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N. Scott Momaday: Towards an Indian Identity

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During the past twenty years ethnic literature and its impact have increased considerably. However, in comparison to Black or Jewish literature, Indian writing has played a relatively small role. While Black and Jewish writers defined themselves in terms of their ethnic identities and expressed their problems and concerns within this context, American Indians did not consider themselves primarily Indians, belonging to one common ethnic group, but emphasized their specific tribal origins as means for self-identification. In the 1970s, this attitude changed significantly with the advent of "Red Power"—a political and sociological movement indicative of the birth of a new sense of identity.[1]

Since Indian history was originally transmitted through a strong, formalized oral tradition, there are virtually no written accounts of the original tribal histories,[2] and as a consequence of the modern Indian experience, information on differing American Indian cultures is relatively poor. The destruction of numerous Indian tribes and their being forced to live together in reservations led to an erosion of varying traditions and life styles, but at the same time, it contributed to a growing awareness of being primarily Indian. A new prototype was created from characteristics which were supposed to be basically Indian: an undisturbed close relationship to the natural environment and a strong adherence to cultural values—values which actually had been distilled from different tribal traditions. As the prototype arose from an opposition to the white mass society, constantly denounced in the 1970's, it

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resulted in the image of a wholesome Indian existence with distinct ideological traits.

On a literary level, N. Scott Momaday's works reflect a sociological development which seems to indicate a reversal of roles: today it is the Indian way of life which is praised as an example to be followed by the white man. Momaday's first novel *House Made of Dawn*—awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1969—depicts the painful search for identity; *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) expands the idea and emphasizes the importance of Indian identity; and *The Names* (1976) evolves this concept in a more individual context.

House Made of Dawn[3]

Two of the relatively few commentaries on Momaday's writings illustrate particularly well the opposing views representative of white society's attitudes to contemporary American Indian problems. Apparently Marion W. Hylton[4] completely accepts the idea of an intact Indian existence superior to modern mass society. She approaches *House Made of Dawn* with a purely emotional respect for Indian culture that comes close to awe, and, therefore, leads to numerous misinterpretations. Harold McAllister,[5] however, gives a thoroughly Catholic interpretation by describing Angela as the Virgin Mary who offers the path of salvation to Abel. McAllister neglects the Indian dimension of this novel and overstates the importance of a cultural integration where white values predominate. While the interweaving of elements from Indian and non-Indian cultures is characteristic for *House Made of Dawn* and represents the basis for its structure and themes, it is, however, the strong emphasis on Indian qualities which determines this novel.

Momaday, himself a Kiowa Indian, combines and juxtaposes Christian and Indian motifs and images, and thereby attempts to give his novel a larger, more universal framework. Modern man's plight, his disturbed relationship to nature, is illustrated by an Indian with the biblical name "Abel" who wanders between the white man's world, represented by a hostile urban environment, and the Indian world of his forefathers which is closely linked to nature. The novel depicts different aspects of the concept of alienation, like the feeling of powerlessness, the sense of meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and self-alienation. The protagonists who live in a white urban environment suffer from the impression that their destinies are controlled by external

agents. As they are removed from the established values of their native communities, they feel culturally estranged and socially isolated. These sentiments and a vague notion of meaninglessness lead to self-estrangement, yet finally motivate the main protagonist, Abel, to search for means of identification, which he ultimately finds in his Indian background. The narrative technique supports the basic themes of alienation and search for identity which are varied and played upon in the manner of a musical composition.

A key to the structure and the plot of the novel is implicitly and explicitly provided by the figure of the old man Francisco, Abel's Indian grandfather, who still succeeds in living in harmony with his Indian background by assimilating the Christian culture. Francisco, who is at the same time a holy man of his Indian tribe and a sacristan of the Catholic church, remembers the upbringing of his grandsons:

> . . . they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were in time. . . . But his grandsons knew already; . . . the larger motion and meaning of the great organic calendar itself, the emergency of dawn and dusk, summer and winter, the very cycle of the sun and of all the suns that were and were to come. (HD, 162/3)

According to the Indian "organic calendar," the novel is divided into four parts, preceded by a prologue which is not dated and has a legendary, timeless quality. The first part takes place in the countryside approximately four weeks after the summer solstice, the second in the city about four weeks after the winter solstice, the third in the city during the early spring rains, and the fourth again in the countryside at the time of the "long race of the black men at dawn."

