House Made of Dawn Study Guide

House Made of Dawn by N. Scott Momaday

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

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During the early 1970s America became interested in the plight of Native Americans as the truth about reservation life was exposed and publicized by Native American activists. By chronicling the struggles of a young Native American man named Abel, Momaday was able to explore some of the issues and conflicts that faced the Native American community in the twentieth century. *House Made of Dawn* was a crucial link in teaching the general public about the real lives and beliefs of Native Americans.

Although most critics admire the poetic beauty of his narrative style, Momaday's indirect way of storytelling□weaving together past, present and myth with no apparent order□may prove challenging to some readers who are used to a linear progression of events. Most critics, however, consider this style necessary for understanding Abel and his culture.

Overview

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Publicized by Native American activists, the truth about reservation life and the plight of Native Americans was exposed to America during the early 1970s. In House Made of Dawn, Momaday chronicles the struggles of a young Native American man named Abel, exploring some of the issues and conflicts that faced the Native American community in the twentieth century.

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Author Biography

Momaday was born on the Kiowa Reservation in Lawton, Oklahoma, on February 27, 1934. His father, Alfred Morris, was an artist and teacher; in fact, his artworks are used to illustrate several of Momaday's books, including his history of the Kiowa people. *The Way to Rainy Mountain.* His mother, Mayme Natachee Scott, taught and wrote children's books.

Momaday spent his childhood on a succession of Native American reservations, learning the cultures of the Pueblo Indians. The family eventually settled in Jemez, New Mexico, which is the model for Walatowa in *House Made of Dawn.*

Momaday attended military school in Virginia, and then went to college at the University of New Mexico. After graduation, he taught at the Apache reservation in Jicarilla for a year. He won a poetry scholarship to Stanford, where he studied under famed poet and literary critic Yvor Winters, who became his mentor and greatly influenced his poetic style. In 1963 he received his Ph.D. from Stanford.

House Made of Dawn, his first novel, was published in 1968. Although not commercially successful, it received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1969. After that. Momaday moved to the University of California at Berkley, where he designed a graduate program in Indian Studies. In 1982 he became a professor at the University of Arizona. He has published several books of poetry, short stories, and essays. In addition, Momaday has often displayed his drawings and paintings in galleries throughout the country. He is an active member of the Gourd Dance Society, where he has succeeded his grandfather, Mammedaty.

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Plot Summary

Prologue

The very first section of *House Made of Dawn* creates the mood for the story. Set in a canyon at sunrise, the protagonist of the novel, Abel, is introduced. Thematic issues that will appear throughout the book are also presented: Abel's isolation and his struggle to communicate, as well as the communion of man and nature. In addition, it introduces the image of Abel running, which will also be the final image in the novel.

The Longhair

In 1945, Abel's grandfather, Francisco, rides his horse-drawn wagon into town and picks up Abel from the bus station. The young man is returning from his service in the army during World War II. So drunk that he does not recognize his own grandfather, Abel stumbles off the bus and into his grandfather's wagon.

Waking the next day at Francisco's house, he recalls frightening images from his early life on the Native American reservation: the mournful sound of the wind blowing over a hole in the earth: the sight of a snake carried up into the sky by an eagle and then dropped, wriggling in its fall to the hard ground. He then reflects on his wartime experiences.

The story shifts to Father Olguin, the Catholic missionary assigned to the reservation at Walatowa. He is visited by Angela St. John, a pregnant white woman from Los Angeles. Mrs. St. John is pregnant and has come to bathe in the local mineral baths to soothe the soreness in her back. She asks Father Olguin to recommend a local person looking for work who can chop wood for her. A few days later, Abel comes to her house. He chops the wood, but does not talk to her.

At the feast of Santiago. Abel participates in a competition that is based on a folk story about Santiago, who founded the town by sacrificing a rooster. The townspeople believe that the discarded feathers and blood of the rooster produced plants and animals from the ground. At the feast, contestants ride horses toward a rooster that is buried up to its neck in the ground, trying to reach down and pull it out. Abel does poorly at the competition. The winner is an albino on a black horse, who takes the rooster over to Abel and beats him with it.

A few days later, Abel walks to Angela St. John's house. She invites him in, gives him coffee, and asks if he would like to make love to her. He accepts, and the two become lovers. Father Olguin comes to talk to her about her sin a few days later, but she does not regret her actions.

After a festival in town, Abel sits in a bar and has a few drinks with the albino. They leave together, and, while walking up the street, the man puts his arm out to Abel. Abel pulls out his knife and stabs the man, killing him.

The Priest of the Sun

Seven years later, the story shifts to Los Angeles. Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, the pastor of the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission and the Priest of the Sun, preaches to Native Americans in the city. Tosamah is a Kiowa, and he recalls stones told him by his grandmother, who had been present for the last of the Kiowa tribe's sun dances in 1887. He passes these Indian stories along to those in his congregation, many of whom are from other native groups.

Abel has served his jail time for the murder of the albino. He is trying to start a new life in Los Angeles at the urging of the Indian Relocation Service. Abel has a close friend, Benally, who is an Indian also transplanted from the reservation to the city; Abel also has a girlfriend named Milly, who is the social worker assigned to his case. He struggles to stay out of trouble and survive in a white man's world.

The Night Chanter

Benally clarifies some of the details of Abel's life in Los Angeles. He is familiar with many of the members in the Native American community and mentions their names in the process of telling the story. He remembers that after his release from prison, Abel was brought to the factory where Benally worked. Feeling sorry for him, Benally gave him a place to live and went out to bars and to the beach with him.

One night they are stopped by Martinez, a local police officer. When Abel does not respond appropriately, Martinez hits his hands with his nightstick. His bones are not broken, but Abel's pride is□soon he stops going to work, and spends his days drinking and wandering the streets:

He went downhill pretty fast after that Sometimes he was here when I came in from work, and sometimes he wasn't. He was drunk about half the time, and I couldn't keep up with him ... Pretty soon I wouldn't give him any more, but you know what he did? He started asking Milly for money.

He loses a succession of jobs, and eventually is attacked and beaten up on the street.

Benally contacts Angela St. John. She visits Abel in the hospital and tells him that she has told Indian stories to her son Peter about a man born of a bear and a maiden. Benally puts Abel on a bus back to the reservation.

The Dawn Runner

When he returns to the reservation, Abel discovers that his grandfather is dying. Abel listens to him murmuring in his delirium for six days about a bear hunt from his youth. The old man dies on the seventh morning.

Abel wakes Father Olguin before dawn and makes arrangements for the old man's funeral service. He takes off down the road south of town. When he spots the figures of men running, he strips off his shirt and runs after them.

Chapter 1, The Longhair

Chapter 1, The Longhair Summary

July 20

N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, winner of the 1969 Pulitzer Prize, is the story of Abel, an American Indian, who arrives home after the war to find himself trapped between his traditional upbringing and industrial America.

The novel opens as an old man named Francisco drives his team of roan mares along the river in a canyon. He comes to a stop, steps down and examines a trap he had set some time before. A sparrow had been caught in the small snare trap he had fashioned from one of the reeds. Disappointed, he unties it, lets its dead body float downstream, and then resets the trap.

Back on the wagon road to San Ysidro, Francisco thinks back to the time when, as a young man, he had participated in the race for good hunting and harvests. He had beaten Mariano, widely regarded as the best long-race runner in the region. He crosses the river below the bridge at San Ysidro and comes eventually to a trading post. Just after one o' clock, a bus appears and stops. Abel, the old man's grandson, disembarks, clearly drunk. He collapses against his grandfather, and does not even recognize him. Francisco helps him to the wagon and takes him home.

July 21

Having slept through the day and night, Abel wakes at dawn and makes his way through the town to the top of the nearby hill. There, staring at the silent valley below he remembers a time when, at the age of five, he had accompanied his brother Vidal, their grandfather and the others to the cacique's field. Riding on horseback with Vidal, they had ventured into a narrow box canyon he had never seen before. He became scared and cried. After that, they returned to the others and watched their grandfather dig with a hoe. His mother had come with Francisco in the wagon and later, when the work was finished, they ate the food she had made – oven bread, rabbit stew, cornmeal cakes filled with jam, and coffee. They ate in groups, the cacique and governor and assorted officials sitting nearest the trees in the place of honor.

Abel had not known his father, he was an outsider though and this made him, Vidal and their mother 'foreign.' Francisco looked after the family but Abel could see even then that he was getting old and lame. His mother, he knew, was going to die, though he had often been told it was nothing. He had ridden back in the wagon with her and his grandfather. She died in October.

He remembers an old woman whom they called Nicolás *teah-whau.* She was a Bahkyush woman and, it was said, a witch. She would beg for whiskey at the side of the road and the first time Abel had seen her she was drunk and screamed an unintelligible

curse at him as she appeared out of a cornfield near which he had herded his sheep. He ran away and at the bank of a nearby arroyo, caught his breath. There, he heard the sound of the wind and it filled in him a particular kind of dread that remained with him throughout his days.

He is older, but still a child, in his next memory. He had waited all afternoon outside the house. He heard the old men pray and when his grandfather called him, he went into the room and stood beside his brother's bed. Vidal was dead.

The tide of memories continues: Abel is seventeen and Francisco had nudged him awake before daybreak in order to go hunting. The first animal that crosses his path is a mule doe that he shoots and kills.

Next memory: It was January 1, 1937 and before dawn, in the bitter cold, he set out with Francisco. He had run part of the way beside the horses, flailing his arms and scaring them to a trot. At Sia, they waited for dawn at the house of Juliano Medina. Then, they went to the Middle where some old people – Navajos and Domingos in blankets – had already gathered and begun to sing. There was plenty of excitement and the men fired their rifles into the air and shouted. Later, after some wine, he had slept with one of Medina's daughters on a dune by the river. She had not been enough for him and wanted her again, but she dressed and ran away and laughed at him because he was too drunk to catch her.

Another time, Abel had been walking since daybreak, and by the middle of the morning had come to the rim of the Valle Grande, a great volcanic crater that lay high up on the western slope of the range. The sight always filled him with awe. It is here that he sees two golden eagles in their mating flight. The female carried a rattlesnake in her claws. She let it go and the male swooped down, hitting the snake in the head and cracking its body like a whip. He too, let it go, but the female did not chase it, and instead simply soared away. The male followed and Abel watched until both were out of sight.

The Eagle Watchers Society was an important society and stood apart from the others because it was the principal ceremonial organization of the Bahkyush; a small group of wretched immigrants, who, wracked by disease and persecution at the hands of buffalo hunters and thieves, had come to the town before the middle of the last century. The society was the sixth to go into the kiva at the summer and autumn rain retreats, and after explaining what he had seen to the chief, Patiestewa, it was decided Abel should join them.

The retreat lasted for days, during which time they prayed and made offerings at the holy places they came to. In the lower meadows of the basin of the Valle Grande, the group set about capturing bait: Forming a large circle, they moved slowly inwards, clapping their hands and calling out and picking off the rabbits (using the curved clubs the men carried with them) as they tried to break way. Abel had hit and stunned a jackrabbit buck.

After binding the bait together and placing it in a sack, he gathered grass and cut a number of evergreen boughs. Thus equipped, he waved to the others and set off toward the cliffs alone. Eventually, he came to the eagle-hunt house; a small tower of stone built around a pit, hollow and open at the top. He placed a prayer offering in the nearby shrine and then got into the house. With the boughs, he fashioned a latticework of beams, across which he splayed the grass and laid the rabbits.

Abel began to sing and call out and shortly thereafter, the pair of eagles appeared. The male swooped first to flush the rabbits, and the female followed. When she had touched down upon the trap, Abel pulled her downwards with all his strength, capturing her. At dusk, he rejoined the party. San Juanito had also caught an eagle but his was old and poor by comparison; they fixed a prayer plume to its leg and set it free. That night, while the others ate, Abel went to look at the bird, bound and helpless in the sack. The sight filled him with shame and disgust. He reached in and suffocated the bird.

His final memory before leaving was that of his grandfather crying. Francisco had not, had not wanted to, understood Abel's decision and he was away in the fields when Abel left on the bus. Abel had never been in a motor vehicle before and sat by the window. He remembered, too late, to look back in the direction of the fields.

A war memory: Abel awoke on the side of a wooded hill. He could not be sure how long he had slept. Hours? Days? All around him were strewn the bodies and limbs of men. Then, the sound of an approaching machine, a tank, reaches his ears. It bears down on him, but at the last moment passes him by, unaware of his presence.

Back in the present, Abel watches as a car approaches from the north. It makes its way through the town and towards the mission. He had not eaten for two days. He stands up and after an interminable wait makes his way down the hill.

For Father Olguin, the day had begun as usual in the mission. It is a feast of martyrs and he dresses in the scarlet chasuble while outside the people shuffle in the pews. Francisco kneels before the glass panel that opened onto the chapel altar and in the corner, the small boy, Bonifacío, is putting on a faded red cassock. At the Father's behest, he runs out to light the candles. Hearing the car come to a stop, Father Olguin watches through the window as a dark-haired young woman gets out and walks into the church. He goes out to the altar.

When the service is concluded, she introduces herself to him as Mrs. Martin St. John. She and her husband, a doctor, live in Los Angeles but she has come to the area for a time and is staying at the Benevides house at Los Ojos. She asks the Father for his help in finding someone to cut wood for her.

By now, Abel has returned to his grandfather's house, but Francisco is not there. They have not spoken since Abel's return. Restless, he leaves in the afternoon and walks along the river until eventually coming to the foothills at the base of the red mesa. Here he sits down and for a moment feels content; he is home.

July 24

On Tuesday, Abel comes to the Benevides house to cut the wood for Angela St. John. For this, he is paid three dollars. Angela watches him work and is amazed by how fully he gives himself into it. It becomes clear that she is pregnant. Later in the day, she goes outside and sits upon the stone steps of the porch while watching Abel work. When he is done, she tries to elicit a response, a reaction, *anything*, in him, but he will not be provoked. He says he will return on Friday or Saturday to finish the job and that she can pay him then.

Gathering an armful of wood, she takes it into the house and places it in the fireplace. In the evening, Father Olguin comes to the house to invite her to the feast of Santiago taking place the following day. He wants to linger, but it is clear she does not want to talk and so he leaves. When he is gone, she thinks of Abel and the corn dance she had seen at Conchiti. The people dancing and Abel, it seemed to her, could see beyond everything, but Abel, she was sure, could not see into her impenetrable world and because of this she could stand up to him.

July 25

The legend of Santiago according to Father Olguin:

Disguised as a peon, Santiago rode southward into Mexico. There, he stopped at the house of an old, impoverished couple who, in spite of their poverty, were kind and gracious. They gave him cold water and killed the only rooster they had and cooked it for him. That night, they gave him their bed and slept on the cold ground and when morning came, he told them who he was, gave them his blessing and continued on his way.

After riding for many days, he came to the royal city where the king had ordered celebrations and dangerous gladiatorial games to be played. These he entered and won, and as his prize was allowed to choose and marry one of the king's daughters. The king was not pleased that his daughter be married to a lowly peon and so ordered the company of guards who were to escort Santiago safely home, to kill him once they were outside the city gates.

By a miracle, Santiago had brought forth from his mouth the rooster, alive, who warned him of the king's plan and gave him a spur from its right leg. When they attacked, Santiago slew the soldiers with a magic sword. At the end of the journey, Santiago sacrificed his horse and from its blood issued a great herd of horses, enough for the Pueblo people. Therefore, he also tore apart the rooster with his bare hands and from its blood and feathers rose cultivated plants and domestic animals for the Pueblo people.

It is late afternoon, two or three hours before sundown, when Father Olguin accompanies Angela through town as they walk towards the Middle. The Middle is an ancient place, roughly a hundred yards long and forty wide. In the center, equidistant from all the walls is a freshly dug hole, eight inches in diameter. The people of the town had begun to gather along the walls of the houses, while others stood on the rooftops

that were, in places, two and three stories high. There, too, a drummer stood, slowly beating his drum. Presently, the riders come into the Middle in groups of three and four. Abel is among them.

When they had all assembled, a town official brought out and buried in the hole up to its neck, a large rooster. Then, one at a time, the riders would bear down on the rooster and try to snatch it up. Many of the riders fell, and similarly, Abel's showing was poor. The last of the riders, a white man, pulled the rooster from the ground with consummate ease. Angela is thrilled at the sight, but when he draws near, she can see that he is an albino.

With the rooster in hand, he rides in amongst the other riders, who wait; wary of whom he will choose. Suddenly, he flails and strikes Abel with the rooster, again and again. He continues until the bird is dead; its neck broken, the flesh torn open and its blood and entrails splashed about.

That night, at a few minutes past eleven, and after having warmed a pot of coffee, Father Olguin reads the journal he had found in the parish records shortly after his arrival. The journal, written by Fray Nicolás and dated from late November 1874, speaks of, among other things, the death of a woman called Tomacita Fragua. He also speaks of an albino child, baptized as Juan Reyes, born to Manuelita and Diego Fragua.

In the journal, Father Olguin finds, tucked neatly between the pages, an accompanying letter he had read once or twice before. He notices, for the first time, how the writing had changed. Here, in the letter, the writing seems hurried, scribbled. In it, Nicolás accuses Francisco of being evil and of wanting to do him harm. It would seem that Nicolás had been, at the time, slowly losing his sanity.

July 28

Abel is walking into the canyon, thinking all the while about how his return to town has been a failure. Since his arrival, he had tried to speak to his grandfather, "had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue," but he has thus far been unable to. Still, as makes his way to the Benevides house, he observes, *feels*, the land around him and feels almost at peace.

Angela had sat downstairs and waited for him to come, but when he arrives, she does not go outside immediately, and instead simply listens to him chopping the wood. Later, she locks the house and goes to the bathhouse where she soaks in a tub of steaming mineral water drawn for her by the attendant. After that, the attendant wraps her in light cotton blankets and she dozes.

Returning to the house, she finds Abel sitting on the front stoop, his work completed. He follows her inside and she gives him coffee. She tries to toy with him, but he offers no sign of interest. At last, she asks if he thinks she is beautiful. He says no. She then asks if he would like to make love to her. He says yes. She leads him upstairs and they sleep together.

Meanwhile, Francisco is working in the field of corn, as he had been most of the day, when he thinks he hears something, though he is not sure what. He is too old to be afraid, he thinks, and blesses the corn before shuffling out of the cornfield. All the while, a pair of eyes is watching him.

August 1

On this, the first day of August, a caravan of Dîné passes through the town, having arrived from the south on the old road to San Ysidro. It causes a stir; fewer men are in the fields than usual, women chatter excitedly and the children stand at the fences, cheer, and chide. Later that day, Father Olguin thinks of Angela, which he could now do without the modicum of excitement she had at first incited within him. He imagines that she envies him and this pleases him. By the afternoon, a strange exuberance had taken hold of him as he drives out of the town into the canyon toward the Benevides house.

She is slightly startled to see him, but he does not notice this. He comes inside and makes himself comfortable. He speaks officiously of the town, of damnation and deliverance and she listens politely, more intent on listening to the rain and thunder than to him. Soon however, he falls silent and notices her behind him. Clearly, she has not really been listening. She apologizes for having offended him, laughing. He is mortified. Afterward, driving back through the town he is repulsed by the people and the children he sees. Presently, he slams the vehicles to a stop, having almost crashed into a wagon with an infant inside.

Alone in the house, Angela revels in the thunderstorm. It seems to wash away all her fears.

Meanwhile, adorned in his leggings and white ceremonial trousers, Francisco shuffles his way to the Middle where the feast had already begun. The smells and odors of the day are pleasant, and he wishes for one of the pale blue stones the Dîné possess; if he had had anything of value he would have liked to barter for such a stone. In the Middle, a shrine for Porcingula, Our Lady of the Angels, had been raised at the center of the north side, adjacent to the kiva, which was a small green enclosure, its framework fashioned from wood and wire and covered with boughs of cedar and pine. He thinks of the events that will take place here the next day.

Francisco climbs up the ladder and raises himself up and over the wall of the kiva. He, along with the other holy men, emerges at dusk just as the rain begins to fall. They go to the house, from which the little horse came out and began to dance. It looked like the black Arabian of the Moors, and inside the framework over which a spotted hide was stretched taut and smooth, the dancer writhed and moved to the beat of the drum. The medicine men blessed the horse and then the 'bull,' followed by clowns, came into the Middle.

Later that night, at Paco's, Abel and the albino were drinking and talking. A handful of Navajos remained, but they were silent and sullen and one had passed out in his own vomit. Later still, the two men leave and walk out and midway between the river and the

road, the albino makes as if to embrace Abel, who draws a knife and stabs him. The albino draws Abel closer, who then thrusts with the knife again, this time into the groin and then, in his terrified state, slashes at the albino's arms. Abel then kneels beside him, removed the albino's little black glasses and stays for a long time looking down at him.

August 2

For the first time in his life, Francisco is away from the dance. He is working in the cornfields and can hear the distant sound of the drums and the people singing; and in his mind's eye could see how they danced. Twice (the first time while riding out to the fields in the wagon), he says 'Abelito.' Having only just gotten Abel back, Francisco is left alone once more.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The account of Abel's life is not a linear retelling but is instead revealed through a fragmented series of memories and accounts told by Abel himself and those people around him. Throughout the book, he oscillates between two worlds – that of his rural homeland and urban Los Angeles – and this theme of cultural dichotomy resonates throughout the book. This clash of cultures is, perhaps, the single most important theme present in *House Made of Dawn*.

