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COMMENTARY

N. Scott Momaday: Word Bearer

KENNETH LINCOLN

I made you the gift of a small, brown stone,
And you described it with the tips of your fingers
And knew at once that it was beautiful—
At once, accordingly you knew,
As you knew the forms of the earth at Abiquiu:
That time involves them and they bear away,
Beautiful, various, remote,
In failing light, and the coming of cold.
—N. Scott Momaday, "Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu," for Georgia O'Keeffe[1]

Literary giants are sparked by evolutionary, even revolutionary cultural shifts—from societal emancipation to progressive change, breakaway civil chaos to the rebirth of a nation. Scholars trace the 1855 American Renaissance to locally rooted writers, Herman Melville and Ralph Waldo Emerson across to Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman, in full stride to define themselves as emancipated natives of a new land. Euro-American modernism sprang from 1920s armistice relief and wasteland angst fueled by the maverick vigor of Ezra Pound and company. The antiwar 1950s Beats triggered a literary revolution that catalyzed writers from James Baldwin to Adrienne Rich and cultural callouts everywhere.

A Nebraska native and adopted Oglala Lakota, Kenneth Lincoln has taught contemporary and Native American literatures at UCLA for forty years. Beginning with *Native American Renaissance* and *The Good Red Road*, through *Indi'n Humor*, *Sing with the Heart of a Bear*, and recently *Speak Like Singing*, he has published widely in American Indian studies, chaired the country's first interdisciplinary master's program in the field, and written novels, poetry, and personal essays about western Americana, including *Cormac McCarthy*, *White Boyz Blues*, *The Year the Sun Died*, *Men Down West*, and *A Writer's China*.

Such is the literary and later modernism that a 1960s Stanford doctorate would master throughout a lifetime. There is something natively older. In traditions going back tens of thousands of years, singular Kiowa writer Navarre Scott Momaday ignited the contemporary Native American Renaissance, no less than Langston Hughes fired the Harlem Renaissance. In *House Made of Dawn* an ancient land steward teaches his Pueblo grandsons the daily rebirth of time over native New Mexico. "The larger motion and meaning of the great organic calendar, 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. And he knew they knew, and he took them with him to the fields and they cut open the earth and touched the corn and ate sweet melons in the sun."[2] *House Made of Dawn* won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction after a revolutionary decade of civil rights protest.

Writers from James Welch, Leslie Silko, and Louise Erdrich to Greg Sarris, Linda Hogan, and Sherman Alexie soon pooled the current with their own Native springs of talent among thousands. None would have surfaced separately without the cultural-political brokerings of Vine Deloria Jr. and Reuben Snake, Ben Reifel and Alfonso Ortiz, David Reisling and Charlotte Heth, Clara Sue Kidwell and Jack Forbes, Wilma Mankiller and even the inflammatory Ward Churchill. Everyone counts in this renaissance of tribal thinking. Any one writer is surrounded, shaped, and followed by hundreds of tribal kin in dozens of disciplines.

Although these trailblazers challenged academia, infused mainstream thinking, and reinvented culture at large, some five hundred tribal councils conducted thousands-of-years-old cultural business through the late twentieth century. These include the Kiowa and Cherokee of Oklahoma, where Momaday was born, and the Navajo of Arizona and Jemez Pueblo of New Mexico, where he grew into a young man. "Earth and I gave you turquoise / when you walked singing," the young poet wrote early on, following a 7/5 tonal-syllabic line reminiscent of Eastern classical verse.[3]

Native Americans live simultaneously in a mythic and modern world much the same as always: providing for the people, speaking with the spirits. Reality is not split between body and soul, but continuous in *communitas,* the communal sphere of all things, sacred hoop among all hoops. With song-poetry, public speaking, storytelling lore, and ceremonial dance-chant as time-honored language arts, tribal peoples observe a steady state of seasonal observances, hunting, planting, tending, and harvesting cycles consistent with game patterns, weather variations, regional ecosystems, trickster abruptions, and human life spans existing from time immemorial. Momaday's writings are bedrocked with this living cultural history. "We lived laughing in my house / and told old stories" (AG 10).