The structure of the novel completes a circle: the last two chapters take up the themes of the prologue and the first chapter; the sections called "July 20" and "Feb. 27" begin in a parallel way with a description of nature, as do the sections "July 21" and "Feb. 28." The first and the last word of the novel are conventional Indian formulas for beginning and ending a story; the prologue begins with the prayer words "There was a house made of dawn," and the book ends with Abel's song: "House made of pollen, House made of dawn." Furthermore, the last two sections thematically close the circle begun in the first two: Francisco, the representative of a threatened Indian culture, dies, and Abel, the representative of a

"lost generation" alienated from its culture, finally comes home and takes over from his grandfather the traditional rite of the long race. The fact that Indian mythology provides the basic structure for the narrative and binds together the various subplots seems to reflect the author's belief in the supportive quality of Indian culture. Momaday uses Indian themes to link different episodes, diverging states of consciousness and levels of time.

At the beginning of the novel, on July 20, 1945, the anniversary of the Kiowas' historical defeat in 1890, the old man Francisco remembers his youth and importance within a still-intact Indian tradition symbolized by the race for good hunting and harvest; several years after the race, in 1889, when his leg is crippled by disease, he records the event by drawing a man running in the snow. At the end of the novel, Francisco remembers on his deathbed how he watched with his grandson Abel the "race of the dead," and his own death is described in the terms of the race. The motif of the runner not only connects the historical factual past outside the novel with the fictional past inside the novel, but also past and present within the narrative frame. Furthermore, the metaphor of the runner fuses the many subplots into the main plot of Abel's attempt to discover the right pace, to regain his lost identity. Abel is twice on the run—the first time before the novel begins, when he leaves his Indian society and fights the white man's war. His second race begins after an illusionary rest in his native community with the ritual killing of the albino, who stands for the frightening white man, and it lasts seven years until at the dawn of the seventh day of the ritual Abel becomes a traditional "Dawn Runner." Even small details from Indian mythology like the magic number "7" function as binding links between the remembered fictional past and the reported fictional present, both by a third-person narrative voice.

Form and content of this novel are built upon mythological themes. The image of the bear, for example, recurs in different contexts and Indian legends. Angela, the white woman to whom Abel makes love, compares him to a strong youthful bear, and later on tells her son a story of a boy born of a bear and a maiden; the story resembles a Navajo legend that Ben remembers. In one of his sermons, Tosamah, the self-appointed urban priest of the sun, tells a Kiowa legend about seven sisters and their brother who turn into a bear and the seven stars of the Big Dipper; and finally, the young man Francisco measures his strength against that of a bear

in a traditional Indian hunting expedition. Thus the image of the bear connects legendary Indian fiction with Momaday's modern fiction, and at the same time, fictional past and present within the novel. The title of this novel is from a prayer song "The House Made of Dawn," apparently symbolizing an Indian identity completely in harmony with the universe and the "organic calendar," as Francisco calls it. Ironically, and probably representative of the situation of the contemporary Indian, it is Ben, the "Night Chanter," an Indian who seems at least superficially to have adjusted to modern urban life, who sings those old chants as a consolation to the completely alienated Abel. Ben, however, only remembers the traditional words and legends after he gets drunk. Abel, who was unable to express himself in the white man's world and who could not pray when he first returned to his native society, silently sings the ritual song when he finally finds the right pace as a "dawn runner."

It is this magic quality of the oral word which Tosamah tries to convey in his sermons. By oral word history, traditions and instructions are transmitted which guarantee a continuation and survival of the tribe and enable man to come to terms with the universe. Momaday's decision to work in the novel form and his intentional use of Indian mythology could be interpreted as an attempt to translate the legendary and historical past of the Kiowas into a written account in order to preserve it, an intention which Momaday explicitly states in the epilogue to his second novel *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.

The importance of being in harmony with the motions of the universe is one of the author's main themes. Thus nature does not merely provide the scenery but influences or even determines the course of events. Although the landscape is far from idyllic, the description of its beauty and majesty is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. To achieve and keep this harmony man has to perform certain ceremonies and rites which are inexplicable and without power in the white man's world. The communication gap between the two worlds is thematically represented by Abel's trial and by his desperate attempt to fight in the traditional Indian way against a modern tank. As Abel is inarticulate, these incidents are commented upon by other figures. Their interpretations vary according to their distance from the Indian culture—from complete misunderstanding in the report of the white soldier, over rationalistic, half-truthful explanations by the Catholic priest and Tosamah, to

Ben's instinctive, sensitive grasping of Abel's motivation. The gap between the rural Indian environment and the urban white environment is illustrated by the inversion of Indian values in the white man's world and vice versa.