When he returns from the war, Abel is an outcast of not only American culture, but of his own as well. He appears to have no place in society, unable as he is to adapt to his new life or resume his old one. He cannot assimilate once more into life at Walatowa – "His return to the town had been a failure." – and similarly finds himself unable, or perhaps partly unwilling, to accustom himself to life in the city, where things simply seem to move too fast for him to properly grasp them.

Early in this chapter, Abel reveals that his father was not of the local tribe and this had made Abel and his family 'foreign' in the community. Through this, we see that Abel has never really belonged and it foreshadows the fact that later in life he will be an outcast in both his town and in Los Angeles.

Two other primary themes in the novel are of rebirth (that is, new beginnings) and of the Indian belief in the beauty and sacredness of nature. Because of this, Nature plays a vital role in the story; it features heavily in the lives of its characters and throughout, Momaday illustrates the majesty of it all with considerable exposition to the description of the land and its creatures. The rain and the moon are two important symbols in the book.

Francisco, steeped as he is in the old ways, holds a spiritual connection with the land and because he is so in tune with it seems to possess a preternatural sense of things to come. While working in the cornfield for instance, he feels as though he is being watched, though this is merely an unsettling feeling that takes hold of him, as if he can sense that something bad is going to happen. In other words, he senses Abel's killing of the albino.

Even Abel, whose generation has had to endure hardships of a different ilk to those of his grandfather's generation, still possesses the old ways in him. It is, after all, because he believes the albino capable of turning into a snake, that he kills him.

Chapter 2, The Priest of the Sun

Chapter 2, The Priest of the Sun Summary

January 26

The Priest of the Sun, Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, gives a sermon in the basement of a two-story red-brick building in Los Angeles in which he lived with his disciple, Cruz. The A.A. Kaul Office Supply Company used the second floor as a storage facility. His sermon is about the Word and Truth and during it, he recalls an old Kiowa woman, his grandmother, who was illiterate but who had a great appreciation for language and stories. She had told him a story about a time when the Kiowas were hungry and a man set off in search of food. After four days, he came across a great canyon where he encountered a creature with the feet of a deer and its body covered in feathers. It asked what the man wanted and when he replied that the Kiowas were hungry, the creature told the man to take it with him. From that day, Tai-me, their sun dance doll, belonged to the Kiowas.

The Priest of the Sun was conducting a prayer meeting, and he, Cristóbal Cruz, Henry Yellowbull, Napoleon Kills-in-the-Timber and Ben Benally joined him in the circle where they smoked and ate peyote buttons.

Abel meanwhile, is lying prostrate in a shallow ditch. He is cold and in pain, his hands and fingers broken. Nearby is a fenced off yard with tractors and trailers and a warehouse in it. His mind wanders aimlessly and he thinks of his friend Benally and the woman, Milly, with whom he had had a relationship. Milly's father had worked the land for years with little success, but at age seventeen had given her all the money he had saved for her so that she could leave the farm. She came to Los Angeles where she worked as a waitress and studied. In her final year, she met Matt whom she married and they had a little girl, Carrie. Matt left and never came back and when she was four years old, Carrie died in hospital. Milly is a social worker.

The pain wracks his entire body and he remembers the time he had fallen from a horse and hurt his back and Francisco had been unable to heal him. Fat Josie had managed to fix it simply by picking him up from behind (he was almost a grown man by then) and shaking him gently. He remembered, too, how sometimes after his mother had died he would go to Fat Josie who would speak kindly to him and give him sweets.

He thinks also of the trial that had taken place six years before. Abel had killed the albino because, he said, Father Olguin had testified that he believed 'this man was moved to do what he did by an act of the imagination so compelling as to be inconceivable to us.' To Abel however, it was not a difficult thing. He had killed the albino and would have done so again if he had the chance. Bowker, a man Abel had served with during the war, was also there. Bowker recounts the incident when Abel had almost been run over by the tank. When it had passed by Abel, Bowker and Corporal Rate,

who were hiding nearby saw him stand up, shout and give the finger to the tank and soldiers who subsequently turned and shot at him before he took off through the trees. Abel is found guilty and sent to prison, ostensibly for six years.

When next he wakes, Abel is coughing and there is blood in his mouth. He hears something and with his ear to the ground, thinks that there are men running toward him and so leaves the road and hides in the nearby brush.

Abel dreams of the time he had gone down to the river with Vidal, who was armed with a shotgun, to shoot gray-geese. Abel had thought them beautiful in flight against the moon. Eventually, Abel manages to pull himself to his feet and makes his way, staying in the shadows, through the city. At one point he had rolled himself into the flatbed of a truck, but had after a while gotten out and continued on foot.

January 27

Tosamah speaks again of his grandmother, Aho. She had died in the spring and he returned to Rainy Mountain in July to visit her grave. She lived in a house near the place where Rainy Mountain Creek runs into the Washita River. So too, while he thinks of her, he remembers the history of the Kiowa; for more than a hundred years they had, in alliance with the Comanches, ruled the Southern Plains, but not long after they surrendered to the US Cavalry. Tosamah's grandmother was born eight or ten years after their surrender. To reach her grave, Tosamah walked along the path of the Yellowstone before descending eastward into the meadows and then the plain; her grave lay at the base of the Rainy Mountain.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Although it is unclear what has happened (nor are the exact events ever revealed), Abel is badly beaten and lying, near death, in a ditch. There is no succinct explanation of what has happened in the six intervening years, but since the killing of the albino, it is clear that Abel's life has not taken a turn for the better. Through a series of memories, we learn of Ben and Milly, Abel's friend and lover, respectively, and of the trial that took place after the murder.

Through Tosamah, Momaday once again illustrates Indian tradition and beliefs. Words and language are important and despite the fact that Tosamah's grandmother was illiterate, her stories were, in typical Indian tradition, passed down by words alone. Moreover, it seems, given his position as priest and orator, he has inherited her gift of storytelling. So here, too, we come across the theme of rebirth; the stories and legends of his forebears live on in Tosamah.

Because many of their stories had never been written down, words were of utmost importance to the Indians, as it was through words alone that their history and legends could be maintained from one generation to the next. Here is yet another disparity in culture between the white man and the Indians. Words mean more to the Indians than to the white man because it is only through words that their past survives. The

importance and power of words are again highlighted during Abel's trial when he feels that 'word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, *their* language.'

In all of Abel's fragmented recollection, the moon constantly appears, and becomes a symbol of grief and sadness. It is by the light of the moon that the fishes hurl themselves onto the land and by the light of the moon that Abel and Vidal hunt and kill geese.

Chapter 3, The Night Chanter

Chapter 3, The Night Chanter Summary

February 20

Ben gives Abel his only coat and accompanies him to the bus station. Abel is in bad shape; his hands are bandaged, his nose broken and there is swelling around his eyes. On the way home, Ben stops at the Silver Dollar, where he asks Manygoats for the money that he owes him. He gives Ben three dollars and Ben buys a bottle of wine and goes home.

At home, he thinks of Milly and supposes that now that Abel is gone she will not come around any more. She had liked Abel, and Ben wished that she were there now. He thinks of the night before, when he, Abel, Tosamah and Cruz had gone up to the hill and gotten drunk. There were drums and everyone there sang and some danced, but not Abel and Ben. They had walked off a little way from the others and talked amongst themselves. Abel was going home to the reservation and in a year or two, they would meet up and get drunk one last time together. They were going to go out into the hills on horseback and watch the sunrise. It was a plan they had. Ben had made it all up when Abel was still in hospital, but Abel had begun to believe in it and then Ben did too. Now they sat up on the hill and Ben sang softly the House Made of Dawn.

Ben remembers the first time he met Abel. Abel and his Relocation officer were already in the foreman's office when Ben was called into his office one morning. Abel was to work opposite Ben as a stapler on the line. Abel barely said a word all day but they hung out together and Ben tried to share his lunch with Abel, but he would not take it. Abel did not have any place to stay yet so Ben invited him to stay in his room, which he did.

They got to be friends and Ben thought that they were somewhat alike; Abel and he, and maybe they were even related somehow. He had been to where Abel was born once and it was similar to the Wide Ruins where he had come from. Everything went fine for Abel for about two months, but his parole officer, and welfare and the Relocation people, Ben noted, would never leave Abel alone. They kept warning him to stay out of trouble and Ben could see that slowly, Abel was getting mixed up; he just could not get used to anything.

There was a time when they were shorthanded at the plant, and he and Abel were working a lot of overtime. After one particular twelve-hour shift, they went over to Tosamah's place, played poker and got drunk. After a while, Tosamah started insulting Abel (not directly, but he kept talking about the reservation and *longhairs*). After a while, Abel flew off the handle and leapt for Tosamah, but he was drunk and stumbled backwards and fell. Everyone laughed and Abel simply gave up. He did not go to work the next day and stayed drunk for two days. When he did finally go back to work, the foreman, Daniels, stood behind him and looked over his shoulder, inspecting his work

and calling him on every mistake, minor or otherwise, he made. By the end of the morning, Abel had had enough, stared at Daniels angrily and walked out.

After that, he spent most of his time drunk. His money ran out and he started borrowing from Ben and Milly. The Relocation people got him a job as a groundskeeper at a school but he showed up drunk a few times and he was fired. Milly found him a night job at a bakery but he did not even show up for that. However, even after all that Ben recalls that they had some good times together. Sometimes, the three of them would take the bus to Santa Monica on Sunday mornings and picnic on the beach. One time had been particularly happy; Abel had been talking about straightening himself out, and Milly believed him and Ben guessed that he believed him too. Abel told them a story about a horse he had on the reservation and how it used to love the water. One day, while riding back from the fields he came upon an old man to whom he gave a lift. Everything went fine until they had to cross the river, when, halfway through it, the horse simply decided to lie down and the old man fell off into the water. He got up and stomped off angrily. On hearing the story Milly laughed so hard that she started to hiccup and eventually they both began to laugh as well.

Ben remembers a girl that laughed like that; he had met her at Cornfields at a squaw dance. After returning home from school (which was ostensibly far away) for the first time, Frazer at the Wide Ruins trading post had told him about the dance and Ben had made up a story about a beautiful ketoh his uncle was going to give him and thereby managed to talk Frazer into letting him use the black horse. Ben had said he would ride to Cornfields to try to get the ketoh in order to trade for the horse. There was no ketoh, but Ben had gotten to borrow a beautiful horse for the day and he was happy. He rode out to Sam Charley's place and then the two of them went to Cornfields together where he met the girl. Her name was Pony.

Ben thinks of the night they had come back from Henry's place. It was late when they finally set off for home and while walking down the street, they were confronted by Martinez, a bad cop whom the people called *culebra*. Armed with a stick, he ushered them into a nearby alley and mugged them. Ben gave him all the money he had on him but Abel had none and so Martinez told him to hold out his hands and then struck them with the stick. Abel did not make a sound, but he doubled up with pain against the wall and the next day his hands were swollen and there were big ugly marks above his knuckles.

Things, Ben felt, were different after that.

Ben would sometimes have to take the truck out on delivery and one day, when there was not a big hurry, he picked up Abel before making the delivery. After unloading the truck, Ben climbed back into the cab and made ready to leave, but Abel made him wait before driving off in order to show him a white woman coming out of one of the stores. Abel told Ben that she liked him and that she was, at a time, going to help him but that he had then got into trouble. Ben recalls that he saw her again at the hospital.

Old Carlozini lived downstairs from Ben and Abel. She lived alone and one time when they were going out, she was sitting on the stairs and the door to her room was wide open; which it almost never was. The room smelled. As they walked past her, she spoke to them (the last time she ever said anything to them), telling them that Vincenzo was not well. Vincenzo was a small animal, a guinea pig Ben thought, that she kept in a small cardboard box and he was more than unwell, he was dead. It made Ben sad to see her like that, old and lonely and neither he nor Abel knew what to say. Then Abel told her that it was dead. She seemed angry at first, but then nodded and went quiet. Ben asked if they should take Vincenzo to the alley but she remained quiet and so they left.

After a time, Abel had stopped looking for a job altogether. He also became a mean drunk, hated everyone and he would not let anyone help him. He and Ben got into a fight once: Abel was drunk and had thrown up over himself and just sat in their room saying the worst thing he could think of, over and over again. Ben got mad (and a little scared) and told him to get out, but a little while later, after he had cooled off, he began to worry about Abel. For three days, Abel stayed away. Ben checked Henry's place and other hangouts but could not find Abel. Then, three nights later Ben heard something outside his room and found Abel lying at the base of the stairs. Old Carlozini's door was open just a crack and she was staring at him. He was broken, torn, and covered in blood; his nose was broken, his mouth raw and bleeding, his eyes swollen shut and his hands were smashed.

Afraid to move him, Ben covered him with a blanket and called an ambulance. Ben waited in the hospital throughout the night, called in sick the next day and late that afternoon finally got to see Abel, who the doctors said was going to be okay. That night he called the white woman and two days later, she came to the hospital. She talked to Abel and told him she was sorry he was sick and that she had thought about him a lot. She had wanted to bring her son, Peter, she said, but he was busy and could not come. Peter always asked her about the Indians, she told Abel, and she used to tell him a story about a young Indian brave born of a bear and a maiden and that she always though of Abel when she told it.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, through Ben, the events of Abel's life in the city are related. It begins, however, not with Abel's arrival in the city, but his departure; having recovered sufficiently to be able to return home to Walatowa. This, of course, is yet another indication that things did not go well for Abel in the city. It is the culmination of a downward spiral of depression and degradation, but not an unexpected one. On numerous occasions, Ben reveals that he often felt that Abel would simply not fit in.

Ben is portrayed as a caring, almost elder brother-esque, figure to Abel. He befriends Abel almost immediately and cares for and worries about Abel's well-being. Similarly, the two women in his life, Angela and Milly, appear to care for him, the latter especially

so. Yet, in spite of this love and friendship, Abel is never quite able to escape his fears and sense of isolation.

Old Carlozini epitomizes what the city is capable of doing to a person, and is in a way the embodiment of the loneliness felt by Abel. She lives in filth, appears to have no friends (her only friend being Vincenzo, the guinea pig), and has essentially been discarded, cast-off from society.

Two of the defining moments of Abel's time in the city are his humiliation at Tosamah's place and the night himself and Ben are mugged by Martinez. After each of these events, Abel withdraws deeper into himself, distancing himself from the world around him and numbing the pain and fear and anguish with alcohol. Before, the alcohol had simply been a way of life and he and Ben, when they got drunk together, would laugh and be happy. Afterwards, Abel simply became increasingly sullen and the drink only made him meaner.

In this chapter, the different values of the people in the city and in the rural community are contrasted. The pace of life is much faster in the city, with the emphasis on money and possessions, while in the rural areas, it is the community, festivals, and religion that are the determining factors in the peoples' lives.

Chapter 4, The Dawn Runner

Chapter 4, The Dawn Runner Summary

February 27

Winter had come upon the land and Father Olguin was at home in the rectory, alone and busy. Abel sat in his grandfather's house as he had done every day since his return. On the first and second days after his arrival, he had gone out and got drunk. He had wanted to go on the third, but it was cold and he was in pain and he had no money. He could no longer understand the old man's random words; Francisco was dying. He complained of the cold even though there was a fire and he lay under three blankets and Abel's gray coat. Abel dipped a cloth in water and pressed it to his grandfather's mouth and forehead. It was growing late and Abel dozed.

When they were old enough, Francisco took his grandsons out to the old Campo Santo at first light, told them, slowly and carefully, of the many positions of the sun and explained how to live their lives according to it. How, by its position, they would know when to plant corn, when the rooster race would be held, and when all the other festivals and events of their lives were to occur.

Before that, as a young man, Francisco rode out on a buckskin colt, leading the hunting horse. He came across many tracks of animals and most importantly, those of a half-grown bear. One night he made camp and awoke to find a pack of animals, ostensibly coyotes, sitting around him just outside the light of the fire. The next morning he followed the track once more and finally came upon the bear, which he shot and killed. With his pouch of pollen, he made yellow streaks above the bear's eyes then disemboweled the bear and ate its liver. Returning to his horses, he smeared some of the bear's liver on the colt's muzzle; they had both come of age now. He returned to the town, the bear carried by the hunting horse, and the people greeted him with jubilation.

In his younger days, he had had a relationship with a beautiful young girl, the child of a witch, who bore his child. It was stillborn though and the sight of it made him afraid and she saw it and just like that, their relationship was over. She left.

There was a time when Abel was still very young that Francisco took him out across the Arroyo Bajo to the edge of a red rock that looked out over the plain. Here, Francisco told Abel, was where the race of the dead was held.

February 28

When Abel woke, his grandfather was dead. He put water on Francisco's hair, then fashioned it in a queue and wound it around a yarn. He dressed the body in bright ceremonial colors and placed the pouches of pollen and meal, the sacred feathers and the ledger book and ears of colored corn at his grandfather's side. He wrapped the body

in a blanket and then rode out to the mission, woke Father Olguin and told him his grandfather was dead.

Abel did not return to his grandfather's house. At the last house in town, he removed his shirt and rubbed his arms and chest with ashes, then walked quickly away along the snow-covered road. He came among the other runners and at the first sign of dawn they all set off. He ran with them but his legs buckled and he fell in the snow. He got up and went on running.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The book ends much as it began; only now instead of Francisco thinking about the time he had run in the race, it is Abel who is actually taking part. This again speaks to the cycle of death and rebirth that is a significant theme in the novel. Abel, as the last surviving member of his family, has returned, at least in part, to the old ways and perhaps in doing so will finally be able to escape the problems that have plagued him in recent years.

The tone is one of hope, for the future and for the fact that perhaps Abel will finally escape his feeling of isolation, embrace the old traditions and through them find for himself a place in the community.

Rain is an important symbol in the book. It is raining when Abel kills the albino and it is raining the day Abel leaves the city and later, alone in his room, Ben thinks how 'everything is bright and clean' after the rain, as though it is a symbolic cleansing of the city and everything in it. Just as in the second chapter, it feels to Angela that the rain washes away all her fears.

Characters

Abel

The protagonist of the story, Abel is a Native American war veteran who struggles to find his place in the world. Some critics have interpreted Abel's behavior as being caused by the strain of trying to balance the expectations of white culture with Indian culture. Others assert that the novel's flashbacks indicate that Abel was estranged and uncommunicative even before he left the reservation for the army.

The story begins when Abel returns to the Walatowa reservation on a bus, so drunk that he can hardly stand or recognize where he is. Shortly after his return, Abel is hired by Angela St. John to chop wood. The two quickly start an affair. After being humiliated in a festival competition, Abel drinks in a bar with his chief rival, the albino. As they leave the bar, the albino takes a step toward him and Abel stabs him. Tosamah later explains that Abel testified in court that he thought the albino was turning into a snake.

After spending seven years in jail for the murder, Abel moves to Los Angles. He takes a job at a factory and meets Benally, who becomes his friend. He also becomes romantically involved with Milly, the white social worker assigned to his case Much of the story told in Los Angeles is interspersed with sights of Abel wandering around, severely injured from a beating, with his thumbs broken□the hook does not explicitly say what happened, but an earlier encounter with a brutal police officer named Martinez implies that it was he who inflicted the damage.

In the end, Abel leaves the city and returns to the reservation. A week after his return, Francisco dies. After arranging his funeral, Abel goes running to the point of exhaustion.

The Albino

The albino (also called The White Man) is a mysterious but important person in this story. He is frequently called "the white man." At the feast of Santiago, the albino beats Abel in a competition, humiliating him. A week later, Abel drinks with the albino in a bar. They leave together, and Abel hallucinates that the man is turns into a snake. He takes out his knife and stabs the albino to death.

Ben Benally

Benally is a Native American man and a good friend to Abel. Raised on a reservation, Benally adapts to life in Los Angeles and appreciates the benefits of urban culture. He asks little more of life than to keep his job and to have a room to stay in without any interference. He is sympathetic to the way life is on the reservation, but he also recognized the benefits of assimilation: "You know, you have to change That's the only

way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all."

Francisco

Francisco is Abel's grandfather. A believer in the traditional ways, he is described as a "longhair." The novel opens with Mm trying to capture a sparrow so that he might have its feathers to use for ceremonial purposes. An elderly man, Francisco is mentioned in an old journal, written by Fray Nicholas. He wrote in an 1888 entry, "Listen I told you about Francisco [and] was right to say it He is evil [and] desires to do me some injury [and] this after I befriended him all his life. Preserve this I write to you that you may make him responsible if I die." There is no indication that Francisco had done anything violent to Fray Nicholas.

Francisco recalls taking part in the Winter Race and has a page in his ledger with a drawing of himself running the race and the caption "1889."

In the 1940s, when the novel begins, Francisco is a farmer working on the communal land owned by the reservation. Francisco was instrumental in raising Abel, and has been his only relative since his mother died when he was five. As such, he holds an important place in Abel's life and acts as a role model for the confused young man.