Today hundreds of Native cultures have been reconfiguring on the fringes of urban density, and Momaday's international recognition is a literary vortex. Reduced to a quarter million in 1900, Native Americans have grown eighteen-fold to four and a half million. Some 82 percent live off reservation, more than fifty thousand are enrolled in college, with a thousand-plus writers in print. The tribal speech and pan-Indian literacy of these renewals—especial words of truth,

beauty, spirit, and power—have been focal points from political speeches to editorials in *Akwesasne Notes, Indian Country Today,* and *News from Native California* and from addresses before the National Congress of American Indians, the Modern Language Association, the Ford Foundation, and the Association of American Indian Affairs to battle cries at Alcatraz 1968, Wounded Knee 1973, Women of All Nations, and the American Indian Movement. The spoken, sung, danced, and written word—poetic strength, grounded beauty, verbal grace, visionary inspiration—have long and richly voiced tribal cultures. Crossing collective disciplines of multifaceted roots, Native American literatures trace back through ceremonial songs, festive dances, origin myths, trickster stories, morality tales, puberty rites, how-to lessons, love lyrics, quieting lullabies, vision cries, death chants, and birth songs celebrated among two thousand tribal camps in the Western hemisphere for some forty thousand years. Momaday calls out "Carriers of the Dream Wheel":

> They are old men, or men
> Who are old in their voices,
> And they carry the wheel among the camps,
> Saying: Come, come,
> Let us tell the old stories,
> Let us sing the sacred songs. (AG 10)

N. Scott Momaday sparks the literary voice of these communal wellsprings rising from the deep resources of American civilizations, the living roots of reborn oral literacy now known as the Native American Renaissance.

Historically, many of our New World or "American" attitudes are borrowed or adapted from Native models. "We the People" translates from the word *Iroquois,* Jefferson's tribally collective *e pluribus unum.* A third of our medicinal pharmacopoeia derives from Native remedies. Corn, beans, tomatoes, squash, potatoes, zucchini, peppers, yams, sweet potatoes, and wild rice are Native products transplanted globally. Intercultural evolution is the rule. Tribal councils morphed into town meetings, and Indian warriors, particularly Iroquoian, fought side-by-side with Revolutionary patriots against the French and British—not in European lines of volleying militia but camouflaged behind rocks, trees, ridges, and vales, as Natives taught colonists to defend their land and people. The crossings were legion, and the borrowings continue, despite fears of alterity on both sides, questioned acculturation, and endangered sovereignty.

After hearing William Faulkner speak when he was a prelaw student at the University of Virginia, the young Kiowa returned to finish his bachelor of arts degree in political science from the University of New Mexico in 1958, then attended Stanford for an American literature doctorate awarded in 1963. He wrote his thesis about Frederick Goddard Tuckerman under Yvor Winters and planned to write a book on Emily Dickinson. Among his favorite writers were Dickinson, Isak Denison, Melville, Wallace Stevens, and Jorge Luis Borges.

Scott is a large fellow with a stentorian voice and deeply set, lambent eyes. Since Stanford in the early 1960s, I've known this man as a mentor, model,

and friend. "You know, Ken, I am a bear," he once said at a UCLA Indian studies banquet thirty years ago. The man bears a sense of gravitas balanced with great good humor. He seems an old ursine soul transposed into an academic don who does not take his ancestry or learnings lightly. After half a century we would do well to measure the depth, vision, strength, and breadth of his accomplishments—and to consider why the works of this Native original are so pivotal to ancestral American culture and letters.

It is useful to begin at the beginning with Momaday's first published poem, "Earth and I Gave You Turquoise," written in 1958 on college break at a second-grader's desk in his mother's Jemez Pueblo Day School classroom. This gifted Kiowa began, and continues to be, primarily a poet—a man made of singing words, to redact Stevens—or in the visionary language of Nicholas Black Elk upon seeing the "make-live" Ghost Dance *wanékia*, an "all-colors" grandfather who "spoke like singing" as everything everywhere danced to the song. What makes his 7/5 tonal-syllabic song-poem Native, beyond American, seems the lyric depth and narrative breadth of speech fully human, familial, and therefore tribal, or Native American.