While in Indian culture hunting is an honorable act, a one-to-one struggle in which both parties have a chance and respect each other, these rules are distorted in the white man's world. Abel has to fight against machines and is pitilessly hunted down and defeated in dark back alleys by a corrupted Mexican policeman. On the other hand, Christian mythology is inverted or assimilated in the Indian country. Francisco, named after the Catholic patron saint of the birds and animals, constantly remembers hunting scenes, and is first shown when he tries to trap a bird in order to get prayer plumes. Abel kills his Indian "brother," the "white man," and recovers from attempts on his life by Cain, his Mexican "brother." Playing upon the biblical story of St. John the Baptist, who experienced a divine revelation in the desert, the tormented Angela Grace St. John regains grace and comes to an epiphany in the Indian country through the close contact with its "heathen" culture; later she announces the arrival of an Indian saviour to her son, Peter. The sun priest's name is "John Big Bluff Tosamah," evoking allusions to St. John the Evangelist; Francisco's lover, the Indian witch, is called Porcingula like the fictional patron saint of Walatowa, Mary; Fray Nicolas could be interpreted as a distorted image of Nicholas of Cusa, a reformer who intended to reconcile the orthodox Church with Rome; and Father Olguin, whose name probably derives from the Spanish "ojos" (eyes) sees only in one eye. When Momaday presents a harmonious assimilation of Indian and non-Indian culture—which is best illustrated by the legend and the feast of Santiago—the Indian elements prevail in the same way as they do when Francisco dies and Abel, who has been alienated from both cultures, instinctively first performs the ancient Indian rites and then calls the Catholic priest.

The changes that have taken place in Indian life and the loss of identity as a consequence of the violating clash between the two cultures is revealed by a comparison between the important life stages of the old man Francisco, and the younger Indians Abel and Ben. After performing a traditional bear hunt, the young Francisco triumphantly returns on horseback to his village where he falls in love with an Indian woman who carries his child. As Francisco has already been infected by the Christian faith, he cannot fully accept his lover, the daughter of an Indian witch, and their child is still-

born. Abel's coming to manhood, however, is much less dignified: he unceremoniously shoots a doe and at a sun-dance makes drunken love to a girl who laughs about his sexual impotence. The fact that he sleeps with Angela, who is pregnant by another man, and Milly, who has lost a child by another man, suggests that he might be sterile. Finally there is Ben, a Navajo, who has been brought up in the white man's boarding school and returns from the city to a sun-dance. It is typical for the modern situation that he has acquired a horse, the traditional attribute of masculinity in the plains and southwest desert cultures, by offering in exchange an old Indian artifact which he actually no longer possesses. Furthermore, it is symptomatic that the girl whom he meets at the sun-dance wears dimes on her moccasins and asks him to give her something "that is worth a lot of money" (HD, 142).

The decay of Indian society and culture in the city is symbolized by violence to Abel's face and hands and the resulting loss of vision. It is also illustrated by the ambiguity of the urban sun priest's attitude, by the shabbiness of the circumstances under which the city Indians live and by their excessive drinking in order to be "happy," as Ben expresses it. To cite only two small details which are indicative of the alienation of Indians in an urban environment: Abel poudly wears shiny shoes which are too big for him when he goes to the city,[6] and the drum Tosamah uses at the urban prayer meeting is a "potbellied, cast-iron, three legged No. 6 trade kettle," a peyote drum (HD, 92).

The search for identity and the emphasis on the supportive quality of Indian tradition are not only thematically expressed but also implied by the narrative technique. The first and the final chapter, both located in the Indian country, are clearly structured and told in a consistent narrative manner. Despite variations of the points of view and frequent shifts between fictional past and present, there is a clearcut distinction between the different time levels as well as between the narrative voice and the protagonists' states of consciousness, although they are all grammatically expressed in the third person. Reminiscences are either introduced as such by the narrative voice or they are printed in italics like the Francisco passages in the fourth chapter. Also different type faces are used to indicate legends, letters and sections from a diary which are inserted. Apparently Momaday tries to support even in the narrative technique the hypothesis that the magnificent landscape brings the imagination to life but that "there is no confusion of objects in the eye but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man" (HD,

105). This clear vision is obstructed and finally lost in the city, a development that is again reflected in the structure of the narration.