Martinez

Martinez is the brutal, sadistic police officer who ambushes Abel and Benally. Martinez accosts them in an alley when the two men are drunk, attempting to intimidate them. When Abel does not cower before him, Martinez cracks his knuckles with his nightstick. It is that senseless and brutal act that alienates Abel from white civilization Benally also asserts that Martinez would stop in at the bar sometimes to pick up bribes□sometimes a free bottle of liquor, sometimes money.

Milly

A white social worker, Milly becomes Abel's girlfriend. Eventually, he drives her away with abusive behavior.

Father Olguin

Father Olguin is the Roman Catholic priest at the mission at Walatowa. He is a confused man, torn between the traditions of his religion and those of the society around him. He lives with a physical handicap as a result of a childhood illness.

Because of his unique position, Father Olguin functions as an intermediary between the outside culture and the people of the reservation. When Angela St. John arrives at

Walatowa, she asks Father Olguin to help her hire an Indian worker. On first meeting her, he "regarded his guest discreetly, wondering that her physical presence should suddenly dawn upon him so." As the story progresses, he develops strong feelings for her.

A large part of the book is devoted to the pages that Father Olguin reads out of the diary of Fray Nicholas, a priest who was at the reservation in the 1870s. At the end of the novel, when Abel comes to him at dawn to arrange the funeral of his grandfather, Father Olguin does not hesitate to accept the responsibility, but he is disturbed that he has been waken up so early. He reprimands Abel for waking him, but then has a sudden realization of how unimportant time is to Abel and his people. This leads to a greater understanding of his place in the community and Native American culture in general. "'I can understand,' he said. 'I understand, do you hear?' And he began to shout. 'I understand! Oh, God! / *understand I understand!*'"

Angela St. John

Angela is the white woman who comes to the reservation for health reasons and ends up having an affair with Abel. Although she is pregnant, her husband never visits her at the reservation Seven years after their affair, Abel sees her walk by on the street in California and tells Benally about her. After Abel is beaten and hospitalized, Benally contacts Angela, and she goes to visit him in the hospital. She explains that she has raised her son with an awareness of Indian culture, telling him a story about a bear and a maiden that resembles the story that runs through Francisco's mind as he is dying.

John Big Bluff Tosamah

As pastor of the Los Angeles Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission and Priest of the Sun, Tosamah gives sermons on both Biblical stones and Indian folklore, often mixing the two. Like N. Scott Momaday, he is a Kiowa, and some of the stories he tells of last days of the Kiowa people are repeated in Momaday's history of the Kiowa, *The Way to Rainy Mountain.*

Tosamah has a vast knowledge of Indian folklore and Bible stories, but he was raised in the city; therefore, his knowledge of the Indian ways is mostly theoretical. Tosamah expresses scornful admiration for the ways in which white society has controlled and obliterated the Indian: "They put all of us renegades, us diehards, away sooner or later. They've got the right idea. They put us away before we're born. They're an almighty wise and cautious bunch, these cats, full of discretion." Once, when Tosamah ridicules die Indians who stay with the old traditions, the "longhairs," Abel becomes so angry that he almost starts a fight, driving him to a two-day drinking binge that almost costs him his job.

The White Man

See The Albino

Setting

The Prologue of the story sets the mood for the rest of the novel. At a canyon at sunrise, the protagonist of the novel, Abel, is introduced. Thematic issues that will appear throughout the book are also presented: Abel's isolation and his struggle to communicate, as well as the communion of man and nature. In addition, it introduces the image of Abel running, which will also be the final image in the novel.

The novel begins in 1945, when Abel's grandfather, Francisco, rides his horsedrawn wagon into town to pick up Abel from the bus station. The young man is returning from his service in the army during World War II. So drunk that he does not recognize his own grandfather, Abel stumbles off the bus and into his grandfather's wagon.

Waking the next day at Francisco's house, he recalls frightening images from his early life on the Native American reservation: the mournful sound of the wind blowing over a hole in the earth; the sight of a snake carried up into the sky by an eagle and then dropped, wriggling in its fall to the hard ground. He then reflects on his wartime experiences. Abel's stay in the reservation is marked by tragedy, and he is eventually jailed for killing someone.

The story now shifts, seven years in the future, in Los Angeles. Here, reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, the pastor of the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission and the Priest of the Sun, preaches to Native Americans in the city. Tosamah is a Kiowa, and he recalls stories told him by his grandmother, who had been present for the last of the Kiowa tribe's sun dances in 1887. He passes these Indian stories along to those in his congregation, many of whom are from other native groups. Abel is also living in Los Angeles and, following his imprisonment, is trying to survive in a white man's world.

Although he is familiar with many of the members in the Native American community, he loses a succession of jobs, and eventually is attacked and beaten up on the street. He is eventually put pack on a bus to the reservation, where he discovers that his grandfather is dying. Abel listens to him murmuring in his delirium for six days about a bear hunt from his youth. The old man dies on the seventh morning. Abel wakes Father Olguin before dawn and makes arrangements for the old man's funeral service. He takes off down the road south of town. When he spots the figures of men running, he strips off his shirt and runs after them.

More than most novels, the setting of House Made of Dawn is integral to its purpose. Because the story is about a man torn between his Native American world and the white world, the reservation environment is rendered quite differently from that of Los Angeles. At times, the story goes beyond obvious, rational differences and considers fundamental ways in which people of different settings think differently.

Social Concerns

Despite the novel's initial popular appeal as a "protest novel" against the discrimination and degradation of native Americans, and the psychological ravages of war, the strength of House Made of Dawn lies in its depiction of Abel, a native American, who is being healed by cultural and spiritual means from the pain of these events.

Within this framework, Momaday depicts the power of language upon Abel — the white culture's silencing and the Indian culture's healing. Momaday, like Alex Haley in Roots, depicts the ability of a strong cultural heritage to unite and connect an individual and a people.

His work also is specific to Southwestern Indian cultures. Momaday captures a patchwork of the dying traditions of the Navajo, Jemez Pueblo, and Kiowa. He records Abel's experiences with these fading cultures, not with a sense of loss, but with a sense of discovery. An important part of these cultures is their attitude toward the land. Building an affinity with these scattered roots of the self and the past involves developing a sense of belonging to the land. This is stressed by Momaday's impressive descriptive passages of mesas, canyons, and villages as well as depictions of battlefields and cities.

Social Sensitivity

House Made of Dawn made a powerful impact when it was published because of its treatment of Native American folklore and the values these tales passed on to subsequent generations. In Western culture, readers look for the "moral" of a story, especially one that is told in the context of a religious lesson. In the case of folklore, interpretation for an audience of outsiders is almost impossible, so it is hard to explain the culture that values them. Momaday's writing style reflects this complex method of retelling stories and is reflective of Native American folklore.

World War II resulted in increased contact between Native American populations and people from the mainstream culture.

Although prejudice and discriminatory policies did not disappear overnight, the fact that people from ethnic subcultures were thrown together in barracks in the war led to some softening social boundaries. Many whites met real Indians for the first time, and many Indians met their first whites.

Like Abel in House Made of Dawn, many Native Americans came back to the reservations they had lived on with conflicted views, having been forced to align their own beliefs with American culture. Unfortunately, any progress that was made in human understanding was very quickly overruled by developers, who soon tried to exploit reservation land for their own profit.

After World War II, the resources on Native American reservations became economic assets. Some politicians in the government argued that it was wasteful to allow Indians to keep such valuable property when they were not using it. Support grew for a plan to move Indians off of the reservations, to assimilate them into society. Some Native Americans supported this idea, lured by quick profits to be made from selling the reservations. Yet most recognized this as a blatant attempt by the U.S. government to exploit the Native American population once again.

Techniques

The novel begins and ends with the traditional Jemez Pueblo words that begin and end a ritual chant or a story.

This mythic, timeless quality is not dispelled by Momaday's use of dates and places to mark Abel's linear, seven-year journey. The prologue is actually the end of the story (1952); the narrative then begins in 1945. This disjointed structure circles back on itself, framing the novel which seems to come from Abel's memories.

The novel itself divides into four parts, four being a sacred cultural number. Each part is dominated by a particular character and represents a segment of Abel's journey.

The first section, "The Longhair" (1945), establishes Abel's context and his conflicts. Through interspersed memories readers learn of Abel's childhood alienation from his tribe because of his illegitimacy. The letters which the Catholic priest, Father Olguin, reads and admires illustrate how detached the white world is from nativeAmerican cultural values. The conflict is intensified after Abel loses a ritual game, is humiliated by the winner — a "white man," or albino — and later kills him. Only his grandfather, the longhair, misses him.

The second section, "The Priest of the Sun" (1952), offers Abel alternatives to the reservation. Tosamah's ironic sermons and his numbered list of materials for the peyote ritual parody spiritual leaders but reject the power of land and language. Framing the two sermons, Momaday relates the story of Milly, who has attempted to integrate herself into white society by becoming a state social worker. She is lonely among her white friends and shares painful memories from her reservation life with Abel. Both characters seem to wear masks which hide their true expressions from those around them.

The third section, "The Night Chanter," consists mostly of Benally's stories and memories, interspersed with Abel's pain and his memories after being beaten and left for dead. These scenes show his final conflict with Tosamah, his being beaten by a malicious policeman, and his resolution to return home.

The final section, "The Dawn Runner," connects the two ends of the story to create a circular structure.

Francisco, Abel's dying grandfather, tells stories about his life as a spiritual man and as a Dawn Runner. Both Francisco and Abel are longhairs and Dawn Runners, and Abel understands the strength of being spiritually connected to a place and a way of life.

The narrative's limited omniscient voice moves through current happenings to remembrances, often when Abel is drunk or in pain; the text depicts Abel's consciousness, the perspective of others who tell their experiences and memories in letters (offset from the text), and stories told to Abel (in italics). Yet these voices and memories conceal the lack of actual dialogue, reflecting Abel's painful silence. This

blending of voices, which includes vivid descriptions of the land and oblique character development, requires careful and sensitive reading.

Thematic Overview

Momaday's special concern with language stems from his background as a member of a culture with a strong oral tradition, in which language has the power to create and destroy. Abel's destruction comes about through language: from Tosamah's daunting preaching, to the "legalese" at his trial , which silences him. Abel is unable to communicate his need to be healed, and his silence pervades the novel.

Abel's re-creation also comes through language and ritual. His friend, Benally, teaches him to re-create himself as a native American; "House made of dawn" is the beginning of a Navajo ritual of healing, which encompasses and orders the world. These reminders of his cultural heritage restore Abel, and give him courage to go back to the reservation and become a "longhair" — a participating member of his tribe.

This ordering power of language also embraces Abel's search for the sacred, which Momaday locates in ancient ritual and a bonding to the land. Abel has many guides who lead him through the landscape of the spirit: the paganism and witchery of the albino, the Catholicism of Father Olguin, Tosamah's peyote road, Benally's Navajo chants, and Francisco's death.

Although these guides can show Abel the spiritual paths that he can follow, he must create his own language and his "center" — he alone is ultimately responsible for his healing.

Themes

Prejudice and Tolerance

Strangely, for a novel about Native American suffering in the white world, there is not a lot of overt prejudice on the parts of the characters in *House Made of Dawn.* The most brutal character in the novel, Martinez, says nothing to indicate that his action is racially motivated; he has a Spanish name himself, making him no more a representative of the white culture than Abel. The two white women, Angela and Milly, treat Abel well and respect his heritage.

The only character to really point out racial differences is Tosamah. He sarcastically declares his respect for the whites for the way they have oppressed the Indians This prejudice is mirrored in Tosamah's prejudice against Native Americans that follow traditional beliefs. In talking about "long-hairs," or the people who follow the traditional way and do not adapt to urban life, Tosamah is so negative that he alienates Abel.

Culture Clash

Some critics interpret Momaday's novel as a statement about the difficulty faced by Native Americans as they are forced to assimilate into the outside world. This straggle is reflected in the experiences of the protagonist, Abel, as he returns home after a stint in the army during World War II.

Late in the book, Abel recalls a culture clash between his Native American world and the white world during his time in the military. While under fire and faced with an advancing tank, Abel stood up, whooped, danced, sang, and gave an obscene gesture to the tank. Momaday is not clear about whether this monologue is meant to be testimony in a court marshal (it ends with Abel running off into the trees), but it is clearly not normal behavior under fire.

When he arrives back at Walatowa drunk, it is clear that he has not assimilated the standards of the white culture; yet after a short time, it becomes obvious that he is not comfortable with Native American culture either. While his grandfather, Francisco, remembers trying to instill "the old ways" into Abel, Abel remembers his advice as, "You ought to do this and that." He makes "a poor showing, full of caution and gesture" when he tries at the rooster-grabbing competition during the festival. Later, he kills the competition champion when he sees turning into an animal□the sort of transformation common to Native American stories such as Benally's story about a Bear and a Snake.

After his release from prison, Abel lives in the Native American community in Los Angeles. He attends the services of Tosamah, who is both pastor and Priest of the Sun. While Abel's friend, Ben, is able to mix his native culture with his new white culture, Abel is unable to bring the two elements together in harmony. When his heritage and pride is insulted, he quits work, drops out of society, and spends his days drinking. In the end,

he finds some balance between the two cultures: he is able to memorialize his grandfather's death with both a Christian ceremony and an Indian race at dawn.

Return to Nature

Native American culture is closely associated with elements of nature in the novel. Native American customs are concerned with natural objects: the sparrow feathers Francisco gathers for a prayer plume, and the rooster used in the competition When there is harmony between people and nature, the world is working as it is intended.

Examples of this harmony can be found with the characters in the novel. Francisco, an old farmer, is said to have "an ethnic, planter's love of harvest, and of rain " Abel chops wood m a way that indicates a special understanding of the inanimate object, a relationship that the white woman Angela wonders about. "He gave himself up to it," she thinks, admiring the beauty of his action. Milly, making love to Abel, is described as moving her mouth "like a small animal."

The problem with Abel is that just as he becomes disconnected from his native culture, so too he becomes detached from nature. He recalls having seen an eagle carry a snake off into the sky with mixed emotions: "It was an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning." He remembers an eagle caught in a ceremonial hunt: "The sight of it filled him with shame and disgust."

In the end, Abel returns to the reservation and reestablishes his relationship with nature by running, opening his lungs and his whole being to where he is: "He could see at last without having to think."

Style

Point of View

In this novel, Momaday often shifts from one point of view to another; as a result, it is not always clear whose thoughts are being related, or when, or what they have to do with the overall story. At first it seems that Abel will be the focus of the novel, but soon the point of view shifts to Francisco. Moreover, there is little consistency in the point of view: while it seldom shifts from one person's perspective to another within one scene, it does not follow a pattern of staying with any one point of view for a whole chapter, or even a section.

For example, Father Olguin gains perspective about what the reservation was like in the last century from the diary that he reads that was written by his predecessor. Momaday is able to relate his ideas about the relationship between Native American religion and Christian religion through the sermons of Tosamah. The incidents of Abel's life in Los Angeles are not related through his point of view, but from Benally's perspective.

By shifting point of view frequently and sporadically, it is possible for Momaday to have Abel be the central character in the book without delving deeply into his thoughts and to present the communal point of view that is more characteristic of Native American thought than of the European tradition.

Setting

More than most novels, the setting of *House Made of Dawn* is integral to its purpose. Because the story is about a man torn between his Native American world and the white world, the reservation is rendered quite differently from that of Los Angeles. At times, the story goes beyond obvious, rational differences and considers fundamental ways in which people of the different settings think differently.

Folklore

One reason that *House Made of Dawn* made such a powerful impact when it was published was for its treatment of Native American folklore and the values these tales passed on to subsequent generations. In Western culture, readers look for the "moral" of a story, especially one that is told in the context of a religious lesson. In the case of the folklore, interpretation for an audience of outsiders is almost impossible, so it is hard to explain the culture that values them. On the contrary, the fact that Western myths can be made so accessible is one of the factors that has helped Western culture dominate the globe during the age of colonization.

Historical Context

The Postwar Reservation

As with many other minority groups in America, Native American populations became more connected with the mainstream culture as a result of World War II Prejudice and discriminatory policies did not disappear overnight, but the fact that people from ethnic subcultures were thrown together in barracks in the war led to some softening social boundaries. Many whites met real Indians for the first time, and many Indians met their first whites.

Like Abel in *House Made of Dawn,* many Native Americans came back to the reservations they had lived on with conflicted views, having been forced to align their own beliefs with American culture. Unfortunately, what little progress was made in human understanding was very quickly overruled by developers, who soon tried to exploit reservation land for their own profit.

Historically, the U. S. government dealt with the problem of taking land from indigenous peoples by providing land and services at limited locations: the reservations. From the start, the concept of reservations was divided between two general schools of thought. Some people considered them as sanctuaries, where the Indians could relax, free from persecution. Others, however, viewed them as prisons where Indians were left isolated, cut off from progress, and dependent on government charity.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration, and particularly his Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, determined that it would be best for Native American groups to take control of their own situations. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 included many provisions leading toward this end: it set up reservation schools that ended the practice of shipping Indian children out to boarding schools; created tribal governing organizations that would deal with the federal government and control order; and encouraged economic development.

After World War II, the resources on Native American reservations became economic assets. Some politicians in the government argued that it was wasteful to allow Indians to keep such valuable property when they were not using it. Support grew for a plan to move Indians off of the reservations, to assimilate them into society. Some Native Americans supported this idea, lured by quick profits to be made from selling the reservations.

Yet most recognized this as a blatant attempt by the U.S. government to exploit the Native American population once again.

After Collier resigned in 1945, the Senate pressured his successor, William F. Zimmerman, to devise a plan for moving Indians off of the reservations. In 1947, the Relocation Service Program, with field offices in Los Angeles, Denver, and Salt Lake

City, was established. In 1953, Congress passed HCR 108, a bill that removed all special status for Native Americans. Whereas they had previously been exempt from federal, state, and local taxes, HCR 108 made them liable Reservations became accountable to the jurisdictions of local law enforcement instead of tribal or federal laws, which allowed racial tensions to dominate control issues.

Healthcare facilities on reservations, which had been run by federal agencies, were abruptly turned over to Native American groups. When they were unable to manage, they were shut down, leaving Indians to travel off reservations when they needed medical care. HCR 108, presented as a step toward Indian freedom, has gone down in history as one of the greatest follies in U.S. / Indian relations In 1970 President Richard Nixon pushed Congress to overturn HCR 108.

Indian Activism in the 1960s

As the Civil Rights movement raised America's consciousness about the oppression of African Americans, it also raised awareness about the treatment of other groups. For example, the Indian Reform Movement became a popular cause for many Amencan people. Probably the best known activist group, the American Indian Movement (AIM), formed in Minneapolis in 1968 to protest against police brutality. After that, the group went on to lead several high-profile protests. In 1970 they occupied a portion of the land at the base of the Mount Rushmore Memorial.

At the same time, other Native American groups were drawing attention to the government's neglect of Native American people. One hundred Native Americans took over Alcatraz Island in 1969, offering to buy the former federal prison back from the government for twenty-four dollars in glass beads (the price allegedly paid to Indians for Manhattan Island in 1626).

The most infamous protest was the siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. The site of a famous massacre of three hundred Indian men, women, and children in 1890, members of AIM and the Sioux nation took hostages in a small hilltop church in Wounded Knee, on the Oglala Reservation, in 1973. The siege attracted international press attention. Two Native Americans were killed during the resulting gunfire, and one hundred were arrested; but as a result, the government promised to hold hearings on Indian rights. After one meeting with representatives from the White House, no further government action regarding Native American rights took place.

Critical Overview

House Made of Dawn did not receive much attention from the mainstream press when it was first published. For one thing, Momaday was relatively unknown in literary circles. Another obstacle was the fact that it had been written by a member of a distinct social minority, and reviewers felt uncomfortable addressing its artistry because they did not want their criticism to seem like criticism of Native American culture: as William James Smith asserted in his review in *Commonweal,* "it seems slightly unAmerican to criticize an American Indian's novel."

Other critics found fault with the writing but suggested that the narrative problems might be necessary in order to capture the Native American mindset. Marshall Sprague, in *The New York Times Book Review,* thought that the "haze" that surrounds the telling of the story might be a natural byproduct of rendering "the mysteries of a culture different than our own." When the novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, the novel's literary merit was called into question less often.

John Z. Bennett, writing in *Western American Literature* shortly after the Pulitzer was awarded, expressed his concerns that *House Made of Dawn* would be valued as a social statement rather than for its artistic achievements. Bennett recognized that it used the cliches that are often used in novels about an alienated social group□the "Indian hero's ruinous journeys into the white man's world and apparent redemption" upon returning to the ways of his people; the white woman who comes to accept the tribe; the descriptions of ceremonies; and the wise grandparent representing tradition. Still, Bennett found the book a "remarkable synthesis of poetic mode and profound emotional and intellectual intellect." His concern regarding the overemphasis of the book's cultural aspect were not very far off, as some reviewers ignored the artistic weaknesses and strengths and focused almost entirely on what it could teach the dominant culture about the Native Americans view of life.

In 1972 Marion Willard Hylton maintained that *House Made of Dawn* was "the tragic odyssey of a man forcibly removed from the psychic environment and placed within a culture light-years away from the attitudes, value and goals of his former life. His anguished ordeal, heightened by his encounter with a white woman, endows him at last with courage and wisdom.... " While Hylton's analysis of the book is accurate, it also reflects the emphasis on this as a novel primarily about the victimization of Native Americans.

