Chapter II

The Aesthetics of Momaday's Writings

Throughout history different cultures have embraced different aesthetics, and expressed these aesthetics through art-work that is unique to a particular culture both in form and style. While aesthetics pertain to a study of sensory or sensori-emotional values, also called judgements of sentiment and taste, scholars define it as a critical reflection on art, culture and nature. Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy which studies new ways of seeing and perceiving the world. Modern Western aesthetics had thinkers who laid great emphasis on beauty as the key component of art and of the aesthetic experience. Aesthetics therefore, is the philosophical notion of beauty. Baumgarten regarded aesthetics as a science of the sense experiences and beauty is the most perfect kind of knowledge that sense experience can have. According to Kant, beauty is objective and universal; thus certain things are beautiful to everyone. But in The Critique of Judgement, he says that judging something to be ‘beautiful’ must also give rise to pleasure by engaging our capacities of reflective contemplation. For Hegel all culture is a matter of ‘absolute spirit’ coming to manifest itself, stage by stage. Post-modern artists and
poets of the 20th century challenged that beauty was central to art and aesthetics thus reiterating the older theory of aesthetics.

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

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

The comparison of the unity of a literary work with that of a living organism implies growth in that literature. Along with Aristotle, his mentor Plato regarded music, poetry, architecture and drama as fundamental institutions within the body politic. Plato’s more mystical writings in Timaeus contain hints of another approach to aesthetics, one based on the Pythagorean theory of the cosmos that exerted a decisive influence on the Neo-Platonists. Through the works of St. Augustine, Boethius and Macrobius, the Pythagorean cosmology and its associated aesthetic of harmony were passed on to thinkers of the Middle Ages. Beauty is seen as a kind of divine order conforming to mathematical laws of number which are also laws of harmony. Music, poetry and architecture exhibit the same conformity to a cosmic order, and in
experiencing their beauty we are really experiencing the same order in ourselves and resonating to it as one string to another. Though little is known of Horace and his treatise *On the Sublime*, the key word *hypsos* or sublimity as Longinus defines it, signifies a certain distinction and excellence of expression, by which authors have been enabled to win immortal fame. An English alternative to the word could be ‘grandeur’ or the ‘Grand Style’. Sublimity is an inborn gift which must be cultivated among other ways, by imitation or emulation of writers who have shown themselves capable of achieving sublimity.

The concept of sublime has been a pre-dominant aesthetic theory in Western art and philosophy, receiving its more explicit formulation in early 18th century philosophy. Its presence as a concept in Native American aesthetics is not as explicitly stated as it is in Western thought, but there are strong indications that the sublime as an aesthetic property of Native American culture has been in evidence for centuries. One only needs to examine for instance, the notions of ugliness, exaltation, greatness and beauty, in the comedy and tragedy, the rituals of the clowns and the dances of the modern Pueblos to realize this. In Zuni art and culture, the notion of the sublime as appreciation through aesthetic non-verbal judgement is evident in the relationship of the beautiful (*tso'ya*) and the dangerous (*attanni*).
However, as Sidney Larson states in his *Native American Aesthetics: An Attitude of Relationship*, Native American people are still in the process of identifying or re-identifying features that distinguish themselves as individuals and in relationship to others. In doing so, they are tied to elements of history, property, and identity. They are dependent on notions of identity developed by others but this is in opposition to their former historical, place-oriented notion of themselves. A sense of place is very traditional in Native American culture and ironically is related to European concepts of property that figure critically in their present circumstances.

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

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

N. Scott Momaday’s memoir *The Names*, a combination of prose and photography however, opposes this theory. The pictures prove to be integral to the power of his work and each photograph reveals a story in
its own right yet they are adequate replacements for the story as told through his words. Although photography is a fascinating means by which to conserve some facets of Native American culture, technological advancement does not always equate with progress. Modern Native Americans, if they are to preserve their cultural heritage, they cannot afford to sever ties to their oral tradition.

All narrative is inherently a search for identity through story, and writers draw from their lives and their experiences in creating their fictions, some to a much greater degree than others. A salutary approach to the study of the work of any literary artist is to consider the multiplicity of biographical, cultural, literary and other factors to ensure a fuller and better understanding of his work. Thus it is important to examine the influences that have shaped N. Scott Momaday as a writer, more specifically as a novelist. His racial and cultural legacy provides a better perspective for the appreciation of his work, and the variety and fullness of his artistic expressions. His writings, paintings and drawings along with his conversations with other scholars, demonstrate the variety and relevance of his art. His life has been a long process of imagining who he is, and this process of self-discovery is ongoing. Through this he has attained a measure of self-control, which he illustrates in his worldview. From early childhood, his parents inculcated in him the value of
education and the development of bi-cultural skills, as also a physical and emotional understanding of his cultural and spiritual origins. He was exposed to various kinds of schooling such as one-room reservation day schools, church schools, and a military academy. This experience, juxtaposed with the family living among various cultures and peoples of the South-western tribes and the dominant white society in towns, has certainly been most enriching for him.

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

The other story that is essential to understand Momaday is the story of Devil's Tower, what used to be the rock tree of the Kiowa people. He remembers his grandmother telling him that the tree came into being because a boy turned into a bear and pursued his sisters, who climbed a stump, which suddenly grew and carried them into the sky to become the
stars of the Big Dipper, a constellation of seven bright stars in Ursa Major in the shape of a dipper:

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

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

...turns into a bear, and in a sense I (Momaday) am writing about myself. I’m not writing an autobiography, but I am
imagining a story that proceeds out of my own experience of the bear power. It is full of magic. But sometimes the bear is very difficult...He is hard to control...They (bears) don’t give themselves easily to any domination...They are equal to man’s dominance.³

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

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

Through these examples, Momaday can be seen as a traditional man with a bi-cultural identity. According to Charles L. Woodard, one of the best examples of this cultural duality is his enthusiasm for the legend of Billy the Kid, a legend he has been celebrating and exploring for years through his writing and painting. He is the Indian looking into that story, and he is the white gun-fighter looking out. He appreciates the irony of that juxtaposition, and he enjoys the comedy of it. His clearly defined identity permits him to make such leaps without fear of seeming to contradict his self. Nor does he believe that there is a contradiction in his refusal to be cause-oriented. One advantage he has is his dual vision, his familiarity with both the Native and the white worlds even if his views on identity are strongly existential. When asked how he felt about the term ‘Indian’, and if he preferred ‘Native American’ or ‘American Indian’, he says,
“Most Indian people I know think of themselves first as Indian.” But he attempts to explore his identity and self-realization through the medium of language when he says that we, meaning the Native American people do not really begin to exist until we convert ourselves into language. Momaday chooses not to be political, and has refused to accept the role of spokesman for the Native American people, a position that was thrust upon him after the success of his ground-breaking novel, *House Made of Dawn*:

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

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

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

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

It’s not that I want people to derive moral or social or political lessons from what I write...I’ve encountered people
who were very disappointed and upset because they thought that I was presenting the Indian world too positively.  