Before the urban background of the second chapter, the different points of view are no longer separated from each other or from the narrative voice, and the narrative technique becomes even more complex through the additional insertion of sermons, dialogues, direct speech and first-person narrations. In a kind of stream-of-consciousness technique Abel's delierious state is illustrated. Considering the context and the diction of the following passage, one has to assume that it is meant to present Abel's point of view:

> [Milly] had looked him squarely in the eye, had spoken up and laughed—she was always laughing—from the very first. Easy laughter was wrong in a woman, dangerous and wrong. . . she was talking to him and laughing, and her laughter was real and ringing. But he was sullen. He was not listening to her, but wanting her, thinking of how to have her. And she knew what he was thinking, and her voice and laughter grew sudden and a little too thin. . . . It was a long time since she had given herself to a man. She had nearly forgotten what to think about, worry about, dwell upon. And it was all right; she was big and plain and breathing hard, but she felt small and beautiful and dear among her things. The flat where she lived was dingy and cheaply done, but she said to herself that it was charming and quaint and tastefully arranged. . . . They were sitting on the side of her bed. (HD, 89–90)

The stringency of this interior monologue is broken by the intrusion of Milly's thoughts and of an omniscient narrator's commentaries. A further difficulty arises with an abrupt switch from inner to outer perspective and even to an over-all perspective, here and in some other passages. The resulting confusion of voices cannot be entirely justified by an intention to demonstrate Abel's growing loss of orientation.

At some points the narrator apparently takes over Abel's part:

> 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, ... 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. . . . Evil was abroad in the night; they must venture out to the confrontation; they must reckon dues and divide the world. (HD, 86)

Although this taking over could be explained by the fact that Abel is inarticulate, and therefore has to have a spokesman, the discrepancy between the narrative voice and the character is replaces cannot be ignored. The Indian Abel, who has been depicted as a non-verbal, "limited" personality, would not seem capable of expressing himself or even thinking in those abstract, philosophical terms.

The use of different types of printing, which serves in the other chapters to separate different levels of time and consciousness, does not always function in this chapter. Italics, which mark personal memories throughout the novel, are used in the following passage for the lyrical musings of an unknown narrative voice which, to judge from the diction, cannot be Abel's:

> And somewhere beyond the cold and the fog and the pain there was the black and infinite sea, bending to the moon, and there was the cold white track of the moon on the water. And far out in the night where nothing else was, the fishes lay out in the black waters, holding still against all the force and motion of the sea; or close to the surface, darting and rolling and spinning like lures, they played in the track of the moon. And far away inland there were great gray migrant geese riding under the moon. (HD, 100)

One wonders whether in the second chapter Momaday has been caught in the protagonist's dilemma and lost the unobscured vision by an overconscious use of different techniques. He endangers the organic unity of his novel by forcing the reader to retrace the literary technique in order to stay clear-sighted.

Chapter 3, however, could be regarded as an example of the successful use of a complex narrative technique to underline the thesis and the plot of the novel. This part is told in the first person by a voice which identifies itself through the information it gives while addressing an imaginary listener, the reader. It is Ben, the urban Indian, whose isolation, social position and state of mind (while he talks he is slowly getting drunk) are all reflected in his diction. Sociolinguists would qualify his speech pattern as "restricted code," symptomatic of underprivileged classes in modern Western society. Ben's language is characterized by short, grammatically simply or incomplete sentences; longer phrases are paratactically structured. When he talks about his neighbour's loneliness and his personal problems, he tends to confuse cause and effect, and his explanations are more descriptive than analytical. His constant use of formulas like "you know" and "I guess" reveal insecurity and a need for reassurance. The characteristic reliance on non-verbal

emotional communication is reflected in his instinctive grasp of the emotional problems which motivate the people who surround him: Abel, Milly, Mrs. Carlozini and Tosamah. Ben's helplessness and alienation from his own situation is emphasized by the predominance of the simple past tense in his makeshift dialogue. There is no grammatical distinction between events that have happened the same day and those that took place weeks before. The few occasions when Ben actually uses the present tense seem to indicate that he regards the things he talks about as irrevocable —the weather and the dreariness of the rain in the city, the habitual outfit of his poor neighbour, and his own depressing circumstances as an Indian in a hostile urban environment.