Since the 1970s, critics have accepted the novel as a part of our literary culture. They concentrate on the overall themes and their relationship with one another For instance, as Martin Schubnell wrote in *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background,* the book can be interpreted as an exploration of both tribal and personal identity.

Howard Meredith has credited the book with beginning "a literary tradition of those prose narratives which previously had circulated almost exclusively within specific tribal contexts." He contends that the time was ripe for these stories to be recorded and

published. "He brings American readers to a new sense of maturity through the use of the traditions of America," Meredith maintained.

Since the publication of *House Made of Dawn,* Momaday's literary reputation has rested on his work as a poet and critic, and he has been praised for his ability to blend Kiowa sensibilities with Western literary methods.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
- Critical Essay #6

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of Creative Writing and Literature at Oakton Community College and College of Lake County in Illinois. Here, he explores ways that Father Olgum can be a useful character for readers who have trouble understanding House Made of Dawn.

The best approach one can take to an unfamiliar text is to burrow into it at any point of access possible, like a termite forcing an attack upon a tree. I will admit that there is much I find perplexing and uninviting about N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn.* At times it seems pointlessly convoluted, while at other parts it seems painfully simplistic. There were some points in my first reading where I wanted to put the book aside, to write it off as a case of weak writing masquerading as a work of substance.

Yet then I see another connection, then another, and the faith rises within me that I *might* make sense of all of this, if only I knew more about the traditions of the Pueblo Indians or if I had studied Spanish nuance. With that faith in mind, I can walk through this story, looking at it from the inside, by inhabiting the character most like me. I am not a Native American. The culture that is not only described but also actually lived out through the book's structure is foreign to me. I cannot pretend to know it, and I can't dismiss it just because it is new.

I can, however, experience it through the eyes of Father Olguin□the man who comes to the reservation just as I have come to Momaday's world through the book, and tries to understand.

Father Olguin actually turns out to be a very useful guide. Though Mexican, his Catholic training has accustomed him to Western thought; as a result, he is as curious about Native American customs as I would be in his position. At the same time, I find that Father Olguin's story provides a parallel version of the book's main story.

Father Olguin is introduced in the same scene as Angela St. John, and it is his connection to the protagonist, Abel, through her that solidifies his position in the story. She appears first, disrupting the natural serenity of the reservation with a car that is noticeable from a great distance.

Father Olguin initially appears as he is dressing for mass. One of the first things we find out about the priest is that he has one bad eye, clouded over with a film and almost closed. In fiction, any abnormality like that *has* to have a symbolic level, especially when it has to do with something as important as sight. Father Olguin has only half of the vision that he should.

Moreover, Angela is staying at Los Ojos, translated as "The Eyes." Father Olguin is aware of her from the time that she walks into his church. Certainly, she would have been a curiosity in that setting. Readers could take his curiosity to mean that he is a man of the reservation□that his way of thinking is not like that of the outside world.

This is clearly not what Angela thinks. She approaches him to act as an intermediary between her and the Native American, as if she assumes that Father Olguin is part of both the white and Indian worlds□in other words, a member of neither. Her assumption is correct: he is certainly separated by language from his young acolyte Bonifacio, addressing him in Spanish, and he is not enough part of the community to quickly come up with the name of someone to chop her wood.

It is this function as a middleman between Indian and white societies that makes Father Olguin such an appropriate stand-in for the reader. Rather than being a part of both societies and thereby providing readers with an entrance into each one, he is actually alienated from each and unable to communicate in either environment. The bad news is that this prevents readers from learning much about either world; the good news is that this alienation mirrors what Abel is going through, and it therefore takes us closer to the soul of the story.

Father Olguin's love for Angela is represented by bees. Bees swarm at the window the first time that her physiological presence "dawns" on him and he considers how her physical features make her "nearly beautiful" Later, after Abel and Angela have made love (although it is doubtful that the priest could have known about it), and after he himself has taken honey from the beehive, he is able to think about her "without the small excitement that she had so easily provoked on him at first." He relishes the thought that she will be envious of his having better things to do than sit around thinking of her□this idea might be effective in suppressing his lust, but it raises three or four other cardinal sins that do not seem to bother him

At least in Father Olguin we can see the struggle to suppress his feelings; moreover, we can understand them better because Momaday has given his feelings an external symbol□the bees. Knowing Father Olguin helps us know Abel, even though the latter keeps his own internal struggles pushed down much more deeply within him.

When Abel is in Los Angeles, Father Olguin is still present- he is represented in the figure of his opposite, The Right Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah. It is as fair to use Tosamah to read Father Olguin as it is to guess that the shape of one side of a cloth will follow the other, so exact are they in their oppositeness.

The distinction goes beyond the obvious fact that one is a Catholic priest in Native American territory and the other a Native American pnest living in the big city. Tosamah has friends, while Father Olguin delegates to his subordinates; Tosamah embraces mysteries while Father Olguin seeks the consolation of solving mysteries; Father Olguin is reticent□like Abel□while Tosamah's speeches ramble. Readers who have trouble perceiving the connection between Father Olguin and Abel must at least concede how unlike Abel Tosamah is.

Both priests are drawn to the distant past, which is something that Abel is trying to forget. For Tosamah, it is the stones that his grandmother shared with him about the last days of the Kiowa tribe in Montana. Father Olguin studies the same period of time in the journals left by his predecessor, Fray Nicolas. Abel's grandfather, Francisco, remembers

these days, and is in fact mentioned in Fray Nicolas' journal, where he is represented as evil and dangerous. Abel could possibly avert tragedy in his own life by listening to what the old man has to say and learning from it, but he doesn't.

Tosamah grew up with stories of the distant past, and so theology comes easy to him. Abel is resistant to the past until the end of the novel. Father Olguin looks to the past to make sense of the present. He steps outside of his role as a pnest and takes up the journal with a cigarette and a cup of coffee in his hand, as if whatever he hopes to find is beyond the consolations of religion, in that same very human realm as his attraction to Angela St. John's body. In the journals he finds a complete person, one who is disabled like he is, as religious as he would like to be, but who is still dissatisfied with himself, writing:

Some days He comes to me in a sourceless light that nses on His image at my bed [and] then I am caught of it [and] shine also as with lightning on me.. He does bid me speak all my love but I cannot for I am always just then under it the whole heft of it [and] am mute against it as against a little mountain heaved upon me [and] can utter no help of the thing that is done to me.

In these words Father Olguin finds comfort because he recognizes himself. They are ideas that Abel might find comfort in too

In the end, Abel and Father Olguin find their fulfillment. Whatever old Francisco earned within him passes on to Abel at his death. This understanding sends him out to run in the canyon at dawn, as Francisco had done long before. By carrying on this tradition he accepts his past and perhaps himself.

Father Olguin's enlightenment finally comes in the simple realization that to the Indians, as to death, the question "Do you know what time it is"" is irrelevant. The lesson of his predecessor, the temptation of the flesh, the humbling experience of his cnppling illness all lead him toward this moment, just as Abel is guided to it by Angela, the albino, Benally, Tosamah, and all the rest.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Hirsch analyzes the characters of Martinez, Tosamaah, and Benally and their relationships with the protagonist, noting that for these characters Abel is a symbol of contempt and a reminder of their Native selves.

N. Scott Momaday, referring to his protagonist Abel, has said, "None but an Indian, I think, knows so much what it is like to have existence in two worlds and security in neither." True as this is of Abel in *House Made of Dawn,* it is truer still of Martinez, Tosamah, and Benally because they, unlike Abel, try earnestly to conform to Euro-American social values. Indeed, the strong responses Abel generates in each of these characters indicate their perception of something unyielding and incorruptible in him, something which throws into stark relief the humiliating spiritual compromises they have felt compelled to make In his suffering Abel is both a sorry example and stinging rebuke to them, a warning and a goad, someone both to fear and reverence, for he reminds them of who and what they are□of what they find most contemptible in themselves and most holy. Martinez, Tosamah, and Benally have been spintually corrupted to varying degrees by the white world, and to the extent that they have, they make Abel their scapegoat and regard him as an evil to be exorcised.

This scapegoating is most apparent in the case of Martinez who, Ben tells us, is "a cop and a bad one." [The critic adds in a footnote: "Most readers assume that Martinez is white, but given his name and the fact that a number of the novel's Indian characters have Spanish names and/or surnames, it seems more likely that he is at least part Indian or Chicano□if the latter, his situation would nonetheless parallel to a significant extent that of the urban Indians. Moreover, to regard Martinez as white is to reduce him to an overworked stereotype□the sadistic white cop□of the sort that Momaday, in his portrayal of every other white character in the novel, has scrupulously avoided."] He derives his sense of self from the power and authority vested in him by white society. That power, in his eyes, makes him superior to his "brothers" in the street by enabling him to identify with the oppressor and victimize them at will. He acts out his own version of the American Dream with every Indian he extorts, yet his violent response to Abel's slight resistance suggests that he has paid a price for the power he enjoys.

Martinez emerges, appropriately enough, from a dark alley as Ben and Abel are returning home from Henry's bar. Ben meekly complies with Martinez' order to hold out his hands, and he recalls that his hands "were shaking bad and I couldn't hold them still." He had just been paid and he gives Martinez "all I had left." Martinez then notices Abel:

Martinez told him to hold out his hands, and he did, slowly, like maybe he wasn't going to at first, with the palms up I could see his hands in the light and they were open and almost steady. "Turn them over," Martinez said, and he was looking at them and they were almost steady.

Enraged, Martinez smashes Abel's hands with his nightstick, but Abel "didn't cry out or make a sound." From Benally's description, we can see that it is Abel's attitude rather than his actions that engenders Martinez' wrath. Martinez could not help but notice the contrast between Ben's involuntary shaking and Abel's relative steadiness, and this implied slight to his authority threatens him. His response to it indicates just how precarious his sense of self is, and the extreme viciousness of his later beating of Abel further reveals the self-hatred that is the price of the Anglo authority he covets.

By his mere presence Abel threatens the protective illusions so necessary to Martinez' emotional and psychological survival, and he poses the same threat to Tosamah and Benally. Martha Scott Trimble maintains [in her 1973 *N. Scott Momaday]* that "the suffering of the urban Indians is ... rendered painful to watch because of their reluctance to admit to themselves that they suffer." They are so reluctant because they have been conditioned by the dominant white culture to regard their very suffering as evidence of their own inferiority. Their suffenng is at least as productive of guilt as of rage and therefore they have devised what Trimble calls "strategies" to avoid acknowledging that suffering to themselves. By means of these strategies, they seek not only to adapt to white society but to retain while doing so a sense of themselves as free agents making intelligent decisions. They have chosen, in Ben's words, to "go along with it" not out of fear or because they have been seduced by the false promise of the white world, but because, they would believe, it makes sense. And as regards Tosamah and Benally, it is indeed painful to watch them disparage that which they most love and most need□their Indianness.

Tosamah, for instance, tries to better his situation by assuming a superior posture toward it□as is apparent in his use of language. In his first sermon, "The Gospel According to John," Tosamah tries to convince both himself and his congregation that he understands the white man by telling them how the white man conceives of and manipulates language. He says that "the white man deals in words, and he deals easily, with grace and sleight of hand. And in his presence, here on his own ground, you are as children...." Tosamah knows what he is talking about; his assertions are verified by Abel's experience in Los Angeles and Benally's explanation of Abel's language problems. But ironically, Tosamah uses language much as the white man does, and to much the same purpose. In fact, he uses it as Martinez uses fear and violence. Like Martinez, he has carved out a little fiefdom of sorts in the Los Angeles ghetto, and language is his means of controlling it.

By manipulating a variety of verbal styles in "The Gospel According to John," Tosamah keeps his parishioners off balance, dazzling as much as enlightening them. Through an ever-shifting combination of biblical oratory, street talk, exposition, and the simple, direct narrative style of the storyteller, Tosamah tries to relate to his audience on several levels simultaneously, to establish at once his oneness with and superiority to them. He wants to be perceived as a follow Indian sharing a similar culture and values, as a ghetto brother sharing the hardship of the streets, and as a teacher in both the shamanistic and professorial senses. The sermon is full of insight, but it is a masterpiece of verbal gymnastics as well.

Tosamah is perceptive enough to know that the agonizing conflict within himself also exists to varying degrees in the other urban Indians, and he exploits their insecurity and self-doubt to shore up his own tenuous conception of self. Indeed, his need continually to assert himself over the others is one indication of his sense of inadequacy. Like them, he both loves and fears his Indianness, and this entails a roughly similar ambivalence toward the white man. Tosamah sees through the white man to a significant extent and pointedly ridicules his blindness, but like Martinez he also feels a troubling yet insistent need to identify with his oppressor. This need underlies his use of language to intimidate and manipulate the other urban Indians. But he also feels the same need with regard to his heritage and his people. When Tosamah speaks so lovingly, so evocatively in his second sermon, "The Way to Rainy Mountain," of his journey to rediscover his Indian self, we cannot doubt his sincerity. This sermon is longer than his first, and it is free of the verbal gamesmanship that characterizes much of "The Gospel." Still, he needs to be a winner. He sees in his parishioners, and even more clearly in Abel, the fate of Indians in a white world, and he cannot accept such a density. If white society has consigned him, despite his education, intelligence, and talent, to a small, severely limited space, it has at least taught him how to control that space. Like Martinez, he has learned to exalt himself by undermining others. Oppressed, he becomes an oppressor victimizing, as Martinez does, the only people he can□his own.

As Martinez batters Abel's body, so Tosamah batters his spirit, and Momaday, through his use of narrative structure, stresses the parallel between them. The novel's second chapter, "The Priest of the Sun," in effect begins and ends with a sermon by Tosamah. These sermons frame a badly beaten, semiconscious Abel whose murder trial and life in Los Angeles pass in fragments before him. Ironically, Tosamah's second sermon, which recounts his journey to the land of his people, the Kiowa, to visit his grandmother's grave, reveals the path to salvation for Abel, tells how he might be made whole again. But Abel is not there to hear the sermon. Indeed, as we later learn from Benally, it was after Tosamah had earlier humiliated Abel that, in Ben's words, "He went downhill pretty fast...," decided "to get even with" Martinez, and was beaten half to death by him. Tosamah calls himself "Priest of the Sun," and he is sufficiently imaginative, sensitive, understanding, and articulate to be that. But he lives his day-to-day life as Coyote, the trickster who is both culture hero and buffoon. Like Coyote, Tosamah has the capacity to bring spiritual gifts to his people, to be a savior of sorts, but his actions are generally self-centered and done in ignorance□in Tosamah's case, a self-imposed ignorance□of their consequences for the world, his people, and himself. Tosamah is quick to take advantage of others to satisfy his own needs, but because he is himself a slave to those needs (emotional and psychological needs as opposed to Coyote's purely physical ones), he is at times the victim of his own tricks. Coyote is a master of self-deception and, as his own ambivalence toward and treatment of Abel indicates, so is John Big Bluff Tosamah.

Despite his awareness of the beauty and value of his native culture, despite his profound understanding of the nearly overwhelming spiritual problems modern America has created for his people, Tosamah is himself tormented by his Indianness. Abel, in his view, is the incarnation of that Indianness, and as such he fills Tosamah with shame and guilt and reverence. Tosamah, for all his insight into its workings, has been conditioned

by the white world and by himself in response to that world to see with two pairs of eyes and the result, at least as regards Abel, is a melange of contradictory impressions and impulses. For example, Ben remembers Tosamah's warning him about Abel: "He was going to get us all in trouble, Tosamah said. Tosamah sized him up right away...." Perceptive as he is, Tosamah can sense in Abel the unyielding integrity that will make him especially vulnerable in urban Los Angeles, that will keep him from "fitting in"; and that integrity implicitly confronts Tosamah with his own compromising and compromised self.

When Tosamah speaks of Abel's trial, he is both ironic and envious. True, the white society that is puzzled by Abel is the target of his irony, and he ostensibly mocks its view of Abel as "a real primitive sonuvabitch" and a "poor degenerate Indian"; but his own view of Abel, as his warning to Benally and his later psychological attack on Abel make clear, parallels to some extent that of the society he ridicules. Consider in this regard his impression of how Abel's testimony must have sounded to the court:

"'Well, you honors, it was this way, see? I cut me up a little snake meat out there in the sand.' Christ, man, that must have been our finest hour, better than Little Bighorn. That little no-count cat must have had the whole Jesus scheme right in the palm of his hand "

Tosamah's tone conveys both embarrassment and admiration here, but alone with Ben in the privacy of Ben's apartment he lets his admiration show. Of the court's verdict, he says:

"They put that cat away, man They *had* to. It's part of the Jesus scheme. *They,* man. They put all of us renegades, us diehards, away sooner or later . Listen here, Benally, one of these nights there's going to be a full red moon, a hunter's moon, and we're going to find us a wagon train full of women and children. Now you won't believe this, but I drink to that now and then."

If Ben "won't believe this" it is because the sentiments Tosamah here expresses hardly parallel his actions, and Tosamah knows it. He seeks to identify with Abel, referring to "us renegades, us diehards," and to the white man as "they," but merely to wish now and again for vengeance is an empty gesture. No doubt Tosamah's desire to avenge himself on those who have poisoned his spirit is sincere, but the courage, the spirit of defiance he recognizes in Abel, lies dormant within his own heart. Ben, as he does throughout the novel, undercuts Tosamah's pretentiousness, telling us that "He's always going on like that, Tosamah, talking crazy and showing off...."

Seeing Abel through white eyes, Tosamah finds him embarrassing. Though Tosamah ridicules Anglo cultural arrogance and the stereotypes that feed it, Abel□alcoholic, at times violent, and inarticulate□seems to him to lend credence to the stereotypes; thus Tosamah, educated and articulate as he is, feels misrepresented, degraded by association. This is the "trouble" of which he warns Benally. Seeing Abel through Indian eyes, Tosamah cannot help but admire him as a kind of modern-day warrior who refuses to give in meekly to the torment and tribulations of urban Indian life. But if Tosamah as an Indian is vicariously elevated by Abel's integrity, he is at the same time

humbled by the lack of his own. Viewed from either perspective, then, white or Indian, Abel engenders in Tosamah self-contempt so strong that it is beyond enduring; he is anathema to the illusory conception of his own superiority that is Tosamah's primary means of emotional and psychological survival. Therefore, because of the guilt he feels, a guilt stemming from a profound sense of his own inadequacy, he projects upon Abel his own diminished sense of self.

Tosamah needs to tear Abel down and one evening, during a poker game at his place, the opportunity presents itself. In a seemingly expansive mood Tosamah, Ben tells us, was "going on about everything ... and talking big " Ben, seeing that this talk bothers Abel, wants to leave, but Abel, already drunk and becoming more so, ignores him. Ben recalls,

I guess Tosamah knew what he was thinking too, because pretty soon he started in on him, not directly, you know, but he started talking about *longhairs* and the reservation and all I kept wishing he would shut up, and I guess the others did, too .. because right away they got quiet and just started looking down at their hands, you know□like they were trying to decide what to do I knew that something bad was going to happen.

Abel, too drunk to seriously threaten Tosamah, lunges impotently toward him, and the others, to relieve their own discomfort, laugh at his futility. Ben tells us that the laughter "seemed to take all the fight out of him. It was like he had to give up when they laughed; it was like all of a sudden he didn't care about anything anymore." Abel's response to the laughter indicates that, though perhaps not consciously aware of it, he attacked Tosamah not merely to avenge a personal insult but to avenge all the Indians at the table and back home, to avenge the honor of his people. Tosamah, who "doesn't come from the reservation" himself, has made the others ashamed of what they are, and when they try to dispel their shame by projecting it onto Abel, Abel's rage loses its foundation and he feels empty and alone. Ben remembers "that he was hurt by what had happened; he was hurt inside somehow, and pretty bad." Tosamah, the Priest of the Sun of the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission, has lost sight of the needs of his people in pursuit of his own isolated ends and in so doing, as his attack on Abel symbolically suggests, he has violated the very essence of his own Indianness. By shaming his people he has done the white man's work.

Unlike Tosamah, Benally is compassionate towards Abel; he is, from the time of their first meeting, instinctively protective of him. He trains Abel for his new job, introduces him around, and though he has very little himself, readily shares his home, his food, and his clothing. Most important of all, he shares with Abel, and Abel alone, his dearest possession□his native religion. It is Ben's honest, profound spirituality that sets him apart from the other urban Indians. As has often been noted, Ben is the one who has the vision during the peyote ceremony, and whereas Tosamah's understanding of his native culture seems at times largely intellectual, Ben "lives his religion on a level deeper than the intellect, the level of spirit and emotion" [Carole Oleson, "The Remembered Earth: Momaday's *House Made of Dawn," South Dakota Review* II, No. 1 (Spring 1973)]. Yet there are definite similarities between Ben and Tosamah as well, and to ignore them is to obscure considerably the scope and horror of the spiritual

compromises white society, for its own material and psychological convenience, requires of Indians

Sincere as his religious beliefs are and sensitive as he is, Benally has compromised himself almost as severely as Tosamah has, and this is most apparent from the contradictions in his narrative Ben is trying earnestly to sell himself on the American Dream in a vain effort to convince himself that the life he feels compelled to live is in fact better and ultimately more fulfilling than the life he knew on the reservation. His pathetic monologue on the wonders of Los Angeles is a case in point:

It's a good place to live ... Once you find your way around and get used to everything, you wonder how you ever got along out there where you came from There's nothing there, you know, but the land, and the land is empty and dead. Everything is here, everything you could ever want You never have to be alone.

