin or something,” Abel lost both the
sense of place which characterized his tribal culture and the very community which supports that sense of place. Incredibly, he doesn’t even recognize the earth. Mechanical sounds are associated with Abel’s disorientation. The “low and incessant” sound of the tank descending upon him reaches back in the novel to the “slow whine of tires” Francisco hears on the highway and looks ahead to the sound of Angela’s car intruding on his vision in the first dawn above the valley as it creeps along the same highway toward the Jemez church. These are the same mechanical sounds Abel tried “desperately to take into account” as the bus took him away to the war—again on the same highway. They are the sounds that reminded him as he left the pueblo to go to war that “the town and the valley and the hills” could no longer center him, that he was now “centered upon himself.”

That Angela Grace St. John, the pregnant wife of a Los Angeles physician who comes to Walatowa seeking a cure for her own ailments, will become an obstacle in Abel’s re-emergence journey is first suggested by the extensive auditory motifs of Part I.

Abel’s failure at the rooster pull demonstrates his inability to reenter the ceremonial life of the village, as he realizes in his second reflection at dawn, July 28, 1945. The section opens with an explicit statement of the relation of the emergence journey and the landscape. He was alone, and he wanted to make a song out of the colored canyon, the way the women of Torreón made songs upon their looms out of colored yarn, but he had not got the right words
together. It would have been a creation song; he would have sung lowly of the first world, of fire and flood, and of the emergence of dawn from the hills.

Abel is at this point vaguely conscious of what he needs to be cured. He needs a re-emergence. He needs words, ceremonial words, which express his relation to the cultural landscape in which he stands. He needs to feel with the Tewa singer quoted earlier his authority return to him. But here out of harmony with himself and his community he needs most of all the kind of re-emergence journey offered in a Navajo chantway.

His re-entry into the village spoiled, Abel turns not to the ceremonial structure of the pueblo for support but to Angela. And it is the Benevides house, not the land, which provides “the wings and the stage” for their affair. Abel’s first sexual encounter with Angela is juxtaposed in the novel with Francisco’s encounter with the albino witch in his cornfield. Indeed, Angela, who “keened” to the unnatural qualities of the albino during the corre de gaio, echoes the auditory symbols of evil.

Earlier in his life Abel found physical regeneration through a sexual experience with Fat Josie. His affair with Angela has just the opposite effect. The following couplet in the text implicates Angela in this alienation:

Angela put her white hands to his body.

Abel put his hands to her white body. (32)
Later Abel tells Benally that “she [Angela] was going to help him get a job and go away from the reservation, but then he got himself in trouble.” That “trouble” derives in part from Abel’s separation from his land.

Abel appears to kill the albino then as a frustrated response to the White Man and Christianity, but he does so more in accordance with Anglo tradition than Indian tradition. Indeed, he has been trained in the Army to be a killer.

Momaday forces to see the murder as more complicated and subtle in motivation despite Benally’s sympathetic reflections on the realities of witchery, Tosamah’s reference to the murder as a legal mystery, and Abel’s own statement that the murder was “not a complicated thing.” Death has not been a simple thing for Abel to cope with earlier in the novel, as shown by his emotional reactions to the deaths of the doe, the rabbit, the eagle, as well as the deaths of his brother Vidal and his mother. More to the point is the fact that the White Man Abel kills is, in fact, a white Indian, an albino. He is the White Man in the Indian; perhaps even the White Man in Abel himself. When Abel kills the albino, in a real sense he kills a part of himself and his culture which he can no longer recognize and control. That that part should take the shape of a snake in his confused mind is horribly appropriate given the long association of the Devil and the snake in Christian tradition and the subsequent Puritan identification of the American Indians as demonic snakes and witches in so much of early American literature. In orthodox Pueblo belief the snake and the powers with which it is associated are accepted as a necessary part of the
cosmic order. Yet, the whiteness of the albino suggests something more terrible than evil to Abel. The albino confronts Abel with his own lack of meaning, his own lack of a sense of place. Because of Abel’s act, Francisco is for the first time separated from the Walatowa community. He stands muttering Abel’s name as he did in the opening of the chapter, and near him the reed trap—again suggesting the reed of emergence—is empty.

Tosamah’s description of the emergence journey and the relations of words and place serve as a clue to Abel’s cure, but the role he plays in Abel’s journey appears as ambiguous and contradictory as his character. He is at once priest and “clown.” He exhibits, often on the same page, remarkable insight, buffoonery, and cynicism. He has then all the characteristics of Coyote, the trickster figure in Native American mythologies. Alternately wise and foolish, Coyote in Native American oral tradition is at once a buffoon and companion of the People on their emergence journey.

Words are, of course, a problem for Abel. On the one hand, he lacks the ceremonial words—the words of a Creation song—which properly express his relation to community and place. He is inarticulate. On the other, he is plagued by a surfeit of words from white men. The bureaucratic words of the social worker’s forms effectively obscure his real problems. Indeed, Benally perceives Abel’s central problem as one of words, as he equates finding community with having appropriate words.
Tosamah perceives a similar dislocating effect of words on Abel, though he relates it to religion. Beyond his sermons, there is a special irony in the fact that Tosamah doesn’t understand Abel and his problems, for he is described several times in Part II as a “physician.” Though they put Abel’s problems in a broader and clearer perspective, Tosamah’s words are of little use to Abel.