Italics mark the passages in which he dreams of his happy youth of long ago. When he recalls personal experiences as a young man in his Indian home, Ben changes from the first person "I" to "you." He thereby on the one hand reveals the distance between his former and his present life, and on the other hand transforms his personal experiences into more representative ones to be shared by others.

Compared to the passages intended to reflect Abel's delirious state of mind, the narrative technique is consistent in terms of point of view and perspective in this passage:

> Let's see . . . let's see; Manygoats gave me three dollars, and I bought a bottle of wine. I wonder who that great big girl was. I have two dollars and eleven cents. I wish I had some more of that wine. I wish I had another bottle of wine . . . and a dollar bill . . . and two dimes . . . and two pennies.
>
> Ei yei! with a name like that, and she had dimes . . . dimes on her shoes.
>
> She's from Oklahoma, I think.
>
> Henry, you keep that dollar bill and those two pennies. Give me twelve shiny dimes. For old time's sake, Henry, give me twelve shiny dimes. Time's dimes, shine wine.
>
> Maybe the rain will let up for a while. (HD, 149)

Here the confusion of different time levels functions to reveal Ben's drunkenness, paralleling his dislocation in time and space.

The discrepancy between the style of Ben's Indian prayers and his everyday language justifies his title as "Night Chanter," and it supports the alienation theme. Although the language of the chants is also simple, it is rhythmic and melodious and thereby creates a lyrical impression. Its repetitive pattern has a soothing effect which marks a strong contrast to the hectic tone of Ben's

summary of the events that culminated in Abel's final defeat in the city. The third chapter finally ends in the hopeful mood of the Indian chant by joining Angela's tale about the arrival of an Indian saviour with Ben's remembering a similar Indian myth. Then it turns into a prayer in Ben's own words announcing Abel's coming home and the survival of Indian culture. To emphasize the trust in an Indian future, the refrain of "The House Made of Dawn" prayer, which Ben repeats, is changed from "May it be beautiful before me, May it be beautiful behind me . . ." into the more confident formulation: "With beauty before me, With beauty behind me . . ." (HD, 122/154), and the last line "In beauty it is finished" (HD, 122) is rephrased in Ben's personal prayer, "And it was going to be right and beautiful" (HD, 155).

Momaday varies the traditional literary image of the fatherless hero who sets out on a quest for identity in a way that is representative of the contemporary Indian situation. Being without roots, Abel, Ben and Tosamah, who stand for today's Indian generation, can neither find a new father in the modern world nor rely on any fathers in a destroyed old world; they have to return to their grandfathers. It is the Indian culture of their forefathers which offers them support, protection and the possibility of regaining a lost identity. Abel, who has lost his innocence by first leaving the garden of Eden and by then being driven out of it for having killed the "white man," attempts to regain it when he returns to the land of his forefathers and identifies with their culture. Admittedly, another solution is implied in the Angela plot. Contrary to Abel, Ben and Tosamah, who are unable to procreate and produce an heir, and to Milly whose daughter dies, Angela gives birth to a son named Peter. She conceives him by her white husband first, but does not accept him, than "re-conceives" him by the Indian Abel. The possibility that both cultures should be assimilated in order to survive, which is also hinted at in the Santiago legend, is, however, not fully developed. The final goal is apparently clear vision without rationalizing:" . . . [Abel] could see at last without having to think" (HD, 173). On one level, the conclusion seems to approach Rousseau's ideology of the noble savage and the wholesome return to nature.

The Way to Rainy Mountain[7]

Less complex in terms of theme and narrative technique, Momaday's second novel, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, could be interpreted as a variation on the identity theme. In the prologue the

author calls it "the history of an idea, man's idea of himself" (WRM, 4), and there are numerous allusions to the belief that man must create a reality for himself in order to establish an identity. By consciously transforming the "fragmentary remains" of a verbal tradition, Momaday creates a document of the "endurance of the human spirit" and a written account of the tribal history of the Kiowas (WRM, 3–4).