But for all practical purposes Ben, until Abel comes, is alone. He has drinking buddies, true, but no one with whom he can share what is most important to him. Moreover, the "radios and cars and clothes and big houses" which, Ben says, "you'd be crazy not to want" and which are "so easy to have" have managed to elude him. He lives in a leaky, dilapidated slum tenement, gets his clothes second-hand, and is a cipher in the plant where he works. He willfully mistakes the racist ridicule of his co-workers for good-natured kidding and the pseudo-amiable hustle of the salespeople in the stores for friendliness. The extent and cost of his self-deception, however, are most painfully revealed m his comments about the land.

Ben's narrative is punctuated at several points by contrapuntal remembrances which rise unbidden in his mind, memories of growing up on the reservation, on "the land south of Wide Ruins where I come from," on the land he still loves. These recollections are full of precise, beautiful, and evocative details which belie his remark that "the land is empty and dead." The land he recalls is rich with vitality and meaning; it is the sacred center of all life and being. He remembers childhood on the land:

And you were little and right there in the center of everything, the sacred mountains, the snow-covered mountains and the hills, the gullies and the flats, the sundown and the night, everything□where you were little, where you were and had to be

The vision of the land inherent in his memories is that which contemporary America requires him to abandon, and he tries to do just that. After all, "That's the only way you can live in a place like this [Los Angeles]. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all." The need to "go along with it" is a recurrent motif in Ben's narrative, and all that gives his life meaning must be subordinated to it:

If you come from the reservation, you don't talk about it much; I don't know why I guess you figure that it won't do you much good, so you just forget about it You think about it sometimes, you can't help it, but then you just try to put it out of your mind . it mixes you up sometimes.

But Abel does not let Ben "forget about it." He is to Ben what he is to Tosamah, the incarnation of all that is Indian within him, and Ben intuitively apprehends this. He remarks:

We were land of alike, though, him and me. After a while he told me where he was from, and right away I knew we were going to be friends We're related somehow, I think Abel's mere presence evokes his memories of home, and the first of Ben's "flashbacks" occurs as he recalls their first real conversation. Ben's history resembles Abel's in certain respects, and his memories [according to Lawrence J. Evers in his "Words and Place. A Reading of *House Made of Dawn,* " *Western American Literature* XI, No. 4 (February 1977)] "reveal a sense of place very like that Abel groped for on his return to Walatowa." What is especially sad about these memories is that they convey a sense of wholeness and security that contrasts sharply with the fragmented, fear-ridden, tenuous existence Ben now endures. He appears to regain a modicum of that sense with Abel, however; Ben knows that his most precious treasures are safe with him:

"House made of dawn." I used to tell him about those old ways, the stories and the signs, Beauty-way and Night Chant. I sang some of those things and told him what they meant, what I thought they were about

Abel is wonderfully receptive, as Ben knew he would be, and "would want me to sing like that." And Abel, Ben fears, is the only one who would. Just as Tosamah finds "longhairs" like Abel an embarrassment to him in the white world, so is Benally, within the context of that world, embarrassed by his own best impulses□and that world includes the other urban Indians. He tells of a night when he and Abel, along with the others, are drinking and having fun on a hill overlooking the city:

I started to sing all by myself. The others were singing, too, but it was the wrong kind of thing, and I wanted to pray. I didn't want them to hear me, because they were having a good time, and I was ashamed, I guess I kept down because I didn't want anybody but him to hear.

Only with Abel does Benally feel good about being an Indian; only with Abel can he free his spirit in song and prayer, and see past and future merge into an all-inclusive present. When Abel is in the hospital recovering from his beating, Ben, to comfort him, makes up a plan about going home, about "going out into the hills on horses and alone. It was going to be early in the morning, and we were going to see the sun coming up." There, they would "sing the old songs," sing "about the way it used to be, how there was nothing all around but the hills and the sunrise and the clouds." Ben at first did not take his plan seriously, but Abel "believed in it" and "I guess I started to believe in it, too." Dream and waking reality come together for Ben in Abel's presence, albeit briefly, and the deepest impulses of his spirit are vindicated in Abel's existence. In that respect Abel is truly a blessing for Benally. But they live in a world uncongenial to these impulses, a world contemptuous of vision and song, and in that world Abel also becomes an agonizing problem for Ben.

Ben's Indianness can find expression only through his religion and his friendship with Abel, and in a world hostile to Indians both, Ben feels, must be sheltered and protected. This is one reason why he tries to shepherd Abel as he does at the factory and why he takes him into his home. That Ben truly believes he is acting in Abel's best interest is undeniable, and in a very real sense he is. Abel sorely needs the kind of support Ben provides, and if Tosamah's attempt to isolate Abel is a denial of his own Indianness, Ben's generous inclusion of Abel in his own life is a wonderfully rich expression of his. Moreover, by telling Abel of the old traditions and teaching him the old songs, Ben not only provides him with necessary spiritual sustenance in a world unresponsive to spiritual need, but prepares him for his return to Walatowa to try again, this time more successfully, to find himself in the life of his people. But Ben's concern for Abel is motivated by fear as well as by compassion. Tosamah feared that Abel "was going to get us all in trouble," and so does Ben. He speaks to Abel of things Indian, for, as we have seen, his own spirit requires as much, but throughout his narrative he emphasizes repeatedly Abel's inability to "get along." He understands why Abel has difficulty adjusting and implies that he himself has faced similar obstacles, but he never questions the need to accommodate oneself to the white man's world, and that is why he eventually loses patience with Abel. Abel's problems, in Ben's view, go beyond those which confront every relocated Indian, severe as these problems may be. What Tosamah recognizes as Abel's unyielding integrity Benally sees as sheer obstinacy; or rather, the sustaining illusion he has constructed about the "good life" in Los Angeles demands that he see it as such. After all, Abel has a steady job, a place to live, drinking buddies□ everything he needs, Ben would believe, to make it in urban America. Yet despite these advantages, he persists in being a trial to those who care for him.

Abel scares Ben. He scares him when he subtly defies Martinez in the alley and he scares him during Tosamah's harangue about "longhairs and the reservation." In both instances his actions threaten to undermine Ben's illusions by confronting him with the truth that life in urban America is incompatible with his identity as an Indian. Benally, as Carole Oleson has said, has whitened himself considerably by removing his religion from his daily life. He retains the songs and traditions within himself, and that is good, but he also compromises the old religion by confining it like a retarded child whom the family loves but of whom they are ashamed. Like Angela St. John, whose affair with Abel in Walatowa puts her in touch, if only temporarily, with her body's potential for joy and wonder, he turns off his own light, as it were, denies his own intuitive wisdom in a futile attempt to avoid emotional and psychological conflicts which might prove irreconcilable. And like Father Olguin, Benally also preaches the white man's religion□not in the form of Christianity, as Olguin does, but in its true aspects of materialism and conformity; like both Olguin and his predecessor, Fray Nicolas, he would convert the Indian to a new and alien faith for, like them, he needs converts to vindicate his own. Thus it is that when Abel ultimately proves "unregenerate," the usually mild Benally, possessed by anger but more by fear, loses patience:

He wouldn't let anybody help him, and I guess I got mad, too, and one day we had a fight... he was just sitting there and saying the worst thing he could think of, over and over. I didn't like to hear that kind of talk, you know, it made me kind of scared, and I told

him to cut it out I guess I was more scared than mad; anyway I had had about all I could take

As with Martinez and Tosamah earlier, Ben knew "something bad was going to happen and ... didn't want any part of it." At this point Abel goes to look for Martinez, but even after he is gone and Ben cools off, Ben nonetheless maintains that "It had to stop, you know; something had to happen."

Benally, then, like Tosamah, is a priest whose saving message, because he has divorced his religion from his everyday life, has an ironic as well as a revelatory dimension. It is especially ironic that despite his deeper, more sincere spirituality, Ben lacks Tosamah's awareness of the redemptive potential of the old ways of seeing and knowing. As the "Night Chanter," Ben, as we have seen, is essential to any hope Abel has for recovery, but Ben himself does not see the sharing of himself and his religion in this way. The road to recovery he consciously charts, as we have also seen, involves passively assimilating the values and accommodating oneself to the demands of white America, even at the cost of one's heritage and identity. Thus the role of "Night Chanter" assumes a second, and contrary, meaning. Though with the best intentions, Benally also, and quite unknowingly, chants the dark night of the soul, the tortured, fragmented, solipsistic state of being that Los Angeles comes to symbolize in the novel. Through the distorting lens of his own desperate need for some sense of meaning to his life, Ben sees an urban paradise, and it is this vision that he consciously advances as salvation.

Though it exists to differing degrees in each of them and, given their enormously diverse natures, manifests itself in various ways, Martinez, Tosamah, and Benally all share a single quality: self-contempt. Each is ashamed of being what he is, of being an Indian, and that is why Abel, when he is relocated in Los Angeles, becomes a kind of sacrifice to then: fear and desperation. A "longhair" from the reservation, he is, among other things, a constant reminder to them of how they are perceived by the dominant culture and of that which has made them wretched. They have been made to feel, against all logic and common sense, that their suffering is somehow deserved because of what they are; thus each of them projects his own diminished sense of self upon Abel and responds to that self in his own way. Martinez tries to obliterate it through violence, Tosamah tries to disassociate himself from it, and Benally tries to remake it to fit the white world he inhabits. The issue is agonizingly complicated, however, because the very Indianness within them which they have been taught to hate is that which they intuitively love. Tosamah and Benally especially know in their very depths that fulfillment and wholeness he in the realization and free expression of their Indian selves. Tosamah has made a long journey to the land of his people to rediscover his Indianness, and Ben hoards the old songs like treasure within his heart Therefore, their self-contempt is further intensified by a profound sense of guilt stemming from men-perceived inability to live their Indianness, by what they themselves see as a personal betrayal of their heritage and of themselves. However, though it saddens him, Momaday does not condemn the urban Indians for feeling as they do. Their self-hatred is in fact his most telling indictment of a modern America which relentlessly tries to compel its native peoples to barter dignity and self-respect for material, emotional, and psychological survival.

Source: Bernard A. Hirsch, "Self-Hatred and Spiritual Corruption in House Made of Dawn," in *Western American Literature,* Vol XVn, No. 4, Winter, 1983, pp. 307-20

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Lattin emphasizes Momaday's presentation of the failure of Christianity in the Indian culture and the desire of the latter for a renewed reverence for the land in its mythic vision of wholeness.

The Native American novel *House Made of Dawn* ... presents the failure of Christianity. Further, its mythic vision of existence becomes an alternative not only to Christianity but to modern civilization based on secular, technological structures...

Father Olguin reveals the inadequacies of Christianity for the Indian. Although attempting to live within the Indian community, he meets only with isolation and failure because he cannot understand the Indian.... Near the end of the novel, awakened from sleep by Abel's announcement that his grandfather is dead, Father Olguin can only complain about being disturbed. After Abel leaves, the priest illuminates the irrelevance of Christianity for the Indian by crying out after Abel in the darkness: "I can understand... I understand, do you hear?... I understand. *Oh God. I understand I understand!"* Olguin and his religion have never understood the Indian culture, and Christianity is but a futile cry.

Also in *House Made of Dawn,* a Native American, the Rev. J. B. B. Tosamah, Pastor and Priest of the Sun, is a more complex religious figure than Father Olguin. Living in Los Angeles among urban Indians, Tosamah represents the religious confidence man in his most subtle form: he is both critic and supporter of the white way; he is both priest and medicine man; he is both friend and foe. Ultimately, he is a religious sham, speaking the truth but never the whole truth. His full name reveals and hides him: he is "The Right Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah."

[Tosamah] toes to span two religions and cultures; neither Christian nor pagan, he remains isolated from himself and his tribal past. A sacred vision emerges in the novel when Abel discovers himself and when ... he returns home through his grandfather and his racial memory. His quest takes him through the typical monomythic pattern of descent and death, through "loneliness and fear" ... until he is able to return to the reservation and join the ancient religious ritual, the run against evil and death.... [He] will be able to accept his place in the universe and defeat the fear that has dominated his life.

Abel's fear arises from unconscious recognition of individual, racial, tribal, and religious extinction. He cannot see the continuity, the oneness of life, because of his fragmented existence.... Like the Bahkyush tribe, which was almost destroyed by marauders and then by the plagues, he makes a "journey along the edge of oblivion," a journey which takes him through the white man's war, a series of brief sexual encounters, prison, and finally near-death from a brutal beating by a Los Angeles policeman. Out of their suffering, the Bahkyush acquired a tragic sense, a "dignity and bearing" which made them holy, "medicine men ... rainmakers and eagle hunters." During the depth of his

despair, close to extinction, Abel likewise discovers some religious truths and acquires a holy vision that returns him to himself and his tribal past.

His final vision results from pagan realities of which he has gradually become aware. During the feast of Santiago, which takes place in the Middle, "an ancient place," ... the sacred center, the "axis munde," Abel is forced to confront his fear, his enemy in the form of a huge, grotesque Albino....

[The resulting struggle between them] reenacts the spiritual confrontation between creative and destructive elements that has been going on forever. At the end of the battle, Abel appropriately kneels down to watch the white man die. During the later trial, when the white world disposes of Abel with *"their* language," Abel's defender, Father Olguin, speaks of the "psychology of witchcraft" and of "an act of imagination," ... unable to recognize the religious significance of Abel's act. Abel understands, however: "They must know that he would kill the white man again, if he had the chance, that there could be no hesitation whatsoever. For he would know what the white man was, and he would kill him if he could."

Abel's quest also takes him back to a reverence for all existence and for the land which supports this existence. Elsewhere Momaday has written of modern America's need to come to accept the land, to develop an "American Land ethic ... not only as it is revealed to us immediately through our senses, but also as it is perceived more truly in the long turn of seasons and of years. And we must come to moral terms." One of the major themes of *House Made of Dawn* is that the people will return in a new dawn to this ancient way, throwing off the invasion and conquests of the white people and their religious vision. The narrator speaks in the novel of a prehistoric civilization that "had gone out among the hills for a little while and would return; and then everything would be restored to an older age, and time would have returned upon itself and a bad dream of invasion and change would have been dissolved in an hour before the dawn.... In part, this explains the significance of the chant "House Made of Dawn" ...: it is a prayer for a return, a rebirth of the old way....

At the end of the novel, beside his grandfather's deathbed, [Abel] is for six mornings reminded of all that is; and within these six dawns of his grandfather's dying he is reunited with his individual, racial, and religious self....

Finally, Abel's life blends with his grandfather's death, and he takes up the past and runs onward ... [As] Abel joins the ancient race against evil and death, he unites himself with his sacred past. He also completes the circle of the novel, which begins and ends with his running; he completes the circle of the history of the American continent, which began with this original pagan religion, survived the Christian polemics and onslaught, and now returns to its origin; and he completes the infinite circle itself, the circle of life which all ancient people recognized and accepted. With such knowledge, the reader recognizes that the running at the end of the novel, with Abel breathing a song, is both beginning and end....

[Momaday has] created a new romanticism, with a reverence for the land, a transcendent optimism, and a sense of mythic wholeness. [His] reverence for the land can be compared to the pastoral vision found in most mainstream American literature, but the two visions contain essential differences. In Norris's *The Octopus,* for example, the wheat remains, a symbol of the vitalistic force moving everything, but this vision of cyclically renewed life is unconvincing, overshadowed by the railroad's evil....

[Many] white heroes fail or are unconvincing because their relationship to the land has been more fantasy than history and because they are conquerors and violators. Their vision must then remain either an anomaly or forlorn and tragic This is even more true of modern Americans, whose experience as a nation, as Momaday has said, is a repudiation of the pastoral ideal, an uprooting of man from the land, and a consequent "psychic dislocation .. in time and space." In contrast, Abel... can return and rediscover, because [he has] a land vision that preceded the white conquerors. Abel's grandfather, a farmer artd holy man who lives by the organic calendar [is] ... able to sustain the shock of civilization and technology and preserve and transmit the land vision that [he has] never violated as [an individual] or as a people The bad dream of violation may not end, but Abel ... can transcend the nightmare, and like the Bahkyush tribe, [he] can return to the land....

[Momaday is] willing to face the "silence of the transcendent" in the modern world. Rejecting the phenomonological limitation of writers like Beckett and Kafka, where the dissolution of the hero's quest is the form, [he creates] an optimistic fiction with the protagonist returning to wholeness and mythic vision and transcending the limitations of both society and time.... This quest can be contrasted with postmodern works like Pynchon's *V,* in which Herbert Stencil's quest is undercut by a denial of form and meaning in the universe, or with *Gravity's Rainbow,* in which the hundreds of characters, appearing and disappearing, deny the possibility of individual, personal transcendence Abel's ... pagan vision, however, is a way of viewing the world as a religious whole: it is belief. This sacred transcendence is also different from attempts at secular transcendence in novels like *Humboldt's Gift* or the popular *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.* [Moreover, Momaday's novel is a form of rediscovery, an attempt] to return to the sacred art of storytelling and myth-making that is part of Indian oral tradition. [It is an attempt] to push the secular mode of modern fiction into the sacred mode, a faith and recognition in the power of the word which "comes from nothing into sound and meaning ... [and] gives origin to all things."

This rediscovery of the land, of mythic vision, and of the sacred word offers modern America not only a kind of fiction seldom seen, but, if [Annette Kolodny in her *The Lay of the Land]* is correct in her analysis of America's failure to deal with the environment and in her assessment that the twentieth century demands a new pastoral vision offering "some means of understanding and altering the disastrous attitudes toward the physical setting that we have inherited from our national past," then perhaps the mythic vision and land ethic of those people our nation so brutally conquered are appropriate and even necessary at this time.

Sources Vernon E Lattin "The Quest for Mythic Vision1 in Contemporary Native American and Chicano Fiction," in *American Literature,* Duke University Press, Vol. L, No 4, January, 1979, pp 625-40.

Critical Essay #4

An American critic and educator, Evers has authored several books on Native American songs and has served as president of the Association for Study of American Indian Literatures. In the following essay, he examines Momaday's focus on language, landscape, and Native American rituals and narratives in House Made of Dawn.

Native American oral traditions are not monolithic, nor are the traditions with which Momaday works in *House Made of Dawn*—Kiowa, Navajo, and Towan Pueblo. Yet there are, he suggests [in "A Conversation with N. Scott Momaday," *Sun Tracks: An American Indian Literary Magazine* 2, No. 2 (1976)], "common denominators." Two of the most important of these are the native American's relation to the land and his regard for language.

By imagining who and what they are in relation to particular landscapes, cultures and individual members of cultures form a close relation with those landscapes. Following D. H. Lawrence and others, Momaday terms this a "sense of place" [in his "A Special Sense of Place," appearing 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. A superb delineation of one such symbolic order is offered by 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.

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. Like Kosahn, Momaday's grandmother, the native American draws from it "strength enough to hold still against all the forces of chance and disorder" [" An American Land Ethic," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 55 (February 1970)].

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

In the Navajo emergence narrative, for example, First Man and First Woman accompanied by Coyote and other actors from the animal world journey upward through four underworlds into the present Fifth World. The journey advances in a series of movements from chaos to order, and each movement takes the People toward greater

social and symbolic definition. The cloud pillars of the First World defined only by color and direction become in the Fifth World the sacred mountains of the four directions, the most important coordinates in an intricate cultural geography. As with the Tewa and the Kiowa, that cultural landscape symbolizes the Navajo conception of order, the endpoint of their emergence journey. Through the emergence journey, a collective imaginative endeavor, the Navajos determined who and what they were in relation to the land.

The extraordinary interest in geography exhibited in Navajo oral literature then may be seen as an effort to evoke harmony in those narratives by reference to the symbolic landscape of the present world. Significantly, a major test theme in Navajo oral literature requires identification of culturally important geographic features. Consider the Sun's test of the Hero Twins in one of the final episodes in the emergence narrative [as recounted in Ethelou Yazzie's 1971 *Navajo History].*

He asked them to identify various places all over the surface of the earth. He asked, "Where is your home"' The boys knew where their home was They pointed out Huerfano Mountain and said that was where they lived The Sun next asked, "What mountain is that in the East?"

"That's *Sis Naajini* (Blanca Peak)," replied the boys. "What mountain is down here below us?" "That's *Tsoodzi* (Mount Taylor)," said the boys. "What mountain is that in the West"" "That's *Dook'o'oosiid* (San Francisco Peak)." "Now, what mountain is that over in the north7" "Those are the *Dibe Nitsaa* (La Plata Mountains)."

Because all the boy's answers were correct, the Sun said goodby to them as they were lowered down to the earth at the place called *T6 Sidoh* (Hot Springs).

Through their knowledge of the Navajo cultural landscape the Twins proved who and what they were to the Sun.