> Earth and I gave you turquoise
>   when you walked singing
> We lived laughing in my house
>   and told old stories
> You grew ill when the owl cried
> We will meet on Black Mountain. (AG 10)

"Earth and I," the speaker begins, "gave you turquoise." This invocation turns on participant creativity, not a little solo god manqué making things up, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge posited. The earth is alive, sentient, active, partnering; stones and soil exist before, with, and after human—the earthen *humus* of life to which all life returns. Blue-green turquoise composites the earth's gift to humans, the cerulean depth of the liquid sky come to earth as healing stone, especially to restore eyesight. Pueblo infants wear turquoise earrings, Navajo lovers don turquoise necklaces and rings, Apache elders bedeck themselves with the medicinal stones of beauty.

The appeal of "Earth and I" is cooperative, not self-assertive—all at once spiritual and material and cognizant, even sacred in an earthly sense of the sky-water stone. The artist speaks in love as supplicant to his beloved, and he stands tribally in relationship to the significant other: co-kinship rooted at the heart of all things. The stress falls on the collective, not the individual, reciprocal connection through an infinitely animate creation. There is no "making it up," but working with what is—as the Lakota medicine people tried to explain *Takuskanskan* to the Jesuits who wanted to know the name of their God. No single-gendered deity like Yahweh or Allah runs High Plains things. Theirs is more a multitude of spirits, a *Taku* or "power" that energetically "moves" (*skan*) through the "sky" (also *skan*) of all things, as the James R. Walker Lakota papers, among the earliest intercultural Lakota documents, record more than a century ago. The creation is alive, kinetic, animized, in a

phrase, "What-moves-(all that)-moves." Kin to the Kiowa, anyone from Big Sky country knows of this motion, power, and energy that animate the heavens, the wind or Lakota *Taté* among the four principal spirits with sun, stone, and earth in a four-by-four pantheon. Interactive motion is all.

Speech as living wind moves human nature, and song rises up as breath from the danced earth through human beings. All art adds to and works with what is—the given reality before and beyond ego. Time is a collective gifting, ongoing, a giving back of beginning and ending, opening and closing. Space fills with collaborative sharing, and giving is sacredly, lovingly participant—what all related creatures do in common at their best.

I detail these points because readers want to know specifically what distinguishes Native American from generically Western art. The latter features creation as independent genius in making up things, from the Greek *poiein*, to make; the former remains communal, shared, collective, as in the much older Proto-Indo-European root *ar-* to connect (art, arc, arm, architecture, articulate). With no word for "compose" or "create," the Lakota in my homelands speak of *yatun*, "to give birth to song," implying an already existing music in nature. Holy man Black Elk, a blind singer, called the poet-translator John Neihardt a "word sender." To repeat, co-kinship lies at the common heart of tribal matters, and certainly it forms the core of Momaday's writings.

Backtrack to a turquoise participant art of loving: each part, each "maker" or co-creator, exists only as *part of* a larger beloved continuum, without necessary or known origin or end. Native *making* means working with what is—arranging, presenting, and fitting into the natural patterns. There is no heaven, hell, Big Bang, or Rapture, but an interdependent infinity warping around and between and within lover and beloved at the tribal center of the sacred hoop that halos the horizon of all life. The lovers reenact creation, their humble giving and happy receiving. The anthropologist Barre Toelken calls this "sacred reciprocity"—the "re" and "pro," back and forth of all things earthly in contiguous kinship. Consider earthen biomass from minerals (rocks give off nitrogen and hydrogen), to organic matter (plants secrete oxygen), to two-leggeds, four-leggeds, fins, skins, crawlers, and wings (animals emit carbon). With earthly wisdom of the ancients, there's no appreciable gap between Native knowledge and eco-sciences.