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

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

His fiction relies on his imaginative recreation of a history of people and events. In his perception, imagination is the ultimate form of existence for as he says, “I saw with my own eyes and with the eyes of my mind.” Imagining or ‘reflections’ as he calls them, holds as to lineage
and landscape. In his introduction to The Way to Rainy Mountain, written in 1969, he refers to the losses and sufferings of his Kiowa ancestors as "the idle recollections, the mean and ordinary agonies of human history." However, in his conversation with Woodard, he prefers not to dwell on them, choosing instead to celebrate the positive things:

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

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

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

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

The Way to Rainy Mountain offers a first portrait of origins, his own personal odyssey or life-journey highlighted against the migration of the Kiowa people, a nomadic group of the Plains, whose language is
thought to form a branch of the Aztec-Tanoan linguistic stock, from their old Rocky Mountain home in central Montana to Indian Territory, what later became known as Oklahoma. They call themselves Kaui-gu meaning ‘principal people,’ and today the tribe has about 12000 members living in Southwest Oklahoma. In 1837, they were forced to sign their first treaty, providing passage for the whites through Kiowa-Comanche land. By 1879, most of them were removed to, and confined in the reservations in Oklahoma as arbitrarily assigned homeland. Momaday followed the route of the Kiowas, starting at the headwaters of the Yellowstone River and ending at his grandmother’s grave, at Rainy Mountain Cemetery, near Mountain View, Oklahoma.

Momaday’s narrative is told as a series of 24 triads of personal and family history, calendar history and tribal mythic-history. The three sections of the memoir, with the headings The Setting Out, The Going On and The Closing In, alternating between three types of narrative, as Kenneth Fields has noted, allows Momaday to achieve a density and concentration approaching that of poetry. He published the prologue and several of the myths as The Journey of Tai-me in 1967. The introduction first appeared in the Reporter in 1967, and later as part of Tosamah’s life story in House Made Of Dawn in 1968. Circularity is a characteristic of all Native American cultures; Momaday’s works, whether it is House
Made of Dawn, or The Way to Rainy Mountain or The Names, exhibit the cyclical structure in a non-linear form. The journey is not linear and permanent but continuous and it is complete only when the return is made to the native landscape. The Kiowa journey like that recounted in the emergence narratives of other tribes is seen as a movement from chaos to order, from discord to harmony, with the cultural landscape symbolizing the conception of order. He regards the migration of his Kiowa people as a symbolic expression of all adversity, defining it in terms of landscape, route and time. Momaday published the book as a whole in 1969. He clarifies the theme in the prologue, regarding the work pre-eminently as the history of man’s idea of himself, with an essential being in language, and the journey is infused with motion and meaning:

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

In the introduction he recalls his grandmother Aho through whom he had learnt about the Golden Age of the Kiowas- the horse, the buffalo, the Sun Dance, the expression of religious belief and cultural pride. By the end of the work, the tone of nostalgia and sadness at the virtual destruction of Kiowa culture intensifies. It is clear that Aho is the source of the constantly threatened unity of Kiowa past and present, of myth and reality. She continues to inspire this modern Kiowa, Momaday who
attempts to restore life to the myths and the language of his people. Standing by her grave at Rainy Mountain Cemetery, he is infused with the knowledge of his origins and discovers himself anew. For the legends and stories, particularly in the first section, Momaday illustrates how the power of language lives on the mythic, cultural and personal levels. He uses a colloquial tone appropriate to oral delivery while the historical sections are more formal. By merging time and space he has added another dimension to his existence—his native belief in the metaphoric force of a particular landscape, or what he terms “the sense of place”. Like him, Eudora Welty says this sense of place is essential to good writing. It is by knowing where one stands that one is able to judge where one is:

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

The structure outlined in the book is in keeping with the conventional division of a beginning, middle, and end, more precisely, the origins, the golden age, and the final decline of the Kiowas as a proud, independent people. The three sections reveal a movement from myth, through legend to history. As Robert L. Berner describes it in his 1979 essay, *N. Scott Momaday: Beyond Rainy Mountain*, in *American
Indian Culture and Research Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1, the journey is a process in which the myth arises out of a people’s need to define their relationship to the world, making it through frequent re-telling, a legend which loses its original significance, and declines under the weight of history. Accompanying this story is that of Momaday’s own discovery of himself as a Kiowa; it parallels his journey through memory, from his first sight of the Great Plains, to the final vision of the Rainy Mountain toward which the Kiowas were inevitably and tragically destined to find their way.

The same holds for The Names: A Memoir, an account of the family genealogy- the Momaday born of Kiowa father and part Cherokee, part Anglo-English and French mother, raised on Kiowa, Navajo and Jemez Pueblo reservations where his parents were teachers, and the eventual Stanford Ph.D. with a dissertation written under the direction of Yvor Winters. Using his mother’s language, he tells his story in the manner of his father’s people, again merging time and space, interweaving legend, myth, and history, exploring the minds of many remarkable personages, in a most elegiac tone. His prose is formal and symbolic, and his words achieve his purpose- an inner view of what it might have meant to be a part of the high plains ‘horse culture’ which flourished briefly but gloriously. Similar to his people’s manner of
recording events by painting images, he tells his story by evoking images, and fusing the fragments from the historical and legendary past of the Kiowas with a ‘personal calendar history’. Using the technique of repetition, a characteristic device of the oral tradition, Momaday construes his account as:

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

The memoir begins thus:

    My name is Tsoai-talee. I am, therefore, Tsoai-talee; therefore I am.
    The storyteller Pohd-lohk gave me the name Tsoai-talee.¹²