Thematically, the three parts of this narrative—"The Setting Out," "The Going On" and "The Closing In"—are built upon and linked by an introduction taken from one of Tosamah's sermons in *House Made of Dawn*. In the sermon Tosamah describes his pilgrimage to Rainy Mountain in order to retrace the birth, the coming of age and the death of the Kiowa people. In the novel it is an anonymous first-person narrator whose identity is established during his imaginary journey described in twenty-four untitled sections which form the main body of the book. In both cases the narrator's quest has been motivated by the death of his grandmother, who represented a last connection with the "golden age" (WRM, 85) of the Kiowa tribe. The pilgrim obviously belongs to a modern generation that has lost natural contact with the Indian tradition, and therefore he has to "see in reality" what his grandmother "had seen more perfectly in the mind's eye" (WRM, 7).

A comparison between Tosamah's sermon on "The Way to Rainy Mountain" and the introduction reveals only minor but possibly meaningful variations. Various bits of geographical information and personal impressions are left out in the introductory version, probably in order to put more emphasis on the Kiowas' legendary quest, and two longer passages dealing with man's quest in general and Tosamah's personal journey have been eliminated for the same reason. A small but significant modification seems to be the admission of the nameless narrator that he does not speak Kiowa, thereby revealing his distance from this Indian culture.

Implicit and explicit interpretations are given in two poems, the prologue and the epilogue. Together with an explanation of the author's intention these form the framework for the report of the imaginative journey. It is, therefore, more interesting to discuss how Momaday realizes his intentions in terms of an unusual narrative technique than to repeat the idea which stands behind this novel.

Similar to the rhetorical pattern of the prologue, a tripartite

principle serves as a basic structure for the main body of the narration. This does not consist of a continuous text, but of a collection of twenty-four untitled but numbered sections which are gathered under three headings playing upon the introductory theme. Each of the numbered sections comprises three parts which are typographically arranged as three paragraphs. These paragraphs deal with different levels of reality: a legendary one, a historical or documentary one, and a personal one. The three levels are distinguished from each other through the insertion of mythological elements into the legendary passages, of facts, dates and quotations from an anthropological study into the historical passages, and personal remarks by the narrator into the biographical passages. At the same time they are linked to each other by the diction, which is simple in choice of words and syntax. The recurrence of traditional formulas like "once there was a man" or "long ago there was" recall the oral folk-tale tradition.

Throughout the chapters "The Setting Out" which describes the origin of the Kiowa tribe and their culture, and "The Going On" which depicts their ancient way of living, the different levels do not interfere with each other. In the first section of the chapter "The Closing In," however, which contrasts the Kiowas' final disgrace by the white man with their traditional war ethic, they are no longer separated from each other. From then on the distinct levels are thematically more and more intertwined, and the focus closes in on the narrator's dead grandparents, the last representatives of a generation that still lived in harmony with their Indian tradition.

Comparable to a stream-of-consciousness technique, the variation of a common theme joins the three vignette-like paragraphs with each other. Indian subjects and themes like the importance of religious rites, of food, the horse and the word, which are already familiar from *House Made of Dawn*, recur to form an "organic" weaving pattern. Metaphorically speaking, there seem, however, to be parts which are very loosely woven, and a loss of the geometric pattern in the third chapter, which might be intended to symbolize the "closing in" of the Kiowas and the resulting breakdown of the tribal order.

Momaday's novel could be interpreted as a modern version and continuation of the "calendar history of the Kiowa Indians."[8] In the 1890s the anthropologist James Mooney "translated" paintings on skins which the Kiowas made in order to keep records of

events,[9] and it is certainly no accident that Momaday inserts excerpts from Mooney's reports into the so-called historical sections of his narrative.

By combining legend, history, individual accounts and his personal experiences, the nameless narrator not only establishes his own identity (a careful reading of the text permits the reconstruction of his family tree up to his great-great-grandparents) but also creates a sense of continuity.

Although *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is strictly an Indian tale in contrast to *House Made of Dawn*, which incorporates non-Indian elements, it appears to be less dogmatic and more universal. The return to nature and ancient tradition is not offered as the final salvation from man's alienation but as one way of establishing an identity and creating a reality by putting oneself into a proper relation with nature, family and tradition.