> I will bring corn for planting
>   and we will make fire
> Children will come to your breast
>   You will heal my heart
> I speak your name many times
> The wild cane remembers you. (AG 10)

In the beginning, Genesis says, "The whole *earth* was of one language" (11:1). Tribal creation myths tell of a time when humans, plants, animals, sun, moon, stars, and rocks spoke in common. So indigenous stories tell of this life, earthen, earthly—not above in heaven, or below in hell, or beyond in eternity, but here and now—presently beloved, humanly sacred, patiently

accepted, courageously honored. Consider the syntax of the collectively joined compound in "Earth *and* I gave you turquoise." Earth comes first (thou *and* I): prehuman, parahuman, extrahuman others as honored relatives. The Cree say animals are "other-than-human-persons," and the Lakota speak to grandfathers in stones and address spirits in clouds and thunder. Earth forms the ground, base, or reality, as in grounded, that is, earthen or "clay," this earthly life. Land, soil, dirt, sand: Oklahoma, the Indian Territory where Momaday was born in 1934 and his ancestors long settled, comes from the Choctaw for "red-earth," as Hebrew Adam comes from Adama or "red-earth-person." Blood ties root earthen kin wherever people settle.

> My young brother's house is filled
>   I go there to sing
> We have not spoken of you
>   but our songs are sad
> When Moon Woman goes to you
> I will follow her white way. (AG 10)

As with history, heritage, and etymology, Momaday's poem defers to a life force that precedes self, the extended horizon plane of this existence lived with others. Tribal context is all. Note the locally specific Diné details that narrate the poem's story: Black Mountain as a sacred place; corn and wild cane as native grains; the young brother's house of mourning; Moon Woman casting the spirit "beauty-way" on lake water; Chinle as an historic site of the deep temporal canyon; loom, mutton, and coffee providing daily Navajo staples; and a black crow on one leg at Red Rock as the sign of dyadic life to come. First-person "I" remains participant and culturally bounded, not a solitary self as a loner or heroic individual out for personal gain. This is the art of partnering, a compounding, a cojoining of thou and I-other through conjunctive adding on. We exist as *us* all, a global human collecting.

> Tonight they dance near Chinle
>   by the seven elms
> There your loom whispered beauty
>   They will eat mutton
> And drink coffee till morning
> You and I will not be there. (AG 10)

To end beginning again, lovers will walk singing and live laughing and connect through speaking. Collective relations as nouns become verbs in participles or gerunds ending in *-ing*. It's a tribalizing, a familializing genealogy, a be-loving. A marriage of all tribal life forces transcends illness and death and the speaker's rich sense of loss. Genders cross and recombine. At the end of the poem she will hear his horse's drumming hooves. They will meet on Black Mountain with sensual fire and children will come to her breasts. Futurity is the legacy of collective history, the tribal promise beyond personal loss without interruptive punctuation or end-stop.

I saw a crow by Red Rock
    Standing on one leg
It was the black of your hair
    The years are heavy
I will ride the swiftest horse
You will hear the drumming hooves. (AG 10)

Winters in *Forms of Discovery* laureled his doctoral student, the young Scott Momaday, among America's five best poets to the extent that he had crafted one perfect poem, "Before an Old Painting of the Crucifixion," written at The Mission Carmel in June 1960. This is high praise from a literary lion of the American canon. Whether Momaday ranks with Dickinson and the Modernists, whom he admired in his apprenticeship to the great tradition, this Kiowa Native stands as godfather to a Native American Renaissance. For that, all readers of American literature and tribally activist writers interested in an indigenous heritage are thankful.

The Journey of Tai-me records Kiowa tribal legend without gloss in an older archetypal tradition of the handcrafted volume limited to one hundred leather-bound copies. This rare book has generated a public text that sold more than 200,000 copies in forty years. Dedicated to his parents, Natachee Scott, the mixed-blood Cherokee teacher-writer, and Al Momaday, the Kiowa painter, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* carries his grandmother Aho's oral tradition forward through social sciences, personal witness, and his father's visual illustrations. The text is cross-disciplinary, multidimensional, and intercultural, framed by rhymed, metered lyric elegies to tribal legend. At the heart of the storytelling keen ancient women's voices emerging from a hollow log—the wondrous delight of Aho's interjective, "There were many people, and oh, it was beautiful";[4] Grandmother Spider raising the Sun Twins to people the nation; the unnamed dark beauty haunting the shadows just beyond the campfire; one-eyed centenarian Ko-sahn remembering a hundred-year-old woman carrying the Sun Dance sand on her back; and, ancient as they are, the women and men singing the sacred songs and telling the sovereign stories: "We have brought the earth. / Now it is time to play; / As old as I am, I still have the feeling of play" (WRM 88). *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is a book of magical passages, a miracle document of tribal journey toward the dawn. Momaday has charted an ongoing cultural treasure of tale-telling and dance-singing and deep-rooting in the storied places of time and human imagining.