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

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

When Pohd-lohk, his step-great-grandfather and one-time member of the Seventh Cavalry bestowed on him the Kiowa name Tsoai-Talee, after the 1200-foot volcanic protrusion in Wyoming which Americans call Devil’s
Tower, it was regarded as nothing short of a high honour for the mystic rock was a place of great significance. For Native Americans, a name was never just an identifying tag but a kind of emblem and ideal, the determining source of one’s character and course of life. Naming is, as Momaday says, a ‘complicated, and a sacred business’:

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

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

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

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

He depicts the Kiowas’ antecedents from their creation-myth as the Kwuda –‘the coming out people’- who emerged from the hollow log into
the world through the tribal self-naming. In the prologue he begins with a
Kiowa folk tale:

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

Momaday goes on to say that for them:

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

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

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

Thus he drew not only from his personal memory but also from his racial memory. He simply corroborates Geary Hobson’s notion that in the
remembering of heritage is strength, and continuance and renewal throughout the generations. As for that place of emergence, that hollow log, Momaday says,

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

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

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

Momaday as Tsoai-Talee, achieves his individual quest for identity in the same way that Abel (\textit{House Made of Dawn}) and his nameless traveler to Rainy Mountain (\textit{The Way to Rainy Mountain}) did, by reintegrating
himself into the spiritual community of his people when he arrives where his journey began in the cultural landscape. Choosing not to write about the indignities suffered by his ancestors, Momaday’s work is testimony that there are Native Americans who lived what he describes as the “pastoral time of my growing up” both on reservations, and in towns amidst white populations. In this work he has paid some attention to his mixed family genealogy but reiterates his strong and exotic Kiowa heritage, “I’m Kiowa, and I’m going to die Kiowa.”

He attributes his sense of cultural identity to his parents, despite the assimilation of different cultures. He was convinced that the constant traveling was an important part of his education. And being an only child, he spent much of his time alone but his solitude encouraged him to develop his imagination, and that was a good thing for his writing. Recalling an occasion when he was taken ill, he had asked his father to bring him a book. Smoky, the Cowhorse by Will James was his ‘first insight into the miracle of reading’. He could identify himself with the character because he was ‘a boy with a horse’ and because he was living in the Wild West, he was greatly ‘enamoured of Billy the Kid legends and stories of cowboys and horses’. Having grown up in New Mexico, he was greatly fascinated by these legends, because they were a reflection of the world he loved even if the stories of the exploits of this white outlaw hero
is antithetical to the traditional Native world. He was inspired, ironically, to write about the legendary figure, though the man was diametrically opposed to his Indian side. In his later work, *The Ancient Child*, one of his characters, Grey, fantasizes about riding with Billy the Kid. In this regard, he has written about the death of the outlaw, who is as much a marginal character living on the periphery of society as Native Americans are, in the following poem, titled *Wide Empty Landscape with Death in the Foreground*:

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

Giving further biographical information on his exposure to both the Catholic and the Native religions, Momaday agrees that ‘there was always a religious tension in the pueblos’ at Jemez, which was reflected in *House Made of Dawn*. Having received a Pan-Indian experience in the reservation schools, Momaday later enrolled in the University of New
Mexico. It was there that he began writing poetry, and in 1959, published his first poem, *Earth and I Give You Turquoise*, in the New Mexico Quarterly. This is one of the most moving elegies in modern poetry, an evocation of what he loved the most in the past, the laughter and the old stories of his people:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The poem is obscure until we understand the circumstances Momaday is describing. The first three stanzas are his reflections on the death of a friend’s child, and they describe the inadequacy of language to encompass such grief. The last three stanzas turn to an incident that happened on a hunting trip the poet took as a teenager: he had retrieved a goose that had been shot by one of the hunters. The speaker is slow to
realize what is wild in him when he says ‘We are civil’. Alan R. Velie explains that Indian mourning is a violent release and purgation of grief as opposed to the Anglo custom of repressing grief. Thus expressing condolence to someone who is in mourning would not have a hollow ring as words have more force in Native mourning ceremonies.

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

Being a strong believer in destiny, he regards his meeting with his mentor, Winters as a ‘destined meeting’:
You meet someone in your life who sees you for what you are and who advises you, who stands in a position to change your life.  

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

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

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

What ruse of vision,  
escaping the wall of leaves,  
rendering incision  
into countless surfaces,  
would cull and color  
his somnolence, whose old age  
has outworn valor,
all but the fact of courage?
Seen, he does not come,
move, but seems forever there,
dimensionless, dumb,
in the windless noon’s hot glare.
More scarred than others
these years since the trap maimed him,
pain slants his withers,
drawing up the crooked limb.
Then he is gone, whole,
without urgency, from sight,
as buzzards control,
imperceptibly, their flight.24

The bear in his poem is also the incarnation of some primeval,
fundamental truth about the wilderness. The identity of the creature, worn
down to the mere ‘fact of courage’, holds itself together in the wilderness
through an attitude of self-sufficient stoicism, a sort of expert indifference
to the dangers always lurking behind the ‘countless surfaces’ of the
leaves. The poem offers a moment of insight, in which we understand
something of the age and mystery of the land. As Winters puts it in Forms
of Discovery, “It seems rather a perception of the ‘discrete’ wilderness,
the essential wilderness.” Going back to the ancient story, Momaday says
that nobody knows what happened to the bear or the boy. His notion is
that the boy and the bear are “indivisible.” He is convinced that he is the
reincarnation of the bear, and so he deals with it by imagining it and by
writing a story about it in the same way that the Kiowas did when they
encountered that mysterious rock formation. They incorporated it into
their experience by telling a story about it. Shedding more light on his bear power, he says that whenever it surfaces, “there is an energy, an agitation, an anger, perhaps” but then he also becomes very spiritual and feels “a greater kinship with the animal world and with the wilderness.” Under its influence, his work and life acquire an intensity that makes him “accelerate” his creativity in a great burst of vitality. In fact, he adds that it ‘enables me to raise my imagination to a higher level than I ordinarily can. It is very creative.’ In Winters’ words, Momaday’s works are also ‘forms of discovery.’ And indeed, learning and writing about the bear is a process of self-discovery as Woodard also puts it. Momaday could not agree more for he feels that his name proceeds from that ancient Kiowa story in which his being is intrinsically involved.