The pattern of the emergence narrative□a journey toward order symbolized by a cultural landscape□is repeated in Navajo chantway rituals A patient requires a chantway ritual when his life is in some way out of order or harmony. In order for that harmony to be restored he must be taken through a ritual re-emergence journey paralleling that of the People. It is important to note the role of the singer and his ritual song here, for without songs there can be no cure or restoration of order. Through the power of the chanter's words the patient's life is brought under ritual control, and he is cured.

We come round, then, to another of the "common denominators" Momaday finds in oral traditions: attitude toward language. Of Kiowa oral tradition Momaday writes [in *The Way to Rainy Mountain]:* "A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things." It is this concept, remarkably like one text version of the Navajo origin giving "One Word" as the name of the original state of the universe, which forms the center of Tosamah's sermon on St. John's gospel in the novel [*House Made of Dawn*]. But more germane to our discussion of oral tradition generally is the related notion that "by means of words can a man deal with the world on

equal terms " It is only through words that a man is able to express his relation to place. Indeed, it is only through shared words or ritual that symbolic landscapes are able to exist. So it is that the Tewa singer, the Navajo chanter, and the Kiowa "man of words" preserve their communities through their story and song Without them there would be no community. One contemporary Navajo medicine man [Curley Mustache] suggests that loss of ceremonial words will signal the end of the world: "The medicine men who have knowledge in the Blessing Way *(Hozho ji)* will all evidently be lost. The words to the song will vanish from their memory, and they will not know how to begin to sing."

In this context we can better appreciate Abel's dilemma in *House Made of Dawn.* As Momaday suggests [in "A Conversation with N. Scott Momaday"]: "One of the most tragic things about Abel, as I think of him, is his inability to express himself. He is in some ways a man without a voice.... So I think of him as having been removed from oral tradition."

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

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

[Elsie Clews Parsons tells us in the 1925 *The Pueblo of Jemez]* that racing is a conspicuous feature of Jemez ceremonialism. The winter race Abel runs in the prologue and at die end of the novel is the first race in the Jemez ceremonial season, an appropriate ceremonial beginning. But the race itself may be seen as a journey, a re-emergence journey analogous to that mentioned in connection with Navajo and Kiowa oral tradition. Indeed, the language echoes a Navajo re-emergence song sung in the Night Chant, from which the title of the book is taken.

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

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

Abel's genealogy is complicated. He did not know who his father was. "His father was aNavajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway," which made Abel "somehow foreign and strange." The ties Abel does have to Walatowa are through his mother whose father, Francisco□both sacristan and kiva participant□is the illegitimate son of the consumptive priest Fray Nicolas V. Through Francisco, Abel is a direct descendant of the Bahkyush, a group of Towan-speaking pueblos who immigrated to Jemez in the mid-nineteenth century. He is a "direct [descendant] of those men and women who had made that journey along the edge of oblivion," an experience which gave them a "tragic sense." Abel, as bis Bahkyush ancestors, is on just such a "journey along the edge of oblivion" in the novel.

Abel's journey in Part I is a journey of return to Walatowa and his illness is most explicitly related to a WWII experience. At the end of his seven memory fragments in the first dawn of his return Abel recalls:

This□everything m advance of his going□he could remember whole and in detail It was the recent past, the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not put together in his mind.

In the confusion of war among soldiers who recognized him only as a "chief speaking in "Sioux or Algonquin or something," Abel lost both the sense of place which characterized his tribal culture and the very community which supports that sense of place. "He didn't know where he was, and he was alone." Incredibly, he doesn't even recognize the earth: "He reached for something, but he had no notion of what it was; Ms hand closed upon the earth and the cold, wet leaves."

Mechanical sounds are associated with Abel's disonentation. The "low and incessant" sound of the tank descending upon him reaches back in the novel to the "slow whine of tires" Francisco hears on the highway and looks ahead to the sound of Angela's car intruding on his vision in the first dawn above the valley as it creeps along the same highway toward the Jemez church. These are the same mechanical sounds Abel tried "desperately to take into account" as the bus took him away to the war□again on the same highway. They are the sounds that reminded him as he left the pueblo to go to war that "the town and the valley and the hills" could no longer center him, that he was now "centered upon himself."

That Angela Grace St. John, the pregnant wife of a Los Angeles physician who comes to Walatowa seeking a cure for her own ailments, will become an obstacle in Abel's re-emergence journey is first suggested by the extensive auditory motifs of Part I. Yet her perceptions of his problems and of the Indian world generally have earned the

sympathy of some readers. Perhaps her most seductive perception is that of the significance of the corn dancers at Cochiti Pueblo:

Their eyes were held upon some vision out of range, something away in the end of distance, some reality that she did not know, or even suspect. What was it that they saw? Probably they saw nothing after all, . nothing at all. But then that was the trick, wasn't it? To see nothing at all, ... nothing in the absolute. To see beyond the landscape, beyond every shape and shadow and color, *that* was to see nothing. That was to be free and finished, complete, spiritual . To say "beyond the mountain," and to mean it, to mean, simply, beyond everything for which the mountain stands of which it signifies the being.

As persuasive as Angela's interpretation of the Cochiti dancers may seem, it is finally a denial of the value of the landscape which the novel celebrates. Angela's assumption that the Cochiti dancers possess a kind of Hindu metaphysics which rejects phenomena for noumena is a projection of her own desires to reject the flesh. Her attitude toward the land is of a piece with her attitude toward her own body: "she could think of nothing more vile and obscene than the raw flesh and blood of her body, the raveled veins and the gore upon her bones." We become almost immediately aware of the implications of that denial she craves in two following scenes: the *corre de gaio* and Abel's second reflection on the Canon de San Diego.

We view the *corre de gaio* through Angela who again projects feelings about her own existence on the ceremony. For Angela the ceremony like herself is "so empty of meaning ... and yet so full of appearance." Her final impression of the ceremony is sexual. She senses some "unnatural thing" in it and "an old fascination returned upon her." Later she remarks of the ceremony: "Like this, her body had been left to recover without her when once and for the first time, having wept, she had lain with a man." In the albino's triumph and Abel's failure at the *corre de gaio* she finds sexual pleasure

The etiological legend of Santiago (St. James) and the rooster is told by Fr. Olguin appropriately enough for his "instinctive demand upon all histories to be fabulous." The legend explains the ceremonial game which follows in the novel. Just as the sacrifice of the rooster by Santiago produced cultivated plants and domesticated animals for the Pueblo people, so too does ritual re-enactment of the sacrifice promote fertility at Walatowa While ethnographers suggest that the *corre de gaio* is of relatively minor ceremonial importance in Pueblo societies, in the context of the novel the rooster pull affords Abel his first opportunity to re-enter the ceremonial functions of the village. It is, we are told, the first occasion on which he has taken off his uniform Though the ceremony itself seems efficacious, as rain follows in the novel, Abel is "too rigid" and "too careful" at the game and fails miserably.

Abel's failure at the rooster pull demonstrates his inability to reenter the ceremonial life of the village, as he realizes in his second reflection at dawn, July 28,1945. The section opens with an explicit statement of the relation of the emergence journey and the landscape: "The canyon is a ladder to the plain," and is followed by a description of the ordered and harmonious existence of life in that landscape. Each form of life has its

proper space and function in the landscape, and by nature of that relation is said to have "tenure in the land " Similarly, "man came down the ladder to the plain a long time ago. It was a slow migration. .." Like the emergence journeys of the Kiowa and the Navajo mentioned earlier, the migration of the people of Walatowa led to an ordered relation to place which they express in their ceremonial life. As Abel walks in this landscape in the dawn he is estranged from the town and the land as well. "His return to the town had been a failure" he realizes because he is no longer attuned to its rhythms. He has no words to express his relation to the place. He is "not dumb," but "inarticulate."

Despite his inarticulateness, the rhythm and words are still there "like memory, in the reach of his hearing." We recall that on July 21, seven days before, "for a moment everything was all right with him." Here however,

He was alone, and he wanted to make a song out of the colored canyon, the way the women of Torre6n made songs upon their looms out of colored yarn, but he had not got the right words together It would have been a creation song, he would have sung lowly of the first world, of fire and flood, and of the emergence of dawn from the hills.

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

Significantly, the passage closes, as did the dawn walk of July 21, with an emblem of Angela St. John intruding on Abel's vision: "the high white walls of the Benevides house." The house itself is another symbol of Angela's denial of the land or more particularly the landscape of the Canon de San Diego In contrast to Francisco and the other native residents of Walatowa who measure space and time by reference to the eastern rim of the canyon, Angela measures hers in relation to this "high, white house:"

She would know the arrangement of her days and hours in the upstairs and down, and they would be for her the proof of her being and having been

His re-entry into the village spoiled, Abel turns not to the ceremonial structure of the pueblo for support but to Angela And it is the Benevides house, not the land, which provides "the wings and the stage" for their affair. Abel's first sexual encounter with Angela is juxtaposed in the novel with Francisco's encounter with the albino witch in his cornfield. Indeed, Angela, who "keened" to the unnatural qualities of the albino during the *corre de gaio,* echoes the auditory symbols of evil mentioned earlier. Just as Nicolas *teah-whau* "screamed" at him, and the moan of the wind in the rocks frightened him earlier, as Angela and Abel make love "she wanted to scream" and is later "moaning softly."

Earlier in his life Abel found physical regeneration through a sexual experience with Fat Josie. His affair with Angela has just the opposite effect. Lying physically broken on the beach in Part II Abel reflects:

He had loved his body. It had been hard and quick and beautiful, it had been useful, quickly and surely responsive to his mind and will His body, like his mind, had turned on him; it was his enemy.

The following couplet in the text implicates Angela in this alienation:

Angela put her white hands to his body. Abel put his hands to her white body.

Later Abel tells Benally that "she [Angela] was going to help him get a job and go away from the reservation, but then he got himself in trouble." That "trouble" derives in part from Abel's separation from his land.

Auditory symbols follow Abel directly from his affair with Angela to the climactic scene of Part I, the killing of the albino. Just before the murder the albino laughs "a strange, inhuman cry." Like the sound of Nicolas *teah-whau* it is "an old woman's laugh" that issues from a "great, evil mouth." At the very scene of the murder the only sound that breaks the silence is "the moan of the wind in the wires."

That Abel regards the albino as evil, as a witch *(sawah*), is clear enough even without the explicit statements of Father Olguin, Tosamah, and Benally later. Moreover, it is clear at the time of the murder that Abel regards the albino as a snake. He feels "the scales of the lips and the hot slippery point of the tongue, writhing." But that Abel is "acting entirely within the Indian tradition" when he kills the albino is wrong.

Abel's compulsion to eradicate the albino-snake reveals an attitude toward evil more akin to the Christian attitude of Nicolas V.: "that Serpent which even is the One our most ancient enemy." The murder scene is rife with Christian overtones. The killing takes place beneath a telegraph pole which "leaned upon the black sky;" during the act "the white hands still lay upon him as if in benediction," and after the albino's death "Abel knelt" and noticed "the dark nails of the hand seemed a string of great black beads." Abel appears to kill the albino then as a frustrated response to the White Man and Christianity, but he does so more in accordance with Anglo tradition than Indian tradition. Indeed, he has been trained in the Army to be a killer.

We recall here that the murder takes place squarely in the middle of the fiesta of Porcingula, the patroness of Walatowa, and that a central part of the ceremony on that feast is a ritual confrontation between the Pecos bull and the "black-faced children, who were the invaders." Parsons describes the bull-baiting at Jemez during the fiesta of Porcingula, August 1, 1922, as follows:

An hour later, "the Pecos bull is out," I am told and hasten to the Middle. There the bull-mask is out playing, with a following of about a dozen males, four or five quite young boys. They are caricaturing Whites, their faces and hands painted white; one wears a false mustache, another a beard of blond hair. "U.S A " is chalked on the back of their

coat or a cross within a circle.... They shout and cry out, "What's the matter with you boy?" or more constantly *"Muchacha^ Muchachoy> . .*

The bull antics are renewed, this time with attempts of his baiters to lasso. Finally they succeed in dragging him in front of their house, where he breaks away again, to be caught again and dragged into the house. From the house a bugler steps out and plays "Wedding Bells" and rag-time tunes for the bull-baiters to dance to in couples, "modern dances," ending up in a tumble. Two by two, in their brown habit and sandaled feet, four of the Franciscan Fathers pass by It grows dark, the bugler plays "taps" and this burlesque, reaching from the Conquistadores to the Great War, is over for the night

The very day then that Abel kills the albino the community from which he is estranged could have provided him with a way of ritually confronting the white man. Had his return not been a failure, he might have borne his agony, as Francisco had "twice or three times," by taking the part of the bull. "It was a hard thing," Francisco tells us, "to be the bull, for there was a primitive agony to it, and it was a kind of victim, an object of ridicule and hatred." Hard as that agony was, Abel as Francisco before him might have borne it with the support of his community. Separated from that community, he acts individually against evil and kills the white man.

Momaday forces us to see the murder as more complicated and subtle in motivation despite Benally's sympathetic reflections on the realities of witchery, Tosamah's reference to the murder as a legal conundrum, and Abel's own statement that the murder was "not a complicated thing." Death has not been a simple thing for Abel to cope with earlier in the novel, as shown by his emotional reactions to the deaths of the doe, the rabbit, the eagle, as well as the deaths of his brother Vidal and his mother. More to the point is the fact that the White Man Abel kills is, in fact, a white Indian, an albino He is the White Man in the Indian, perhaps even the White Man in Abel himself. When Abel kills the albino, in a real sense he kills a part of himself and his culture which he can no longer recognize and control. That that part should take the shape of a snake in his confused mind is horribly appropriate given the long association of the Devil and the snake in Christian tradition and the subsequent Puritan identification of the American Indians as demonic snakes and witches in so much of early American literature. In orthodox Pueblo belief the snake and the powers with which it is associated are accepted as a necessary part of the cosmic order: "The Hebres view of the serpent as the embodiment of unmitigated evil is never elaborated among the Pueblos; he is too often an ally for some desired end" [Hamilton A. Tyler, *Pueblo Gods and Myths,* 1964].

Yet, the whiteness of the albino suggests something more terrible than evil to Abel. As the whiteness of the whale does to Ishmael, it suggests an emptiness in the universe, a total void of meaning. It is an emblem complementary to Angela's philosophizing over the Cochiti dancers. The albino confronts Abel with his own lack of meaning, his own lack of a sense of place.

This reading is reinforced by the poignant final scene in Part I. Francisco stands alone in his corn field demonstrating the very sense of place Abel has lacked on his return.

We recall that in this very field Francisco too had confronted evil in the shape of the albino, but that he responded to the confrontation very differently:

His acknowledgement of the unknown was nothing more than a dull, intrinsic sadness, a vague desire to weep, for evil had long since found him out and knew who he was He set a blessing upon the corn and took up his hoe

Because of Abel's act, Francisco is for the first time separated from the Walatowa community. He stands muttering Abel's name as he did in the opening of the chapter, and near him the reed trap□ again suggesting the reed of emergence□is empty.

Part II of the novel opens with Abel lying broken, physically and spiritually, on the beach in Los Angeles. Like the helpless grunion with whom he shares the beach, he is out of his world. Abel's problem continues to be one of relating to place As in Part I at Walatowa he fails to establish a sense of place in Los Angeles because of a failure to find community. Not only is he separated from other workers at the factory, but even Tosamah and the Indian men at the Silver Dollar reject Abel. That rejection is a major cause of Abel's second futile and self-destructive confrontation with evil in the person of Martinez, a sadistic Mexican policeman. The pattern of the second confrontation is a repetition of the first Just as Abel kills the albino at Walatowa after he has failed to find community there, so too he goes after Martinez, also perceived as a snake *(culebra),* after he has failed utterly to find community in Los Angeles. Implication of Anglo society in this failure is again explicit and powerful, as Abel has been sent to Los Angeles by the government on its Relocation Program after serving time in prison for killing the albino.

On the beach Abel "could not see" This poverty of vision, both physical and imaginative, is akin to the inability of one-eyed Father Olguin to "see" and is related to Abel's prison experience: "After a while he could not imagine anything beyond the walls except the yard outside, the lavatory and the dining hall□or even walls, really." Yet it is by the sea that Abel gains the insight required to begin his own re-emergence For the first time he asks himself "where the trouble had begun, what the trouble was," and though he still cannot answer the question consciously, his mind turns again to the mechanical auditory images noted earlier:

The bus leaned and creaked, he felt the surge of motion and the violent shudder of the whole machine on the gravel road. The motion and the sound seized upon him. Then suddenly he was overcome with a desperate loneliness, and he wanted to cry out He looked toward the fields, but a low rise of the land lay before them.

The bus takes Abel out of a context where he has worth and meaning and into a context where "there were enemies all around." From the cultural landscape of the Canon de San Diego to the beach where "the world was open at his back," Abel's journey has taken him, as his Bahkyush ancestors, to "the edge of oblivion": "He had been long ago at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void." On the beach, then, Abel finally realizes that "he had lost his place," a realization accompanied by the comprehension of the social harmony a sense of place requires. Out of his delirium, as

if in a dream, his mind returns to the central thread of the novel, the race, and here at last. Abel is able to assign meaning to the race as a cultural activity:

The runners after evil ran as water runs, deep in the channel, in the way of least resistance, no resistance His skin crawled with excitement; he was overcome with longing and loneliness, for suddenly he saw the crucial sense in their going, of old men in white leggings running after evil in the night They were whole and indispensable in what they did, everything in creation referred to them. Because of them, perspective, proportion, design in the universe. Meaning because of them They ran with great dignity and calm, not in hope of anything, but hopelessly; neither in fear nor hatred nor despair of evil, but simply in recognition and with respect. Evil was. Evil was abroad in the night, they must venture out to the confrontation; they must reckon dues and divide the world

We recall that as Abel killed the albino "the terrible strength of the hands was brought to bear only in proportion as Abel *resisted them"* (emphasis added). The murder is an expression of Abel's disharmony and imbalance. As Abel here realizes "evil is that which is ritually not under control" [Gladys A. Reichard, *Navqjo Religion: A Study of Symbolism,* 1974]. In the ceremonial race, not in individual resistance, the runners are able to deal with evil.

Tosamah's description of the emergence journey and the relations of words and place serve as a clue to Abel's cure, but the role he plays in Abel's journey appears as ambiguous and contradictory as his character. He is at once priest and "clown." He exhibits, often on the same page, remarkable insight, buffoonery, and cynicism. He has then all the characteristics of Coyote, the trickster figure in native American mythologies. Alternately wise and foolish, Coyote in native American oral tradition is at once a buffoon and companion of the People on their emergence journey. As Coyote, a member of "an old council of clowns," the Right Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah speaks with a voice "full of authority and rebuke." As Coyote, "he likes to get under your skin; he'll make a fool out of you if you let him." Note how Momaday describes Tosamah:

He was shaggy and awful-looking in the thin, naked light; big, lithe as a cat, narrow-eyed, suggesting in the whole of his look and manner both arrogance and agony He wore black like a cleric; he had the voice of a great dog.

The perspective Tosamah offers Abel and the reader in the novel derives not so much from his peyote ceremonies, for which Momaday seems to have drawn heavily on La Barre's *The Peyote Cult,* but rather from the substance of the two sermons he gives. The second sermon, "The Way to Rainy Mountain," which Momaday has used in his book by the same title and several other contexts, addresses the relation of man, land, community, and the word. In it Tosamah describes the emergence of the Kiowa people as "a journey toward the dawn" that "led to a golden age." It was a journey which led the Kiowa to a culture which is inextricably bound to the land of the southern plains. There, much in the manner of Abel looking over the Canon de San Diego in Part I, he looks out on the landscape at dawn and muses: "your imagination comes to life, and this, you

think, is where Creation was begun." By making a re-emergence journey, Tosamah is able to feel a sense of place.

That coherent native relation to the land described so eloquently by Tosamah is counter-pointed in the novel not only by Abel's experiences but also by the memories of Milly, the social worker who becomes Abel's lover in Los Angeles. Milly, like Tosamah, is from Oklahoma. There her family too had struggled with the land, but "at last Daddy began to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own very personal and deadly enemy." Even viewed in the dawn her father's relation to the land was a despairing and hopeless one:

And every day before dawn he went to the fields without hope, and I watched him, sometimes saw him at sunrise, far away in the empty land, very small on the skyline turning to stone even as he moved up and down the rows.

The contrast with Francisco, who seems most at home in his fields, and with Tosamah, who finds in that very landscape the depth of his existence, is obvious. The passage also recalls Angela's denial of the meaning of the land and Abel's own reflections on "enemies."

In his first sermon in the novel, Tosamah addresses the crucial role of words and the imagination in the reemergence process. The sermon is a bizarre exegesis of St. John's gospel which compares Indian and Anglo attitudes toward language. As participants in oral traditions, Indians, Tosamah tells us, hold language as sacred. They have a childlike regard for the mysteries of speech. While St. John shared that sensibility, he was also a white man. And the white man obscures the truth by burdening it with words:

Now, brothers and sisters, old John was a white man, and the white man has his ways Oh gracious me, he has his ways He talks about the Word He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes, and hyphens and accents. He adds and divides and multiplies the Word And in all of this he subtracts the Truth.

The white man may indeed, Tosamah tells us, in a theory of verbal overkill that is wholly his own, "perish by the Word."