Each of the fragments is a memory of initiation. In the first Francisco recalls taking Abel and Vidal to the ruins of the old church near the Middle to see “the house of the sun.” All signs then point to a new beginning for Abel as he rises February 28, the last day of the novel. His own memory healed by Francisco’s, for the first time in the novel he correctly performs a ceremonial function as he prepares Francisco for burial and delivers him to Father Olguin. He then joins the ash marked runners in the dawn. Momaday comments on that race in his essay “The Morality of Indian Hating” [in Ramparts 3 (1964)]:

The first race each year comes in February, and then the dawn is clear and cold, and the runners breathe steam. It is a long race, and it is neither won nor lost. It is an expression of the soul in the ancient terms of sheer physical exertion. To watch those runners is to know that they draw with every step some elementary power which resides at the core of the earth and which, for all our civilized ways, is lost upon us who have lost the art of going in the flow of things. In the tempo of that race there is time to ponder morality and demoralization, hungry wolves and falling
stars. And there is time to puzzle over that curious and fortuitous question with which the people of Jemez greet each other.

That very question—"Where are you going?"—must ring in Abel’s ears as he begins the race. The time and direction of his journey are once again defined by the relation of the sun to the eastern mesa, “the house made of dawn.” Out of the pain and exhaustion of the race, Abel regains his vision: “he could see at last without having to think.” That vision is not the nihilistic vision of Angela, “beyond everything for which the mountain stands.” Rather, Abel’s “last reality” in the race is expressed in the essential unity and harmony of man and the land. He feels the sense of place he was unable to articulate in Part I. Here at last he has a voice, words and a song. In beauty he has begun.

The novel pounds relentlessly at the theme of escaping from the past. Just as the Pecos people fled in defeat from their diseased ancestral home, the traditional Indian must escape the stagnating anachronism of his home place, a source of oppression and division. Abel’s place in the village of Walatowa is defined in terms of exclusions: he is an outsider, just as Momaday had been in his youth at Jemez, in part because of the racist suspicion in the village of his intertribally mixed blood. In the first section, we see Abel’s empathic, imaginative attitudes toward Nature in contrast to the traditional people’s rather crude and demeaning pragmaticism. This thread begins with an epiphanic moment on the very first pages, when old Francisco first appears on the scene. He finds a dead bird in a snare he set, and he discards it without a
second thought because it’s just a drab sparrow. In the same section, Abel kills a caged eagle because its sordid captivity disgusts him after watching the beautiful flight of free eagles. Sex with a local girl is a drunken muddle of meat and grease rather than the Laurentian ballet of his sexual encounters with Angela and Millie. And yet, instead of accepting the obvious interpretation, that these things represent Abel’s potential to be more than his primitive, superstitious neighbors will ever be, we look for complex ironies that are, I’m afraid, not there.

Tosamah, who for all Momaday’s hints to the contrary, is clearly a personification of the expressed author, finds Abel pitiable and contemptible. Ben protests that Tosamah “doesn’t understand,” but Ben himself speaks, less confidently and elegantly, the same lessons of modern accommodation that Tosamah does. His monologues interweave his rich and beautiful recollections and memories of Navajo country with the refrain. Momaday has said elsewhere that the key to tribal identity is not physical proximity but the imaginative recreation of the landscape, “the remembered earth.” In other words, what “works” for the Indian is what Ben and Tosamah are doing, not what Abel finally does. Don’t go home; imagine it. Ben is “right” about both the beauty and the emptiness. There is “nothing there” economically, to mention only the obvious, and Ben could not survive there any better than he does in Los Angeles. He has found a similar, if less articulated, solution to the
one Tosamah and Momaday chose. Ben has his Navajo home “only in memory”.

There is no sense of community, in the broad, social spiritual sense of the term, in *House Made of Dawn*. The communities of Los Angeles are desperate groups thrown together for lacking better perspectives. The community of Walatowa excludes Abel in almost complete silence. Abel is as isolated, alienated, and nuclear in his home place as the young Kiowa boy, an outsider, who played with Abel’s nephews, rode a horse in the Jemez canyons, and later, with a touch of that active imagination, described his two or three years of childhood. Abel has no community to help him integrate after returning from World War II. In the first section, we only see him interacting with “white” people—Angela, the albino, white soldiers, the court—and his grandfather. He has no contact with the community of Walatowa, and there is no hint that the community has any interest in him.

The character of Abel represents a generation of individuals and families deeply affected by military service and wage-work during WWII, and by the pressure from federal Indian polices of the 1950s to assimilate into “mainstream” American metropolitan communities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis and San Francisco. “Termination” is the general term for a series of resolutions and public laws enacted between 1953 and 1961 which sought to dismantle federal trust relationships with Native tribes. These
policies resulted in the erosion of the tribal land base and tribal sovereignty based in treaty agreements.

From the late 1940s through the late 1970s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs ran a controversial “Relocation” program that encouraged Native individuals and families to move to urban areas. In adjusting to the new environment of the cities, Native people arriving from reservations and rural homelands formed connections through community organizations. These centers represented in *House Made of Dawn* by the “Indian Friendship House” and Tosamah’s Native American Church—supplemented the services of the Relocation offices with material help in the form of groceries and clothes, networks for finding jobs and housing, and friendship and support for day-to-day cultural survival.

N. Scott Momaday’s innovative voice led the way in achieving institutional recognition and public attention for Native literatures. His use of multiple voices and his re-alignment of literary styles and genres allowed him to merge literary modernism with Native oral forms and a politicized, historical memory. In *House Made of Dawn* oral literature is not a static relic of past cultural purity—a stage in the evolution of literature but is rather a contemporary resource in the post-World War II generation’s confrontation with Indian policy.

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