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

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

Bo-talee rode easily among his enemies, once, twice, three- and four times. And all who saw him were amazed, for he was utterly without fear; so it seemed. But afterwards he said:
Certainly I was afraid. I was afraid of the fear in the eyes of my enemies.25

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

...what she has in mind is that the truth as most people perceive it is rather boring much of the time. In order to get at it in an interesting way you have to apply the imagination.
So telling the truth "slant" is really the business of a storyteller.26

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

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

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

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

What he has imbibed from Dickinson is evident in his series of poems-*Plainview: 1* to *Plainview: 4* from *The Gourd Dancer* called *Plainview: 1* in which we get a glimpse of his attitudes about language and literature:
There in the hollow of the hills I see,
Eleven magpies stand away from me.
Low light upon the rim; a wind informs
This distance with a gathering of storms
And drifts in silver crescents on the grass,
Configurations that appear, and pass.
There falls a final shadow on the glare,
A stillness on the dark, erratic air.
I do not hear the longer wind that lows
Among the magpies. Silences disclose,
Until no rhythms of unrest remain,
Eleven magpies standing on the plain.
They are illusion-wind and rain revolve-
And they recede in darkness, and dissolve.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Momaday also reveals his commitment to well-ordered language. He is a methodical stylist who slowly sculpts his prose until it is resonant and symmetrical, and who employs traditional versification in much of his poetry. These devices demonstrate his commitment to precision and economy of expression, the concise and economical naming of the world. It is his belief, as he has Tosamah say in the section, *The Priest of the Sun* in *House Made of Dawn*, that in the modern world man, more specifically, the white man has ‘diluted and multiplied the Word’ and in so doing has devalued language. The word as an instrument of creation
has diminished nearly to the point of no return and it may be that we will
‘perish by the Word’. The precise language is heightened by regular
measure and emphatically rhymed couplets. Besides, there are simple
ingredients and complex meaning. In The Way to Rainy Mountain, he
states, ‘A word has power in and of itself. He adds, ‘it comes from
nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things.’

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

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

One of the effects of having so much time was the sense of
isolation. The sense of being very far from my native land.
So there grew up in me in Russia a loneliness such as I have
not known at other times or places in my life. And that
turned out to be creative, I wrote...There is a loneliness in
such isolation that sparks creativity.”31
Thus silence is ‘a great restorative,’ that leads to a ‘creative condition.’ The great poets write their poems ‘out of that context of silence’ and incorporate it into their words.

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

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

He continues in the same essay,

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

One may turn one’s attention to this ritual formula from the Navajo healing ceremony:
Reared within the Mountains!
Lord of the Mountains!
Young Man!
Chieftain!
I have made your sacrifice.
I have prepared a smoke for you.
My feet restore for me.
My legs restore for me.
My body restore for me.
My mind restore for me.
My voice thou restore for me.
Restore all for me in beauty.
Make beautiful all that is before me.
Make beautiful all that is behind me.
It is done in beauty.
It is done in beauty.
It is done in beauty.
It is done in beauty. 33

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

It is significant that in this rich, ceremonial song the singer should end upon the notion of beauty, of beauty in the physical world, of man in the immediate presence and full awareness of that beauty. And it is significant, indeed necessary, that this whole and aesthetic and spiritual sense should be expressed in language...The singer affirms that he has a whole and irrevocable investment in the world...He aspires to the restoration of his body, mind, and soul, which in his cultural and religious frame of reference is preeminently an aesthetic consideration, a perception of well ordered being and beauty, a design of which he is the human centre. 34
The sacred power of the word is one of Momaday’s favourite themes. Thus in *House Made of Dawn*, through the character of Tosamah, he focuses on the Gospel of John because John equates the word with God:

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

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

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

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

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

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

While reconciling his Indian heritage and contemporary American society, he keeps his traditions alive for he understood how language,
reality and imagination are related by his study of the Kiowa oral tradition. That explains his being a member of the *Taimpe* or Gourd Dance Society though he admits that it is not something that he feels the need to do 'religiously'. Yet he takes pride in his membership for

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

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

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

The dance is the living evidence as well as the symbol of the strength and vitality of the culture, with particular stress on the horse, as the final section of the poem, *The Giveaway* reveals. After each song there is a ‘giveaway’ ceremony in which people are honoured through the gifting of gifts, and the gift of a horse is an honour of the highest magnitude.
By the same token, he regards oral literature as that process by which the myths, legends, tales, and lore of a people are formulated, communicated, and preserved in language by word of mouth, in contrast to writing. Oral literature is living speech. Writing is recorded speech. When oral literature is reduced to writing it loses its vitality. Momaday is aware that when the spoken word is translated to the written word, we ‘freeze’ it and ‘paralyze’ it, and it loses some of its vitality and flexibility. Hence in his conversation with Charles L. Woodard, Momaday characterizes his deepest voice as “lyrical and reverent and it bears close relationship to Indian oral tradition.” It “proceeds out of an ancient voice” and is “anchored in that ancient tradition.”

To experience the inner vitality of a song or a story, the reader has to look upon words as events. Much of the vitality of language as a medium is lost in a passive reading of written texts. In Momaday’s view, man’s existence is ordered, controlled and preserved through language. Native Americans thought of language as creative and imperishable and as a vehicle for the continuance of human existence across time and space. Matthias Schubnell says that this idea is important for understanding Momaday’s work in which the dividing lines between reality and imagination, between past, present and future, and between individual and racial experience are blurred. Momaday thinks that oral
and written literatures are stages in an evolutionary process. He endeavored to blend both as the same principles can be applied to each tradition in order to bring them closer together.