Words are, of course, a problem for Abel. On the one hand, he lacks the ceremonial words□the words of a Creation song□which properly express his relation to community and place He is inarticulate. On the other, he is plagued by a surfeit of words from white men. The bureaucratic words of the social worker's forms effectively obscure his real problems. At the murder trial, he thinks: "Word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, *their* language, and they were making a bad job of it." Again when Benally takes him to the hospital after the beach scene bureaucratic words get in the way. Indeed, Benally perceives Abel's central problem as one of words, as he equates finding community with having appropriate words

And they can't help you because you don't know how to talk to them They have a lot of words, and you know they mean something, but you don't know what, and your own

words are no good because they're not the same, they're different, and they're the only words you've got..,. You think about getting out and going home. You want to think that you belong someplace, I guess.

Tosamah perceives a similar dislocating effect of words on Abel, though he relates it to religion. Scorning his inarticulateness and innocence, he sees Abel as caught in "the Jesus scheme " Beyond his sermons, there is a special irony in the fact that Tosamah doesn't understand Abel and his problems, for he is described several times in Part II as a "physician." Though they put Abel's problems in a broader and clearer perspective, Tosamah's words are of little use to Abel.

Part III is told from the point of view of Ben Benally, a relocated Navajo who befriends Abel m Los Angeles. Roommates in Los Angeles, Ben and Abel share many things in their backgrounds. On his one visit to Walatowa, Benally finds the landscape there similar to that in which he grew up. Like Abel he was raised in that landscape without parents by his grandfather. Benally even suggests that he is somehow related to Abel since the Navajos have a clan called Jemez, the name of Abel's pueblo Moreover, we recall that Abel's father may have been a Navajo, and that Francisco regards the Navajo children who come to Walatowa during the Fiesta of Porcingula as "a harvest, in some intractable sense the regeneration of his own bone and blood." This kinship gives Benally special insight into Abel's problems and strengthens his role as Night Chanter.

Benally's childhood memories of life with his grandfather near Wide Ruins reveal a sense of place very like that Abel groped for on his return to Walatowa.

And you were little and right there in the center of everything, the sacred mountains, the snow-covered mountains and the hills, the gullies and the flats, the sundown and the night, everything□where you were little, where you were and had to be.

Moreover, this sense of place gives him words: "you were out with the sheep and could talk and sing to yourself and the snow was new and deep and beautiful."

In Los Angeles, however, Benally's sense of place is lost in his idealism and naivete. Return to the reservation seems a pale option to the glitter of Los Angeles. "There would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of old people, going no place and dying off." Like Milly, Benally believes in "Honor, Industry, the Second Chance, the Brotherhood of Man, the American Dream...." Theirs is a 50's American Dream of limitless urban possibilities. Benally believes you can have anything you want m Los Angeles and that "you never have to be alone." Yet in the very scene following his reflection on this urban cornucopia, we find Benally excluded even from the community of The Silver Dollar, counting his pennies, unable to buy a second bottle of wine Idealism obscures Benally's vision, even as Tosamah's cynicism obscures his.

Nevertheless, Benally is the Night Chanter, the singer who helps restore voice and harmony to Abel's life. In the hospital having realized the significance of the runners after evil, Abel asks Benally to sing for him.

"House made of dawn" I used to tell him about those old ways, the stones and the songs, Beautyway and Night Chant. I sang some of those things, and I told him what they meant, what I thought they were about

The songs from both the Beautyway and the Night Chant are designed to attract good and repel evil. They are both restorative and exorcising expression of the very balance and design in the universe Abel perceived in the runners after evil. Ben's words from the Night Chant for Abel are particularly appropriate, since the purpose of the Night Chant is to cure patients of insanity and mental imbalance. The structure and diction of the song demonstrate the very harmony it seeks to evoke. Dawn is balanced by evening light, dark cloud and male rain by dark mist and female rain. All things are in balance and control, for in Navajo and Pueblo religion good is control. Further note that a journey metaphor is prominent in the song ("may I walk....") and that the restorative sequence culminates with "restore my voice for me." Restoration of voice is an outward sign of inner harmony. Finally, note that the song begins with a culturally significant geographic reference: *Tsegihl* One of its central messages is that ceremonial words are bound efficaciously to place. No matter how dislocated is Benally or idiosyncratic his understandings of Navajo ceremonialism, the songs he sings over Abel clearly serve a restorative function.

Angela also visits Abel in the hospital and offers him words. She tells Abel the story her son likes "best of all." It is a story about "a young Indian brave," born of a bear and a maiden, who has many adventures and finally saves his people. Be-nally marvels at the story which reminds him of a similar story from the Mountain Chant told to him by his grandfather. Yet unlike the Navajo legend and the Kiowa bear legend told by Tosamah earlier, both etiological legends tied firmly to cultural landscapes, Angela's story is as rootless as a Disney cartoon. Abel seems to realize this, if Benally does not, for he does not respond to Angela. Benally "couldn't tell what he was thinking. He had turned his head away, like maybe the pain was coming back, you know." Abel refuses to play Angela's game a second time.

Part IV opens with a description of a grey, ominous winter landscape. Olguin is reflecting on his seven years' service at Walatowa. He claims to have grown "calm with duty and design," to have "come to terms with the town." Yet he remains estranged from the village; it is not his place. He measures his achievement in the language of commerce, noting with his predecessor Nicolas V. what good works "accrued to his account." Like Angela who was offended that Abel "would not buy and sell." Olguin seeks to at least make good the "investment" of his pride.

Whereas Abel looks to Benally's Night Chant for restoration Olguin seeks and claims to find restoration from the journal of Nicolas. In that same journal we recall Nicolas V. himself sought restoration of his Christian God:

When I cannot speak thy Name, I want Thee most to restore me Restore me' Thy spirit comes upon me & I am too frail for Thee1

The passage leaves off in a fit of coughing and seems a singularly ineffectual request.

At the same time Abel sits with his dying grandfather. Though Francisco's voice had been strong in the dawn, it now grows weaker and fades as it has on each of the six days since Abel's return to Walatowa. The few words Francisco does speak, in Town and Spanish, juxtapose in the manner of Parts I and II the memory fragments which Abel seeks to order in his own mind. Francisco is here, as Momaday suggests [in the 1973 *Puerto del Sol* interview], "a kind of reflection of Abel." The passage translates:

Little Abel. . I'm a little bit of something ... Mariano . . cold . . he gave up .. very, very cold ... conquered . . aye [exclamation of pain], Porcingula . how white, little Abel . . white devil witch ... witch .. and the black man . yes .. many black men . running, running . cold ... rapidly . little Abel, little Vidal ... What are you doing1' What are you doing?

As the seventh dawn comes these words grow into coherent fragments in Francisco's memory and serve as a final statement of the realizations about the relation of place, words, and community Abel has had earlier in the novel.

Each of the fragments is a memory of initiation. In the first Francisco recalls taking Abel and Vidal to the ruins of the old church near the Middle to see "the house of the sun."

They must learn the whole contour of the black mesa They must know it as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart. .. They must know the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years, and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were in time

This is the sense of place Abel lost in "the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused." As he is instructed to know the shape of the eastern mesa like his own hands, it is appropriate that in the *corre de gaio* the albino should first attack his hands, that in the murder scene (and Abel's memory of it) hands should be so prominent, and finally that as he lies on the beach after Martinez's brutal beating of his hands, Abel should think of Angela's effect on him in terms of hands. The relation to place taught him by Francisco is broken by each, as are his hands. Now through Francisco's memory Abel is retaught his ordered relation to place and how it is expressed in "the race of the dead." Abel similarly participates in Francisco's memories of his initiation as a runner (in the race against Mariano), as a dancer (from which he gained the power to heal), as a man (with Porcingula, "the child of the witch"), and as a hunter (as he stalks the bear).

All signs then point to a new beginning for Abel as he rises February 28, the last day of the novel. His own memory healed by Francisco's, for the first time in the novel he correctly performs a ceremonial function as he prepares Francisco for burial and delivers him to Father Olguin. He then joins the ashmarked runners in the dawn. Momaday comments on that racein his essay "The Morality of Indian Hating" [in *Ramparts* 3 (1964)]:

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

That very question□"Where are you going?"□must ring in Abel's ears as he begins the race. The time and direction of his journey are once again defined by the relation of the sun to the eastern mesa, "the house made of dawn." Out of the pain and exhaustion of the race, Abel regains his vision1 "he could see at last without having to think." That vision is not the nihilistic vision of Angela□ "beyond everything for which the mountain stands." Rather, Abel's "last reality" in the race is expressed in the essential unity and harmony of man and the land He feels the sense of place he was unable to articulate in Part I. Here at last he has a voice, words and a song. In beauty he has begun.

Source: Lawrence J. Evers, "Words and Place A Reading of House Made of Dawn," in *Western American Literature,* Vol. XI, No 4, February, 1977, pp 297-320

Critical Essay #5

Trimble is an American educator and critic. In this excerpt, she briefly analyzes some major themes and symbols in House Made of Dawn

Invited to submit to Harper & Row some poetry for publication, Momaday instead submitted the prose manuscript of *House Made of Dawn* for the Harper Prize Novel Contest, even though he had missed the deadline. Harper & Row published the book in 1968, Signet followed with a paperback edition in 1969. *"Three Sketches from House Made of Dawn"* had appeared in the October 1966 issue of *The Southern Review,* with a footnote announcing the pending publication by Harper & Row, and with a statement by the author:

The novel is about an Indian who returns from World War II and finds that he cannot recover his tribal identity; nor can he escape the cultural context in which he grew up He is torn, as they say, between two worlds, neither of which he can enter and be a whole man The story is that of his struggle to survive on the horns of a real and tragic dilemma in contemporary society .

The three sketches were incorporated into *House Made of Dawn:* "The Sparrow and the Reed" principally as the first chapter; "Homecoming" as the first part of the second chapter, and "The Albino" as part of the fourth chapter. A comparison of these sketches in their journal form with the form they have in the novel shows that Momaday had carefully revised them to achieve greater clarity and precision.

The seminal forms of other chapters were also printed in a literary journal before the novel was published. *"Two Sketches from House Made of Dawn"* appeared in the *New Mexico Quarterly* (Summer 1967): "The Bear and the Colt" was incorporated into the next to the last chapter of the novel; and "The Eagles of the Valley Grande" was placed just after what had been "Homecoming" in the first chapter.

House Made of Dawn, a novel of only sixty-five to seventy thousand words, appeared on the editor's desk. It was not a book of poems as the editor had anticipated. Frances McCullough was the editor who saw the literary value of the book and backed it. *House Made of Dawn* was dismissed casually by some reviewers, and sadly misunderstood by others. Only a handful recognized its merit. Then to the surprise not only of the author but also of numbers of incredulous reviewers and others in the publishing world, the judges for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction named *House Made of Dawn*□a first novel by an unknown author□the 1969 winner....

House Made of Dawn opens with a brief prologue that describes Abel running in an early spring dawn on the reservation. Abel's running with the dawn at the end of the last chapter, however, emerges as a religious act leading to self-realization. The intervening chapters describe the events that help explain Abel's run Momaday divides these chapters, each one headed by a specific date, into four parts of varying lengths. The first part, entitled "The Longhair," contains seven chapters having dates ranging from

July 20 to August 2, 1945. It is set in a pueblo at "Walatowa, Cafion de San Diego." Parts two and three take place in Los Angeles in 1952□the former, "The Priest of the Sun," occurring on January 26 and 27, and the latter, 'The Night Chanter," on February 20. The final part, "The Dawn Runner," returns the reader to Walatowa and contains two chapters dated February 27 and 28, 1952.

Momaday's combination of specific chronological ordering with the circular repetition of the scene showing Abel's run emerges as a key to understanding the novel's essential nature. The book contains oppositions arising from two points. One relates to the point of view Momaday expressed in his [January 31,1971 lecture atColorado StateUniversity entitled *"The American Indian in the Conflict of Tribalism and Modern Society"]:* the differences between the white's and the Indian's view of the world and die need to reveal to each culture the knowledge possessed by the other.

The haunting descriptions of the always acutely present landscape contained in the novel spring from Momaday's background. As he says in "What will happen to the land?": "Landscapes tend to stand out in my memory. When I think back to a particular time in my life, I tend to see it in terms of its setting, the background in which it achieves for me a certain relief. Or, to put it another way, I am inclined closely to associate events with the physical dimensions in which they take place ... my existence is indivisible with the land."

The other opposition has something of the same nature, is, if one likes, a concretization of the first opposition. What the reader initially thinks he knows about what happens in the novel, and why, sometimes turns out later to contrast with what he actually does know. As a minor illustration, ask what theater Abel served in during the Second World War, and then ask what is the basis of that knowledge.

As the novel continues, the effect of these oppositions grows more profound. At least with reference to the book, if the contrasts between actual knowledge and apparent knowledge can be reconciled, it will be clear that the materials Momaday presents have not been merely organized into unity by the artistic conventions available for that purpose but rather have become fused into unity through the combined efforts of both author and reader. These efforts might eventually yield cultural results also.

Plotting the events of this novel has some conventional aspects. In *House Made of Dawn* specific dates stand at the head of the chapters. But the events Momaday depicts are forced into an apparently plotted order by those dates. In actuality, they explode out of their chronological patterns, and not only because Momaday depicts them more than once. Many have taken place at some period before the date on which we see them described. We are sometimes not clear about the specific time of their occurrence. We are not sure, for example, how old Abel was when he captured the eagle as a member of the Eagle Watchers Society, nor how old "old enough" was when Francisco took Abel and his older brother, Vidal, to explain to them the movements of the sun along the silhouetted rim of Black Mesa.

In one sense, it is important that we not be sure when such events occur; their having happened becomes more pervasively influential that way. Their mystery, part of their significance, increases.

The book, then, is a pool, circular in structure, not a rising-action-climax-falling-action-all-from-the-same-point-of-view piece of fiction. Momaday patently does not use a consistent point of view, for example. In Part Three, 'The Night Chanter," Momaday presents Benally, Abel's Navaho friend in Los Angeles, as a conventional first person narrator. The other three parts are not so conventional. For example, Part Two, "The Priest of the Sun," utilizes an essentially omniscient point of view, but one noticeably modified by stream-of-conscious-ness when it portrays Abel's agonized return to a hazy awareness after his severe beating by Martinez, a Los Angeles policeman who took pleasure in tormenting the Indians he came into contact with.

A strong sense of the mystery of what goes on in the novel emerges most clearly from Momaday's characterizations. As there seems to be no likely cause-effect pattern in parts of the plot, so there is no fully graspable sense of motive behind the characters' behavior. In fact, the vivid descriptions of the land are balanced by a vagueness, a mysten-ousness in the descriptions of the appearances and behavior of the characters, with only a few exceptions. Momaday describes Angela St. John thoroughly, and the Albino. The others, even the central figure, Abel, are not thoroughly described. However, even the detailed descriptions of Angela and the Albino add to the novel's sense of mystery. Especially bewildering are the motives behind their conduct□conduct having extremely important consequences in Abel's life. The scene during which Abel kills the Albino provides the most striking instance of Momaday's refusal to give an explicit explanation of motives, Abel's as well as the Albino's.

Generally speaking, those figures whom we meet at Walatowa, including Francisco (Abel's grandfather), and the Catholic priests, Father Ol-guin and his distant predecessor, Father Nicolas, remain in deeper shadow than do people like Milly and the "relocated" Indians Tosamah and Benally, all of whom we see in Los Angeles.

If we as readers remained in shadow, the novel could not challenge us so deeply as it does. Before we can grow enlightened about the sometimes mysterious characters in the book and their sometimes bewildering conduct, we have to recognize that, as in his poetry, Momaday writes with symbolic intent. When we look for symbolic significance, we no longer need be discomfited by the lack of information about, for example, the disease that had "stiffened" one of Francisco's legs. Instead, we can hypothesize about the significance of the disease and its bearing on the novel's themes. Then if we wish to guess which disease had afflicted Francisco, we have a basis to use. We work backward from the significance of the crippled leg to what might have been its literal cause rather than the other way around.

The Indian subject matter of the novel contributes a source of symbolism external to but complementing the symbolism created within the context of the novel by such things as Abel's and Angela's names and the Albino's sickly whiteness. We may resolve many of the mysterious things unique to *House Made of Dawn,* but Momaday, in making his

points about the range of relationships possible between cultures, wishes to leave at least the non-Indian reader with an abiding sense of what he does not know. The novel's many scenes depicting Indian religious activities are the primary means of presenting the mystery that must remain. The activities associated with the feast of Santiago, a Catholic saint who metamorphosed into the originator of the pre-Christian Pueblo culture, provide one example, for one has only a general idea of the dynamics of the "rooster pulling" ceremony, even after reading Father Olguin's tale exposing the possible origin of the ceremony, and the ancient ceremony enacted seven days later, on August first, remains as essentially mysterious to the reader as it is unsettling to Father Olguin As Momaday says of the people of the town, "after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky "

Of course this sort of symbolism connects to the symbolism unique to the novel. The song Benally sings ("House Made of Dawn": hence the novel's title) to his battered friend the night before Abel leaves Los Angeles to return to Walatowa is one version of the last song of a formal nine-day purification ceremony in which the major participants are a priest and a patient. Within the context of the work, Benally would be serving as a symbolic priest preparing Abel for his return to the reservation and his subsequent ability to make the ritual run in the dawn after Francisco's death. Abel makes the run either despite or because of his great physical and psychological anguish.

In the recurring ritual running, the themes of the novel most intensely fuse with the traditional symbolism of the Indian religious beliefs. As Abel resumes consciousness after his beating at the hands of Martinez, a beating ultimately arising from his refusal to fear Martinez, he remembers what he saw after knifing the Albino. He was hiding and saw one group of runners, the "runners after evil," go by "with great dignity and calm, not in the hope of anything, but hopelessly; neither in fear nor hatred nor despair of evil, but simply in recognition and with respect. Evil was "

The mystery still remains, for although Momaday explains that Abel "suddenly saw the crucial sense in their going," he does not say whether the insight came as Abel watched from hiding on the night of August 1, 1945, or as he remembered the event during his struggle back to life on the night of lanuary 26, 1952.

Whichever the case, the insight implies a recognition of the need for forgiveness that a neutral or resigned response to the presence of something negative or evil involves. This process also includes the forgiveness of those who called him from his life to fight a war he did not grasp and who put him in prison for six years for killing a being he considered a snake, and therefore evil, *i.e.,* the Albino. Perhaps he could run, finally, because he recognized that the snake, too, should continue to exist□a recognition that goes beyond the Christianity which for so many years in the Pueblo preached forgiveness.

In addition to Momaday's treatment of evil, other themes appear in the book. Perhaps the suffering of the urban Indians is the most noticeable of these, rendered more painful to watch because of their reluctance to admit to themselves that they suffer. Their strategies for avoiding such recognition make up much of the material in Parts Two and

Three of the novel. Momaday does not assert that suffering is an Indian prerogative, of course, for all the non-Indian characters of any importance to the novel also suffer What he does suggest is that Indians may have ways to overcome suffering which others might profit from knowing about. These others might risk the loss of some of their own culturally determined portions of their sense of self, but that risk would be no more than that which cultures subordinate to Western Civilization were forced to take. Growth to maturity requires some such risk for every individual anyway. Benally, however, sometimes yearns rather sentimentally for the tribal way of life. We see this longing in his description of the night before Abel returns.

In-depth scholarly evaluation of *House Made of Dawn* has been slow in appearing. The complexity of the novel and the layers of possible interpretation may delay what will be a growing body of evaluative work. Hopefully, if studied for sociological or anthropological reasons, the book will not be dismissed without adequate attention to its literary value. So, too, if studied as literature, it should not be accepted as art only but also as a recreation of unique human experience....

[House Made of Dawn] is a complex, symbolic expression of how language and culture tend through their own territorial imperatives to encompass one, sometimes to a point of isolation. If one voluntarily or forcedly intermixes with another culture and its language, he may find that in the interim he has lost both cultures and must become reacculturated. *House Made of Dawn* transcends any Indian problem; that the novel is a universal statement does not make the effect of Momaday's portrayal of the deculturation of an Indian youth any the less lamentable. If man is the archetypal Adam, in the archetypal Eden, year by year, society by society, generation after generation□if he is the "house made of dawn," the regeneration comes about.

Source: Martha Scott Tnmble, *N. Scott Momday,* Boise State College, 1973

Critical Essay #6

In the following essay, Hylton presents a thematic analysis of House Made of Dawn, *relating "the tragic odyssey of a man forcibly removed from [the Native American] psychic environment and placed within a culture light-years away from the attitudes, values, and goals of his former life."*

Abel was the land and he was of the land; he was a long-hair and from that single fact stemmed the fearsome modern dilemma explored by N. Scott Momaday in *House Made of Dawn.* Abel is an Indian of the American Southwest, a member of a culture for whom Nature is the one great reality to which men's lives are pegged, the only verity upon which men may rely. Within this massive concept lie all the religion, all the mores and ethics, all the spiritual truth any man may require. To shatter the concept is to shatter the man. Momaday describes the tragic odyssey of a man forcibly removed from this psychic environment and placed within a culture light-years away from the attitudes, values, and goals of his former life. His anguished ordeal, heightened by his encounter with a white woman, endows him at last with courage and wisdom; he comes to know who he is and what he must do to maintain that identity.