The Names[10]

The Names designated as "A Memoir" is only an "autobiographical account" of N. Scott Momaday, alias Tsoai-Talee, but again the story of a quest for identity. Distinct features of the nameless traveller in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* can be recognized in the first-person narrator of *The Names*: the Indian branch of the family tree is identical; there is a photograph of Kosahn, the storyteller from the epilogue to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*; and several of the by now familiar Kiowa legends and themes are literally repeated in the first part of this novel, which could be described as a "personal calendar history." Similar to the Kiowas' manner of recording events by painting images, the narrator, who introduces himself by his Indian name, tells his story "in the way of his people" (N, preface) by evoking images instead of giving a chronological account of his life. In his narrative he fuses fragments from the historical and legendary past of his people with sketchy information about his family background and his childhood experiences. Thus the author Momaday defines himself through an "act of the imagination" (N, preface)—a term which he also applies to define this novel as a whole—and at the same time, he establishes himself as Tsoai-Talee, the perpetuator of the memory of Tsoai, the Kiowas' sacred mountain (N, 55). Employing the technique of repetition, a characteristic device of the oral tradition, the narration of his imaginary journey to Tsoai, the Rock Tree mountain, reiterates and plays upon Indian themes

which represent the basic framework of other works as well. *The Names* contains poems from Momaday's collection *The Gourd Dancer*[11] (cf. N, 26, "The Stalker", and N, 5, "Plainview 1"), Kiowa folk tales from *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (N, 1, "The Coming-out"; N, 55, "The Story of Tsoai" and several others) and Indian traditions observed during his childhood in Jemez (N, chap. IV). The latter obviously served as models for the Indian way of living described in *House Made of Dawn*. But apart from these thematic analogies, the autobiographical account is based on the same concept of self-realization through strong adherence to one's personal and cultural roots combined with a harmonious relationship to one's natural environment. The key sentences are "She [Momaday's mother] imagined who she was. . . . the same essential act [of the imagination] was to be among the most important of my own" (N, 25) and ". . . an idea of one's ancestry and posterity is really an idea of the self" (N, 97).

Developing a sense of identity is again substantiated by narrative devices which are even more complex than those employed in *House Made of Dawn*. This autobiographical account consists of four chapters which are framed by a prologue and an epilogue and headed by a short preface in which the narrator introduces himself as Tsoai-Talee. Each chapter is subdivided into several sections which vary in length and typography probably in order to illustrate visually the complex motions of the creative imagination and to induce the reader to participate in the creative act. A few examples of the narrative technique shall demonstrate how Momaday applies it to support the identity theme.

The first chapter deals with the different sources which contributed to the "coming into being" of Tsoai-Talee, Navarro Scott Momaday. This chapter encompasses eight numbered sections which again branch out into numerous small paragraphs. In addition to Indian tales, poems written by the artist Momaday, and family anecdotes, it contains fragments from popular American folk songs, prose poems about the landscape and family photos. Thus it reflects the different facets of his background and existence. The second chapter, which describes his growing awareness of language, and the evolution of his imagination born out of loneliness, is only divided into two parts. Whereas the first is similar in technique to the first chapter, the second part shifts the point of view: the narrator is looked upon from an outer perspective. His being talked about as "the boy" (N, 72 ff) reveals his isolation in the Indian surrounding of his grandmother's house where he does

not even understand the Indian language. The narrative technique used in the third chapter to illustrate the various impressions which shape and spur his imagination resembles stream-of-consciousness technique, and it is turned into this specific manner of narration when the protagonist gropingly attempts to formulate an idea of himself.

Chapter "four" describes how the narrator finds his "whole self" (N, 114, 152) in a well structured Indian society surrounded by a magnificent landscape. While the depictions of the Indian village of Jemez, its ritual calendar, and its people are semantically and syntactically transparent, the tight structure changes into a more intricate poetic language whenever the protagonist tries to convey his philosophy of intuitive understanding: "Sometimes you look at a thing and see only that it is opaque, that it cannot be looked into. And this opacity is its essence, the very truth of the matter" (N, 146).

The structure of *The Names* bears similarities to *House Made of Dawn*. Both novels complete a circular movement, they start from a traditional Indian background and return to it. Momaday states in the preface that he is Tsoai-Talee, and that this notion determines his existence. As according to Indian belief "a man's life proceeds from his name" (N, preface), he sets out on a journey but moves "against the grain of time" (N, epilogue). Thus he arrives where his own journey—and that of all Kiowas—began. In the epilogue Tsoai-Talee recalls the Indian names which contributed to the creation and acquiring of his name, hence his existence (N, chap. I); on the back of a legendary Kiowa-horse, he passes in reverse order different stations described in the history of his people, sees "with his own eyes" the mythical Rock Tree mountain[12] (N, chap. I, 8), and finally reaches the hollow log from which the Kiowas originated according to their myth (N, prologue).