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

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

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

Momaday says that until very recently:

the story has been the private possession of a few, a tenuous link in that most ancient chain of language that we call the oral tradition; tenuous because the tradition itself is so; for as many times as the story has been told, it was always but one generation removed from extinction. But it was held dear, too, on that same account. That is to say, it has been neither more or less durable than the human voice, and neither more or less concerned to express the meaning of the human condition...The point of the story lies, not so much in what the arrow-maker does, but in what he says- and indeed that he says it. The principal fact is that he speaks, and in so doing he places his very life in the balance. It is this aspect of the story that interests me most, for it is here that the language becomes most conscious of itself; here we are very close to the origin and object of literature...Implicit in his (the arrow-maker) speech is all of his definition and all of his destiny, and by implication, all of ours. He ventures to speak
because he must; language is the repository of his whole knowledge and experience, and it represents the only chance he has for survival...The arrow-maker is preeminently the man made of words. He has consummate being in language; it is the world of his origin and of his posterity...We can imagine him, as he imagines himself, whole and vital, going on into the unknown darkness and beyond...Language determines the arrow-maker, and his story determines our literary experience.40

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

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

The contemporary relevance of this poem is that it states how the oral tradition which is ‘only a generation away from extinction,’ sustained and renewed itself and gave life to the people. The ‘dream wheel’ shapes his
existence and his perception of the world around him. Contemporary Native poets are the current ‘carriers of the Dream Wheel,’ and it is through their poems that modern Native Americans can define their reality and ‘center upon being’. The imaginary realm of histories and myths, visions and songs survives in their voices, and the keepers of oral tradition have existence in and through it. The fundamental tenet of Native American thought is that the world came into existence through language; as long as this tradition is kept alive in their communal experience, the people will continue to know who they are and what their destiny is. Perhaps that explains why Duane Niatum chose the same title for his anthology of contemporary Native poetry.

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

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

Such views on the verbal dimension have special relevance to Momaday who describes himself as a man made of words. He further elaborates:
The continuity is unbroken. It extends from prehistoric times to the present, and it is the very integrity of American literature.\textsuperscript{43}

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

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

Speaking about the “resonances” one finds of one’s thoughts and themes in the work of others with whom one has a natural affinity, whether it is Faulkner or Dinesen or D.H. Lawrence, Momaday regards such ‘discoveries as confirmations, but not necessarily influences’. Momaday agrees:
As to influences, I make that shift in gears every time I’m asked who influences my writing. I say truthfully that I don’t know, but I can tell you who I like and admire. And it’s not the same thing. There’s a distinction to be made, as you say, between an influence and sharing of an impulse.\textsuperscript{45}

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

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

Much of my work is a play upon words and play in the element of words. In The Way to Rainy Mountain, the old woman Ko-Sahn talks to me about the Sun Dance. She tells me that it began with an old woman who brought dirt in to place on the dance ground in the Sun Dance lodge, and then sang. And a part of her song had to do with play. She sang, “As old as I am, I still have the feeling of play.” And I was greatly taken with that, and decided that it’s really a central part of the Native American attitude towards life. One doesn’t ordinarily think of the Sun Dance as play, but if you observe Indian ceremony, there is a lot of play in it. A lot of
laughter and joking and an attitude of playfulness, and it was there in that one-hundred year-old woman, Ko-Sahn. I think that’s what she was talking about when she was talking about the old, old woman of the Sun Dance. That’s an important thing, and I think I deal in it. Not always consciously, necessarily, but it’s part of my attitude. It shows up in my work.46

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

In that book, I wrote about Lupe Lucero, the little boy at Jemez Day School. One day the governor of the village comes up and speaks to Lupe in his native dialect and asks for my father. Lupe considers for a moment, and then he looks up at the governor and he says, “I’m sorry, my friend, but we speak only English here.” I appreciate that little story. There’s a lot of that sort of thing in The Names. To some extent, there’s that sort of thing in House Made of Dawn. When Abel’s horse lies down in the river and Abel has to get up and walk out with his shoes creaking and swishing water, that’s funny. Indians would read that and find it very funny.” Again in the same novel, there is the whole court business where there is such a play upon words and words are the dangerous element:
The narrator comments that the white men are trying to enclose him in words. Disarm him with words. There are words all around him. And of course, Tosamah makes a lot of puns. Not puns in the ordinary sense, but he plays with language a lot. He says things like, “Due process is a hell of a remedy for snakebite” or “Be kind to a white man today.” Where Tosamah remarks upon the court scene- I think Indians would find that funny. When he tells what happened to Abel- this poor longhair who gets himself into trouble. “Look what they did for him,” he says. “They deloused him. They gave him an education and free room and board, and how does he pay them back?” I think that an Indian would find that funny.47
Language and nationality are central determinants of culture. Referring to his cultural duality, which is sometimes a disadvantage, Momaday gives the example of the two ways of explaining the existence of Devil’s Tower. One is the geologist’s explanation of its formation which is a logical explanation; the other, from a Native American perspective, also has a grain of truth in it. That explains the “rift between the mythological truth and the scientific truth.” This he interprets as Tosamah’s narrative in *House Made of Dawn*, a passage that also occurs in the introduction to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, which invests mythic proportions on the formation of the ancient rock structure:

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

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

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

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

The Kiowas could not remember a time of glory in their racial life; they knew only that they were the ‘coming out’ people, according to the name which they gave to themselves, *Kwuda*, who in their origin myth had entered the world through a hollow log. Now it must have seemed to them that in the Southern Plains of 1800, they had reached the time and
place of their fulfillment; and so it was indeed. In the course of their long journey they had acquired horses, the Sun Dance religion, and a certain love and possession of the prairies. They had become centaurs in their spirit. For a hundred years, more or less, they ruled an area that extended from the Arkansas River to the Staked Plains, from the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico, and in them was realized the culmination of a culture that was peculiarly vital, native, and distinct, however vulnerable and ill-fated.