In the Indian view, the universe or Nature is a great cosmological unity characterized by a harmony and oneness of all living things. Religion is not a thing apart from life, it is life itself. Oral communication is minimal; words are not needed between people sharing a common culture whose limitations and capabilities are known to all. Abel growing up in this timeless tradition is endowed with an understanding that transcends the ordinary limits of the word: "the boy could sense his grandfather's age, just as he knew somehow that his mother was soon going to die of her illness. It was nothing he was told, but he knew it anyway and without understanding, as he knew already the motion of the sun and the seasons."

After four centuries of Christianity, the essential way of life is unchanged. The people still pray to the old deities in their own language. They have assumed the names and some of the habits of their enemies but have kept their own souls and then-own secrets: "in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting." Evil spirits as well as good are a part of the pantheon, and Momaday uses both in the unfolding of his remarkable novel. Slowly, by means of fragmentary glimpses into the lives of Abel, Ben, Francisco, and others, Momaday leads to an understanding not only of the Indian's dilemma in the modern world, but of Abel's particular torment and what brought it about Francisco, Abel's grandfather, has lived all his life on the reservation, within and a part of this culture. The important events of his life are totally alien to outsiders: the ritual killing of the bear to symbolize the coming of age, the marks of pollen made above the eyes of the bear, the arduous period of instruction preliminary to his participation in a sacred ceremony, and the healing powers he later acquires as a result of his growing "understanding." In many ways, Abel and his grandfather are much alike and only a very careful reading of some passages will make clear which of them is being referred to

One is reminded that the diminutive of Abel, "Abelito", is much like "Abuehto", the affectionate term for grandfather. The resemblance is not accidental, of course; in a sense, his close attachment to his grandfather and the old ways is the burden Abel must straggle with during the course of the novel.

Abel is not a superficial human being. His suffering is profound and moving, as is the catharsis wrought by that suffering. In a striking passage describing the shoes Abel wears when he leaves the reservation, Momaday points up the differences in attitude1 "they squeaked when he walked. In the only frame of reference he had ever known, they called attention to themselves, simply, honestly ... but now and beyond his former frame of reference, the shoes called attention to Abel They were brown and white and they were conspicuously new and too large ... they shone, they clattered and creaked ... and they were nailed to his feet. There were enemies all around, and he knew that he was ridiculous in their eyes." Years later, after a stint in the army, he returns, reeling drunkenly from the steps of the noisy bus into the arms of his weeping grandfather: "everything in advance of his going□he could remember whole and in detail It was the recent past, the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not put together in his mind." Fully twenty-four hours elapse before Abel begins to realize where he is, both geographically and culturally. Not until he walks out, just before dawn, to a high and distant hill where he sees the vast beauty of the valleys and remembers incidents from his youth, does a kind of peace come to him. But it does not last. Less than two weeks later, during the feast of Santiago, an evil spirit reveals himself to Abel, who, acting entirely within the Indian tradition, kills him.

The albino or, significantly, the white man, has been seen earlier as a figure of evil when Francisco heard whisperings from the corn and was afraid; after he left, the albino emerged or rather seemed to materialize from the green leaves. Since corn is life itself to the Indian, to hear an evil spirit breathing in the corn is a dangerous thing. A snake, or culebra, is likewise a symbol of evil, and when the albino threatens to turn into a snake, Abel's course is clear. Significantly, after his years in prison his attitude is unchanged "They must know," Ben says, "that he would kill the white man again, if he had the chance ... for he would know what the white man was, and he would kill him if he could. A man kills such an enemy if he can."

Abel's real suffering and purgation begin after he leaves prison and wanders to Los Angeles There he meets Ben, Milly, and Tosamah. Ben, like Abel, has been raised on the reservation but has managed to make an adjustment of sorts. Ben can compromise, he is willing to overlook evil or un-kindness and is able to see good in most situations: "You know, you have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all ... You wonder how you can get yourself into the swing of it, you know? ... And you want to do it, because you can see how good it is ... it's money and clothes and having plans and going someplace fast." Because Ben wants to be a part of it, he is willing to live on the fringe of white society, like a child outside a candy store window. When he speaks, one can clearly hear the voice of a lonely man: "this place is always cold and kind of empty when it rains," "you never have to be alone. You go downtown and there are a lot of people all

around and they're having a good time." Ben has not yet admitted to himself that he is only an outsider; he feels the American Dream is his, too, and he is committed to pursuing it. "I could find someplace with a private bathroom if I wanted to, easy. A man with a good job can do just about anything he wants."

Tosamah (John Big Bluff Tosamah) is a very different sort of man. Like Ben he acknowledges his heritage but is not chained to it like Abel. "Priest of the Sun" is a key section for understanding the Indian concept of "The Word" as opposed to the Christian. Tosamah begins by stating in Latin, "In Principio erat Verbum." Caught up in the mystery of the words, he continues, "in the darkness ... the smallest seed of sound ... took hold of the darkness and there was light; it took hold out of the stillness and there was motion forever... it scarcely was; but it was and everything began." But at this point, Ms voice and attitude abruptly switch from that of a priest to that of a huckster, as he tells how this mystery was corrupted by a Christian interpretation: "But it was more than the Truth. The Truth was overgrown with fat; the fat was John's god and God stood between John and the Truth ... and he said, 'In the Beginning was the Word .,.' and man, right then and there he should have stopped... Old John was a white man and the white man builds upon [the word], he adds and divides and multiplies the Word and in all of this he subtracts the Truth." Tosamah1 s bitterness can be heard in his parting words to his "panshoners": "Good night and get yours."

Tosamah, the Priest of the Sun, is as much an outsider in white society as Father Olguin is in Indian society. The dry, mechanical Mass which Father Olguin conducts contrasts interestingly with the peyote ritual at which Tosamah presides, where the mysticism each participant comes to feel is translated into a moving and spontaneous prayer without the embarrassment of spoken prayer; it is part of the old tradition. The tears of one of the participants are not despised, they are accepted; weeping is no disgrace if the occasion calls for weeping. The Mass has the bread, the wine, the incense, the bell; the peyote ritual has the peyote buttons, the prayer sticks, the "makings," and the drummer. The Indian's ritual marking is with pollen, and the priest's with ashes. Tosamah reverts to a caricature of American speech in explaining the impact of peyote: "that little old woolly booger turns you on like a light, man. Daddy peyote is the vegetal representation of the sun," recalling the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

Where the Indian view is at one with Nature, one might say the Catholic view, as typified by Father Olguin and Angela Grace St. John, exists in spite of Nature; the basic difference would seem to doom in advance any hope of accord. Reflecting the missionary zeal which is characteristic of his faith, Father Olguin tries over the years to enlarge his small flock and to urge his parishioners away from the old ways. In the end, he comes to recognize tacitly that some old and final cleavage still exists which he can never bridge. He tries, however, to make the legal authorities understand, as best he can, what prompted Abel to kill the albino. Once again we see the clash of the two cultures: "I believe that this man was moved to do what he did by an act of imagination so compelling as to be inconceivable to us.... Yes, yes, yes. But these are the facts: he killed a man□took the life of another human being.... Homicide is a legal term, but the

law is not my context; and certainly it isn't his.... Murder is a moral term. Death is a universal human term."

Both the parole officer and the Relocation people attempt to keep Abel out of trouble, but his problems only deepen. 'They have a lot of words," as Ben says, "and you know they mean something but you don't know what ... Everything is different and you don't know how to get used to it" Ben understands Abel's plight, and is compassionate. Tosamah understands and is contemptuous.

Ben and Milly literally keep Abel alive in his darkest hours. Where he has understanding based on knowledge, she has understanding based on love. "She was a lot like Ben. She believed in Honor, Industry, the Second Chance, the Brotherhood of Man, the American Dream and him□Abel; she believed in him." She also loved him; she gave him money, a place to stay, and ministered to his needs out of love. On a few rare occasions, she could even make him laugh. But Milly is gentle and vulnerable. And Abel is possessed by an evil spirit. They are drawn together by their awful loneliness, but it is not enough. All her experience had been a getting away from the land where his had been a returning. At the height of his suffering, her name echoes through his mind; only her name, and a question mark. Sadly, the name is remembered, but not the identity.

Abel sinks ever deeper in the white world's web. One night, too drunk and helpless to answer Tosamah's taunts, he sets out to seek some kind of release, to kill the evil spirit, the culebra, that has brought about his misery. Instead of exorcising the evil, he undergoes a mortal combat (presumably at the hands of Martinze, the sadistic cop) that leaves him broken and near death. "He had lost his place. He had long ago been at the center, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void ... The sea reached and waned, licked after him and withdrew, falling off forever in the abyss."

Abel, badly beaten and lying on the beach, is unable to see because of his swollen eyes. We remember that Father Olguin's vision is also poor and that the albino masks his weak sight with small dark glasses. All, in one way or another, "see" with difficulty. The albino's vision is clouded by evil, Father Olguin's by his Christian beliefs, and Abel's by not accepting his birthright. If Abel's suffenng suggests that of Oedipus, then we might say that the grunion form a chorus, and it is no mean comparison. Momaday's evocation of the grunion metaphor seems singularly appropriate for the situation. They, like Abel, belong to the natural order of things; they respond from the tradition of centuries, only to fall victim to the wanton ways of the white man. Abel, too, has been beaten by an evil spirit of the white world and must somehow get back to his own environment in order to survive. "His body was mangled and racked with pain. His body, like his mind, had turned on him; it was his enemy." He has tried to do what seemed to him must be done: extirpate evil. But he has failed; in the white man's world, right and wrong are not the same, and the old values somehow do not apply. He remembers seeing, in his youth, the old men running after evil. Here, it is not the same. He knows at last that he must survive beyond his pain, and return to the life he understands.

Abel has indeed, "lost his place." A reason for his particular suffering lies in the ancient Indian belief that all secrets, even those of sorcery and evil, are divulged during sexual intercourse. Abel had lain with a woman, Angela Grace St. John, and both were altered by the experience.

When Angela comes to live at Los Ojos (The Eyes), she is a distant, disturbed woman. Her attitudes are as far as possible from the Indian's. She keeps herself coldly apart from human contact and "would have her bath and read from the lives of the saints." She despises her body and the child growing within her. "She could think of nothing more vile and obscene than the raw flesh and blood of her body, the ravelled veins and gore upon her bones. And now the monstrous fetal form, the blue, blind, great headed thing growing within and feeding upon her ... at odd moments she wished with all her heart to die by fire, fire of such intense heat that her body should dissolve in it all at once." To the suggestion of disharmony is added the hint of evil: Abel would not bargain, hence, "it remained for her to bring about a vengeance."

Their coming together is an epiphany for each of them; she draws from him a kind of vision she has never experienced before, a "knowingness" of who she is, and of her relationship to other living things and to life itself. But the evil spirit which has hitherto clouded her days now descends upon him. "Angela put her white hands to his body. Abel put his hands to her white body."

Father Olguin is the first to sense the change in her. He has seen her as an ally with whom he can share his world of words; a fellow outsider in the Indian world. But "she listened through him to the sound of thunder and of rain that fell upon the mountains miles away,... she had a craving for the rain ... 'Oh, my God' she said, laughing, 'I am heartily sorry ... for having offended Thee.'" Her laughter horrifies him almost as much as her confession.

When the sky darkens and the storm breaks, Angela no longer fears nor shrinks from Nature: she "stood transfixed in the open door and breathed deep into her lungs the purest electric scent of the air. She closed her eyes, and the clear aftervision of the rain, which she could still hear and feel so perfectly as to conceive of nothing else, obliterated all the mean and myriad fears that had laid hold of her in the past." From that moment on, evil stalks Abel's steps; the disharmony and alienation that had characterized Angela's life now infects his.

Not until years later, when she visits Abel in the hospital and, in effect, releases him, does the evil finally begin to ebb. As she speaks of her son, Peter, and the Indian tales he loves to hear, Ben remembers the stories told by his grandfather who spoke from the legends of his heritage. Abel understands; he does not speak, nor refer to her visit afterwards. Hearing Angela and seeing how she has changed has at last made clear to him just how and why he has lost his way.

House Made of Dawn is an intricately structured novel, and difficult to analyze. Time, for the Indian, is conceived not as a rigidly divided set of days, months, and years, but as experience and wisdom and knowledge, occurring today or yesterday or many

yesterdays ago. Memory is the only immortality. Through memory history is transmitted from generation to generation. Memory, too, presents the novel; events from Francisco's past, or from Abel's, Ben's, or Tosamah's, are juxtaposed with events of the present moment, giving the reader a dimensional montage of thought and attitude.

Few of us suffer from our pasts as Abel must suffer. The Abel who comes back to the reservation to tend his dying grandfather is broken in body but healed in spirit. Wordlessly, he attends the last hours until death, then dresses the body according to the ancient ways. Summoned at night, the priest, significantly, is indignant over the time. "Good Heavens, couldn't you have waited until□Do you know what time it is?" By then, Abel indeed knows what time it is as far as his life is concerned, and he knows, too, that the particular hour of the day or night is of no consequence. Father Olguin, for all his good intentions, understands the Indian no better than his late nineteenth-century predecessor, Fray Nicholas, who, we learn from the old journal, was called on a similar occasion only after the Indian rites had been performed on a body.

After a long and bitter odyssey and much suffering, Abel has come home. He knows at last where he belongs in the scheme of things. During the long vigil before Francisco's death, he begins once again to feel a peace and a kinship with his heritage: "it was the room in which he was born, in which his mother and his brother died. Just then, and for moments and hours and days, he had no memory of being outside of it." When Abel leaves the mission, rubs himself with ashes, and goes on to join the other dawn runners, he is not only assuming his role as male survivor of his family, but also completing the final phase of his own spiritual healing. As he runs, as he becomes a part of the orderly continuum of interrelated events that constitute the Indian universe, Abel is the land, and he is of the land once more.

Source: Marion Willard Hylton, "On a Trail of Pollen Mo-maday's House Made of Dawn," m *Critique,* Vol. XTV, No 2, 1972, pp. 60-69.

Adaptations

House Made of Dawn was adapted as a film by Richardson Morse in 1987. It starred Larry Lit-tlebird, Judith Doty and John Saxon. The screenplay was written by N. Scott Momaday and Morse. It was released straight to videocassette by New Line Cinema in 1996.

The unabridged audio book of the novel, read by Scott Forbes, is available from Books On Tape, Inc. It was recorded in 1976.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the tribal customs of Native Americans from different parts of the United States, such as the northern or southeastern regions of the country. Report on how their practices differ from those of the Pueblo peoples of the Southeast.

Explore one of the American Indian Movement protests of the late 1960s or 1970s, such as the armed siege at Wounded Knee in 1973 or the standoff at the Oglala Reservation in 1975. What were the demands of the protesters? Did the protesters get what they wanted?

Richard Nixon, a president often associated with corruption in government, is considered a hero by many Native Americans. Why? Prepare a report on Nixon's policies and how they benefited Native Americans.

Examine the statistics of Native American participation in World War II. Discuss the ways m which this participation significantly changed the structure and expectations of Native American life

Talk to someone from a Native American group, either on the phone or through one of their websites. Identify the challenges facing Indians in the twenty-first century.

Compare and Contrast

Late 1940s: After Europe is decimated as a result of World War II, America becomes an economic superpower, creating a thriving economy and a population boom.

1968: The generation of Americans born in the late 1940s and early 1950s is dubbed the Baby Boom generation. Many members of this generation reject the materialistic culture and emphasize spiritual values

Today: America has experienced the longest economic expansion in its history.

Late 1940s: The Indian Relocation program uses government money to move Native Americans off of the reservations. The aim was to assimilate them into mainstream culture and provide economic and social opportunities.

1968: The American Indian Movement addresses the issue of police brutality against Indians in Minneapolis and soon becomes a nationwide organization advocating Indian rights.

Today: Government efforts strive to make Native American groups economically self-sufficient.

Late 1940s: Segregation laws across the country prohibit blacks from using the same public services as whites, and permits exclusion of different races from private establishments.

1968: After more than a decade of civil rights protests, the fight for equality turns violent on a national scale in the mid-1960s, with race riots in major cities across America.

Today: Federal laws against discrimination are generally enforced, and abusers are subject to civil suits.

Late 1940s: Television starts to become widespread and influences popular culture.

1968: National awareness increases as television broadcast color footage of the summer's racial riots and the police actions at die political conventions into people's living rooms.

Today: The growing number of homes connected to the Internet resembles the postwar growth of television ownership.

What Do I Read Next?

One of Momaday's best-known works is *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), his history of the last days of the Kiowa people.

Momaday's childhood on the Jemez reservation and at Shiprock in the Navajo country is hauntingly recounted in *The Names,* published in 1976. More than a memoir, it blends genealogy and folklore with personal reminiscences.

Like Abel, the protagonist of the novel *Ceremony* (1977) is also a Native American returning home after service in World War II. It was written by Leslie Marmon Silko, one of the most respected contemporary Native American novelists.

James Welch is a Native American novelist who writes about the American West. His first book, *Winter in the Blood* (1974), is set in the early 1970s.

A summary of Indian perspectives can be gathered *from Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-1992* (1991), edited by Peter Nabokov and published by Penguin.

Published in 1970, Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was an international bestseller. Subtitled "An Indian History of the American West," it presents an interesting, readable story.

Among memoirs by Native Americans, *Black Elk Speaks* holds a place of high esteem. Written by poet and novelist John G. Neihardt in 1932, it was neglected until psychologist Carl Jung's interest sparked a revised edition in the 1950s.

Topics for Discussion

1. Examine the statistics of Native American participation in World War II. Discuss the ways in which this participation significantly changed the structure and expectations of Native American life.

2. Talk to someone from a Native American group, either on the phone or through one of their websites. Identify the challenges facing Indians in the twenty-first century.

3. The protagonist of the story, Abel is a Native American war veteran who struggles to find his place in the world. Some critics have interpreted Abel's behavior as being caused by the strain of trying to balance the expectations of white culture with Indian culture. Others assert that the novel's flashbacks indicate that Abel was estranged and uncommunicative even before he left the reservation for the army. What do you think? Why?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Investigate the tribal customs of Native Americans from different parts of the United States, such as the northern or southeastern regions of the country. Report on how their practices differ from those of the Pueblo peoples of the Southeast.

2. Explore one of the American Indian Movement protests of the late 1960s or 1970s, such as the armed siege at Wounded Knee in 1973 or the standoff at the Oglala Reservation in 1975. What were the demands of the protesters? Did the protesters get what they wanted?

3. Richard Nixon, a president often associated with corruption in government, is considered a hero by many Native Americans. Why? Prepare a report on Nixon's policies and how they benefited Native Americans.

Literary Precedents

Readers familiar with Ira Hayes, the Indian hero of "Iwo Jima," will notice an immediate similarity to Abel. Both Abel and Ira were war heroes who came back home and became victims of white prejudice and the lack of opportunities for American Indians. While the plot is cast in familiar Anglo-American terms, much of the power of the images and concepts stems from early native-American writers, such as Black Elk, Lame Deer, and others who recorded visions and preserved sacred traditions of the culture. Contemporary literature, such as Cogewea, the Half Blood by Mourning Dove (1927), or The Man Who Killed the Deer by Frank Waters (1942) recorded the struggle of halfbloods, illegitimate children, and other misplaced American Indians who must discover where they belong.

While much of the cultural material is clearly based in Native American texts, Momaday also owes much to traditional American writers, particularly William Faulkner. From Faulkner, Momaday learned to create a rich style, and to mold the passage of time by tale-telling and memory-sharing. Also, like Faulkner, Momaday insists that all his works are part of a larger story.

Repeating stories throughout his works establishes a sense of continuity and reveals their autobiographical source.

Momaday has also established a strong example for many other Native American writers, identifying many themes accepted as common to nativeAmerican experience, and exhibiting the variety of genres and styles (from Ernest Hemingway to James Joyce) that can portray those experiences.

Further Study

Mayhill, Mildred, *The Kiowas,* University of Oklahoma Press, 1962. Mayhill presents a well-documented sociological account of the Kiowa people

Nelson, Robert M., *The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction,* Lang Publishers, 1993. Examines works by Momaday, Silko, and Welch

Nelson Waniek, Marilyn, "The Power of Language in N Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn,"* in *Minority Voices,* Vol. 4, No 1, 1980, pp 23-8

Addresses the importance of language in the novel

Scarberry-Garcia, Susan, *Landmarks of Healing- A Study of House Made of Dawn,* University of New Mexico Press, 1990.

A rare book-length consideration of the novel that touches upon all of the varied theories, offering an excellent overview of critical opinion

Sharma, R S., "Vision and Form in N Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn,"* in *Indian Journal of American Studies,* Vol 12, No. 1, January 1982, pp 69-79.

Discusses the roles of vision and narrative form in the novel.

Zachrau, Thekla, "N. Scott Momaday Towards an Indian Identity," in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal,* Vol 3, No 1, 1979, pp 39-56.

An overview of Momaday's career, including his attempts to use varied storytelling techniques to bring the Kiowa vision of reality to a broader public.

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Sprague, Marshall, "Anglos and Indians," in *The New York Times Book Review,* June 9, 1968.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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