Tsoai-Talee achieves his individual quest for identity in the same way as Abel and the traveller to Rainy Mountain, by reintegrating himself into the spiritual community of his people, and by establishing himself as the heir to a wholesome all-Indian tradition. Since—in a strict sense—there are fewer tribal societies left—in *The Names* Momaday mentions that even in the Jemez reservation the traditional rituals are no longer celebrated—the protagonists identify with a new Indian image based on a conglomerate of various cultures. Both *House Made of Dawn* and *The Names* encompass elements from Kiowa, Navajo, Pueblo and

Peco traditions. The complexity inherent in such a mixture is, however, reduced.[13] In all of his works Momaday propagates an Indian identity which is not based on an intellectual self-recognition but on an intense emotional state of awareness. Similar to Ben Benally (HD, chap. III) who in a state of complete oblivion overcomes his alienation and turns into the "night-chanter" of Indian poetry, James Momaday (N, chap. II, 2) in a moment of drunken epiphany attains clairvoyance about the meaning of his life when he is confronted with the beauty of nature. The Indian protagonists do not rationally analyze their situation with respect to the actual conditions of their existence, and thus fail to find their position in a society that has considerably changed. Instead they aim at a quasi mystic transcendance of their finite being by striving for a spiritual communion with nature and the past.

The emerging Indian prototype carries the characteristic features of "the noble savage," particularly well-known in Romantic literature. Even minor details in Momaday's novels confirm this concept; the Indian characters are proud and courageous (WRM; N), physically beautiful (WRM, XV; N, photos), free of vice (HD), hospitable (N, IV) and their natural intelligence is adversely affected by today's formal education (HD, 104 ff; N, 128). Momaday once explicitly stated that

> the Indian is a man from whom a great deal can be learned, for the Indian has always known who and what he is; [and that] he has a great capacity for wonder, delight, belief and for communion with the natural world contradictory to the destruction rampant in "civilization."[14]

In keeping with this belief, he turns to the reader and, in *The Names,* invites him to share the Indian experience of "the vibrant ecstasy of being" (N, 154). *The Names* appears to complete the cycle begun in *House Made of Dawn.* However, one wonders whether this cycle, offered by Momaday to his readers as the solution in the quest for identity, does not in reality represent a circular entrapment excluding the dimension of the future.

NOTES

1. Natachee Scott Momaday, ed., *American Indian Authors* (Boston, 1972), introduction. She is the mother of N. Scott Momaday.

2. Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie, eds., *The American Indian Today* (Baltimore, 1972), and Edgar S. Cahn, ed., *Our Brother's Keeper: The Indian in White America* (Washington, 1969).

3. N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York, 1968). All references in text hereafter as HD.

4. Marion W. Hylton, "On a Trail of Pollen: Momaday's House Made of Dawn." *Critique*, 14 (1972): 60–69; e.g. Hylton claims that oral communication is unimportant among Indians.

5. Harold S. McAllister, "Incarnate Grace and the Paths of Salvation in *House Made of Dawn*," *South Dakotah Review* 12 (1973): 115–25.

6. In *The American Indian Today*, op. cit., p. 160, Carol K. Rachlin explains that the Oklahoma Indians call saturday night when they go to the city "Tight Shoe Night."

7. N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque, 1969). All references in text hereafter as WRM.

8. In book catalogues and the New York Public Library *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is listed as history textbook.

9. Edward H. Spicer, *A Short History of the Indians of the United States* (New York, 1969), pp. 157–161.

10. N. Scott Momaday, *The Names* (New York, 1976). All references in text hereafter as N.

11. N. Scott Momaday, *The Gourd Dancer* (New York, 1976).

12. N. Glossary; Kiowa name for the Devil's Tower in Wyoming.

13. Here I disagree with Joseph F. Trimmer, "Native Americans and the American Mix: N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*," *Indiana Social Studies Quarterly*, 28 (2): 75–91, who in his thorough analysis of HD claims that the diversity of tribal cultures is maintained.

14. Martha S. Trimble, *N. Scott Momaday* (Boise, 1972), p. 41.