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

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

Grey had a hard, uncompromising notion of the Kiowa side of her heritage. The Kiowas were an exclusive people, lordly, tyrannical, domineering. They took advantage of their
opportunities; that is how they survived, how they had survived from the time they entered the world through a hollow log. One had to meet them on their own terms or not at all. They could negate you with their stoicism. Not very long ago the Kiowas, along with their allies the Comanches, were warriors, horse thieves, and slave traders. They had been invincible for a hundred years, and they had conceived a large idea of themselves. It was Grey’s idea, too. [p.221]

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

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

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita range. For my people it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. There, in the south of the continental trough, is the hardest weather in the world. In winter there are blizzards, which come down the Williston corridor, bearing hail and sleet. Hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge...Loneliness is there as an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. At the slightest elevation you can see to the end of the world. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun
at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun. [pp. 112-113]

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

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

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

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

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

Long ago there were bad times. The Kiowas were hungry and there was no food. There was a man who heard his children cry from hunger, and he began to search for food. He walked four days and became very weak. On the fourth day he came to a great canyon. Suddenly there was thunder and lightning. A Voice spoke to him and said, “Why are you following me? What do you want?” The man was afraid. The thing standing before him had the feet of a deer, and its body was covered with feathers. The man answered that the Kiowas were hungry. “Take me with you,” the Voice said,
“and I will give you whatever you want.” From that day Tai-me has belonged to the Kiowas. [p.85]

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

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

Finally the *Tai-me* is referred to in terms of the imagination in *The Ancient Child*. Here the Sacred Sun Dance doll is regarded as the ‘most powerful medicine’ the presence of which was ‘palpable; it was as if she had walked into a warm, slow-moving stream; the presence lay against her like water.’ Momaday places the *Tai-me* and its specific context in relation to the earth and sky. This place is in southwest Oklahoma on and around Rainy Mountain, which becomes in *The Ancient Child*, ‘the center of the world, the sacred ground of sacred grounds.’
Before the Sun Dance could begin however, the US Cavalry put an end to it in July 1890, at the bend of the Washita River:

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

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

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

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

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

Unless we understand the land and its power, we are at odds with everything we touch. The journey recalled through personal and racial
memory, has ended in a remarkable destination—Rainy Mountain Cemetery.

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

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

*Rainy Mountain Cemetery:*

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

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

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

Yet Momaday, and indeed the Kiowa people, pay no such price, traditionally. That is because he has a strong sense of place and an intense belief in the sustaining permanence of origins. And throughout his life and art, he has emphasized the importance of having an intimate knowledge of one’s own landscape. The idea is especially eloquently
presented in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, where he declares that a person:

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

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

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

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

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

From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky. [p.116]
Momaday is therefore a physical and philosophical traveler, a nomad whose life is movement and whose art is a steady progression through time and place to the origins that define him and his people. Beginning with the contemporary House Made of Dawn, he has journeyed steadily back through his writings in a creative and definitive celebration of origins. In doing so, he has demonstrated the power of those origins, as well as the power of place.

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

But however much he loved the land and the people, his family were outsiders and they kept to themselves, in the reservation of their day school, and through this “tender of our respect and our belief, we earned the trust of the Jemez people, and were at home there.” Later, when he went away to school, he encountered people who were much more willing to exchange information and traditions, which ‘leads to a sense of being Indian first.’ For instance, there are similarities between the Kiowa
and the Lakota accounts of the Devil’s Tower story. These comparative mythologies evolved and were probably retold by different tribes, each in its own way but where it originated no one will probably know.

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

I feel that I have some investment in that community and that landscape, and I love the Navajo spirit. They have a great generosity of spirit...They are in great possession of themselves...Isak Dinesen found great nobility in some African people, and I feel that way about the Navajo.\(^5\)

It is interesting to note that in Native American languages the words ‘people’ and ‘land’ are indistinguishable and inseparable. In the name of ‘Oklahoma’, literally, ‘*ogula homma*’ in the Muskhogean languages, the words synonymously mean ‘red people’s land.’ Thus land is people, and by remembering the relationships to the people, the land and the past, Native Americans, according to Geary Hobson, ‘renew in
strength our continuance as a people’. Referring to the Wichita
Mountains in the Southern Plains as a consecrated landscape, in The Man
*Made of Words*, Momaday recounts ‘the Kiowas and Comanches
journeyed outward from the Wichitas in every direction, going away for
years, but they always returned, for the land had got hold of them.’

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

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

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

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

The valley is vast. When you look out over it, it does not
occur to you that there is an end to it. You see the monoliths
that stand in space, and you imagine that you have come
upon eternity. They do not appear to exist in time. You
think: I see that time comes to an end on this side of the
rock, and on the other side there is nothing forever. I believe
that only in *dine bizaad*, the Navajo language, which is
endless, can this place be described, or even indicated in its
true character. Just there is the centre of an intricate geology,
a whole and unique landscape which includes Utah,
Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. The most brilliant colours in the earth are there, I believe, and the most extraordinary land forms- and surely the coldest, clearest air, which is run through with pure light. [p. 68]

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

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

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

Her roots ran deep into the earth, and from those depths she drew strength enough to hold still against all the forces of change and disorder. The land is a link between innumerable generations of the tribe. The land is at once
the place of origin, source of sustenance, and it provides for and protects future generations. Interpreting the relationship of his people with the land as "reciprocal appropriation", he expressed the opinion:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The disappearance of the buffalo and the closing in of the US Cavalry meant the end of the old way of life for the Kiowas, and, along with everything they held sacred, they lost their horses. Momaday regards such
an ending of the cavalry’s massacre of the Kiowa horses as a poignant symbol:

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

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

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

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

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

I identify very strongly with places where I have lived, where I have been, where I have invested some part of my being. That equation between man and nature or between writer and place- I don’t think there is a relationship that is more important than that. I don’t think one can write without
a certain sense of space or place... You create an impression of place. It precedes the experience whatever it may be. The earth was here before I was. When I came, I simply identified place by living in it or looking at it. One does create place in the same way that the storyteller creates himself, creates his listener. The writer creates a place. An excellent example of that is Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, in which the sense of place is so important. I suspect that the Africa of *Out of Africa* never really existed outside of Isak Dinesen’s mind. She went there and she invested herself in the actual African landscape, but when she wrote about it, she created a place that probably doesn’t exist outside the pages of that book. Dinesen sees everything in Africa as expressions of the same theme: they are all Africa in flesh and blood.\(^59\)

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

Such places are truer than the ‘reality,’ they are mythic landscapes with unaccountable things beneath the surface which as Woodard says, really symbolize the earth and her potential. He points out what he regards as a summary of the earth’s implications, or more broadly, the energy in origins, in Momaday’s poem, *Headwaters* at the beginning of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* where he introduces the Kiowa creation myth in which the people emerge through a ‘log, hollow and weather-stained.’ The poem indicates the idea of creation as something with a
specific origin, a source that can be identified by the “roots.” In describing a seemingly stagnant pool, Momaday says,

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

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

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

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

The title of Lawrence’s essay on the subject of man-land relationship is \textit{The Spirit of Place}. Following Lawrence, Momaday terms this a ‘sense of place’ in his \textit{A Special Sense of Place}, which appeared in Viva, Santa Fe New Mexican, (7 May 1972). A sense of place derives from the
perception of a culturally imposed symbolic order on a particular physical topography. Momaday has emphasized many times in his *Viva* columns his feeling of unity with and fulfillment in the land:

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

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

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

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

The Tewa singer finds in the landscape which surrounds him validation for his own song, and that particular topography becomes a cultural landscape, at once physical and symbolic. The Kiowa journey, like that recounted in emergence narratives, may be seen as a movement from chaos to order, from disharmony to harmony, the very same destination that Abel arrives at in *House Made of Dawn*. Like Ko-sahn, the Native American draws from the cultural landscape ‘strength enough to hold still against all the forces of chance and disorder.’
In Momaday’s depiction of the sexual relationship between Abel and Angela in *House Made of Dawn*, we can see that he is in tune with Lawrence’s diagnosis of the malaise affecting modern civilization and his prescription to cure it, to revive a dying civilization. Thus both writers emphasise the need for harmony between man and land, and the reciprocal influences between the two. Reverence for land brings about a communion between man and soil. Thus landscape plays an important role, for it is created by the imaginative interaction of societies of men and particular geographies.

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

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

Similarly, Devil’s Tower is of fundamental importance to him as it is associated with the legend of Tsoai-Talee which gave him his Kiowa name, and is a place through which he and his ancestors have ‘kinsmen in the night sky.’ The Kiowas dared to imagine and determine who they were...The journey recalled is the revelation of one way in which these traditions are conceived, developed and interfused in the human mind.64

*The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee* is Momaday’s own song of joy, and it is particularly expressive of his Plains Indian heritage. Although in form the poem makes a playful glance at Walt Whitman’s catalogues, it really reflects the oral tradition. It is about the imaginative integration of the self into the land. Momaday has identified his spirit with the land, and shown the beauty and psychic sanity that identification promises. That this integration is peculiarly an act of imagination is revealed in the last line of the first stanza: I am the whole dream of these things. What really emerges from the poem is his perception of the beauty of the land, and of its vitality. In *A First American Views His Land*, he wonders if the Native American concept of the land derives from this ‘recognition of beauty, the realization that the physical world is beautiful.’ The poem thus sings of the beauty in the union of man and land.
Reverence for land also influences Native art. Momaday subscribes to the view ‘the land itself seems to inspire artistic expression.’ But interestingly enough, for an artist who writes just as well as he paints, Momaday does not paint landscapes even though the dramatic landscapes in his writings are descriptions which are very visual- “prose-paintings” as Woodard calls them. His response to that is:

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

Giving the example of a mountain, he says,

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

One of the things that strike him about any landscape is the play of light on it and he admits he had never seen light such as one sees in Northern New Mexico, anywhere else. And despite having lived for most part of his early life in Santa Fe, he says, “it is wonderful to wake up there and to
observe the light filtering down through the leaves of the trees.” Even the thought of it fills with him with nostalgia as he misses that environment and feels the need to go there periodically just to restore and regenerate himself.

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

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

It is this notion of the appropriate, along with that of the beautiful, that forms the Native American perspective on the land. In a sense these considerations are indivisible; Native American oral tradition is rich with songs and tales that celebrate natural beauty, the beauty of the natural
world. What is more appropriate to our world than that which is beautiful? He says, “Perhaps it begins with the recognition of beauty, the realization that the physical world is beautiful.”

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

Very old in the Native American view is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, a dimension in which man rightly exists. It follows logically that there are ethical imperatives in this matter. I think: Inasmuch as I am in the land, it is appropriate that I should affirm myself in the spirit of the land. I shall celebrate my life in the world and the world in my life. In the natural order man invests himself in the landscape and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. The trust is sacred.
The process of investment and appropriation is, I believe, pre-eminently a function of the imagination. It is accomplished by means of an act of the imagination that is especially ethical in kind.68

In this same essay, he divides the four sections of the poem, New World which tells of primal man’s first view of his pristine new world on earth. It illustrates what he says is the ‘first truth’ of the Native American:
The first truth is that I love the land; I see that it is beautiful; I delight in it; I am alive in it. Momaday condenses this philosophy, in the poem, I Am Alive, into ‘a number of equations’ which he calls ‘the idea of the self’:
You see, I am alive.
You see, I stand in good relation to the earth.
You see, I stand in good relation to the gods.
You see, I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful.
You see, I am alive, I am alive. 69

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

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

In her the sense of place is definitive of her great, artistic spirit. She perceives in the landscape of New Mexico an essence and quality of life that enables her to express her genius, and she too, is a native in her soul.
Like Momaday, O’Keeffe finds her inspiration and sustenance in the land, and is identified with it. Both are open to the beauty of the earth, appreciating even the bones and skulls and the stones. The poet wishes ‘to feel the sun in the stones,’ the life source and principle. He gives the artist a stone and she ‘[knows] at once that it [is] beautiful,’ just as she knows the greater forms of the earth at Abiquiu. Thus he echoes what he had once heard:

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

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

Think of the Puritans, who came into New England and simply made no concession whatsoever. I suppose they believed that as Puritans, as Christians, as enlightened, chosen people of God, they could not compromise their faith at all. And so it became purely destructive. It destroyed people...I think something of that same thing is true of Fray
Nicholas. He’s a Franciscan. He’s on God’s side, and he’s in a pagan world, and compromise is dangerous. Adaptation. Concession. Any accommodation would be an admission of failure, and a repudiation of one’s ideals. So he’s blind.\(^7\)

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

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

The inappropriateness of Olguin’s attitude is summarized in the terrible image of the blind eye, with the concluding reference to deadened life, ‘the lump of frozen marrow in the bone’. At the end of the narrative, Olguin feels that he has, after considerable turmoil through the years, ‘come to terms with the town’. He is proud of his accomplishments and confident that he has at last achieved an almost total understanding of his circumstances. But then Abel comes to him in the predawn darkness to announce the death of his grandfather:
“What in God’s name-?” he said.
“My grandfather is dead,” Abel said. “You must bury him”.
“Dead? Oh....yes-yes, of course. But, good heavens, couldn’t you have waited until –”
“My grandfather is dead,” Abel repeated. His voice was low and even. There was no emotion, nothing.
“Yes. Yes. I heard you,” said the priest, rubbing his good eye. “Good Lord, what time is it, anyway? Do you know what time it is? I can understand how you must feel, but-”
But Abel was gone. Father Olguin shivered with cold and peered out into the darkness. “I can understand,” he said. “I can understand, do you hear?” And he began to shout, “I understand! Oh God! I understand- I understand!” [p.184]

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

Just as appropriate is Momaday’s description of himself as a “Wordwalker”. The term is suggestive of a person who ‘makes his way on the basis of words’ and has the connotation of ‘the migrant and migration, which is an important part of the Kiowa tradition.’
Further, emphasizing on the notion of the appropriate in an essay entitled *Singing about the Beauty of the Earth*, Momaday says that in order to know instinctively, that which is truly appropriate, or fitting or worthy, and to act accordingly, is ‘to exist in the full realization of our humanity.’

Such a realization perhaps comes from the belief in ‘the spirit of place’. To Native Americans, their understanding of the world is shaped by the mythology and history of their homelands. They are more attached to place, and have found it hard to escape the shattered, unproductive landscape created by the mobile ‘settlers’ as is reflected today in life on many reservations. People whose collective memory reaches back to once beautiful and productive land now live amid its devastations, and suffer from the knowledge of what the land had been. Focusing on the possibility of reconciling Indian-White conflicts, and on a rediscovery of the lost unity of the natural world and the self, Momaday commented that one of the things that concern him deeply is the way we have treated the environment. Obviously we have failed to protect the planet or recognize the ‘spiritual life of the earth.’ A reiteration of the sense of this ‘spiritual life of the earth’ remains one of Momaday’s pressing objectives. And he knows that this relationship between man and the land does not end with death as he returns to the earth.
In his study, *Words and Place: A Reading of House Made of Dawn*, Lawrence J. Evers emphasizes on two important Native American traditions: the relationship with the land and the special regard for language. He says, “It is only through words that a man is able to express his relation to place.” The word has fundamental importance in perceiving the landscape; indeed, “where words and place come together, there is the sacred” as Momaday writes in *The Man Made of Words*. While language is routinely used on a day-to-day basis to convey personal meanings and messages, it is also the repository of a common system of cultural meanings and a common narrative heritage as is evident in its general fund of myths, legends and tales. This provides a reliable and objective method for a recovery of its common beliefs, attitudes and values including the environmental concerns. Stories have, as it were, a life of their own. They persist with only incidental changes, through radically changed cultural circumstances. The Euro-American oral heritage of fairy tales about princes and princesses living in castles, knights, witches and sorcerers, hark back to another physical and psychic world. Yet they live on and continue to be told, relatively unchanged in the re-telling, in today’s world of modern technology. The Native American, on his part, “is someone who thinks of himself in a particular way and his idea comprehends his relationship to the physical world.”
Momaday admits that modern civilization in its relentless pursuit of the ‘American Dream’ and of the ‘Almighty Dollar’ has rejected the moral issues with regard to the environment. But on a more positive note he adds

I hope that we two-leggeds will come to an understanding of the spiritual realities of the world and universe...I don’t delude myself into thinking that the human race is destined to outlive nature...I think that the spirit which informs the landscape is more important than the rise of civilization...My relationship to the world is something apart from procreating my own species. Of greater importance is that part of me which will survive in the mountain in a thousand years or a million years.\(^2\)

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

There is a remarkable aesthetic perception in the Indian world, I believe, a sense of beauty, of proportion and design. Perhaps this quality is most apparent in children, where it seems especially precocious. An Indian child, by virtue of his whole experience, hereditary as well as environmental, sees the world in terms of this aesthetic sense. His view of the landscape is sure to be incisive and precisely composed; he is sure to perceive an order in the object he beholds, an arrangement that his native intelligence superimposes upon the world...He sees with both his physical eye and the eye of his mind; he sees what is really there to be seen, including the aesthetic effect of his own observation upon the scene, the shadow of his own imagination. It is the kind of vision that is cultivated in poets and painters and photographers...Perhaps this quality of abstraction, this understanding of order and spatial relationships, proportion and design, is most fully realized in language.\(^3\)
Notes and References


4 __________, Woodard, Ancestral Voice, p.39.


6 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.41.

7 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.3.

8 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.4


10 __________, Eudora Welty, ‘Place in Fiction,’ *South Atlantic Quarterly* 55 (January 1956).


12 __________, The Names.

13 __________, Ancestral Voice, p. 88.

14 __________, Ancestral Voice, p88


16 __________, The Names. Please refer to the Prologue.


24 N. Scott Momaday, *The Bear*, one of his first published poems in the 1960s.


26 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.95.

27 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.95.

28 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.106.

29 __________, *Buteo Regalis*, Gourd Dancer.


31 __________, Ancestral Voice, p.185.


33 Navajo Night Chant in Native Voice.

34 N. Scott Momaday, Native Voice.

35 __________, The Man, p.162.

36 __________, Ancestral Voice, p. 28.

37 __________, *The Dance* in Gourd Dancer. Also in Viva, 23rd July 1972.

38 __________, Native Voice.

39 __________, Native Voice.

40 __________, Native Voice.

42 ________, The Man, p.168.

43 ________, Native Voice.

44 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.133.


46 ________, Ancestral Voice, pp. 31-32

47 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.32.

48 ________, *The Morality of Indian Hating*, Ramparts 3, No.1 (Summer 1969).

49 ________, *Rainy Mountain Cemetery*, Gourd Dancer; also in The Way.

50 ________, Ancestral Voice, pp. 38-39


53 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.72.

54 ________, The Way, p.67.

55 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.50.

56 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.50.

57 ________, The Way, p. 67.

58 ________, The Way, p.23

59 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.67.

60 ________, *Headwaters*, Gourd Dancer.


64 ________, Prologue to The Way.

65 ________, Ancestral Voice, p.181.


68 ________, A First American.

69 ________, I Am Alive, A First American.

70 ________, Ancestral Voice, pp. 135-136.

71 ________, Ancestral Voice, pp. 126-127.


73 ________, ‘A Garment of Brightness,’ quoted in Ancestral Voice, pp. 151-152.