East of my grandmother's house the sun rises out of the plain. Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the

> wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors
> of the dawn and dusk. (WRM 83)

The genesis of *House Made of Dawn* is the prose genius of place—Southwest desert and Jemez Pueblo in particular—and how the context of place gives distinctive character and voice to counter mainstream anonymity and loss. Abel is a figure running away in the dawn mist, a profile without surname. He stands allegorically for the postwar Indian, orphaned, shell-shocked, broken, and dislocated, indeed the biblical agrarian brother slain by his greedy brother Cain. Yet he is the heroic warrior twin of tribal myths breasting tragic wounds, and he brushes against the elusive shape-shifter of cautionary tales. Abel also represents Everyman as an American native isolato dispossessed of heritage, history, and human dignity, yet unvanquished and finally not to be silenced—Faulkner's Southern nobility gone feral, Robert Frost's hardscrabble New Englanders weeding stones, Hemingway's war-ravaged big two-hearted rivers shoaled, Prescott's Black Legend of the Hispanic-Indian Southwest deserts desiccated, John Steinbeck's migrant West impoverished. Abel's journey from mating eagles over Jemez Pueblo, to war in Germany, to prison and Los Angeles relocation, and back home to New Mexico circles half the globe. His psyche moves through young suffering and soul trauma, to the healing touch of women and brotherly compassion, to rebirth in his grandfather's ceremonial steps and sacred song. Against all odds the Native survivor keeps moving, running ceremonially and seasonally toward the ancestral dawn, and on his broken breath form the words of an ancient song, "*House made of pollen, house made of dawn. Qtsedaba.*" The incontrovertible Native heritage of forty thousand years movement, placement, and survival carry Abel forward into a renaissance of multicultural rebirth. After long night the sun also rises, as the ancients promised.

In 1974 *Angle of Geese* was followed within two years by the more inclusive gathering of poems, *The Gourd Dancer*, commercially vetted by Harper & Row, the national press initiating the first Native American series of contemporary writing. Poetry does not stir big business in the United States, but it opens the cutting room to Native American prose artists who begin as versifiers in an ancient tradition of song-poetry going back to Wordmaker and Orpheus, Samson Occom and Shakespeare.

Momaday etches free verse honorings of the magnificent eagle and lethal pit viper, the cautious deer and hard-natured crow, ancient women and lifelong friends. He shapes syllabic tributes to the totemic bear, companion canine, mythic horse, and marvelous angle of geese in the winter sky. There are prose poems on tribal shields and the colors of night, and everywhere flow communal gracings of the beauty and significance of austere desert and spare plains places. The Kiowa author gives us an epic name-chant:

> I am a feather on the bright sky
> I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
> I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
> I am the shadow that follows a child
> I am the evening light, the luster of meadows. (IPS 16)[5]

He notes the perishable recognition of human impermanence:

> Desire will come of waiting
> Here at this window—I bring
> An old urgency to bear
> Upon me, and anywhere
> Is a street into the night,
> Deliverance and delight—
> And evenly it will pass
> Like this image on the glass. (IPS 34)

For those who treasure Native and American verse, *The Gourd Dancer* is precious, crafted stonework.

The Names, published in the nation's bicentennial celebration, contains a memoir and personal tribute to the extended ancestral family that raised the author a Native American. These are the named relatives four generations back: the incorrigible, blue-eyed Mexican captive Kau-au-ointy and her Kiowa husband Ah-kgoo-ahu and the pistol-toting Kentucky émigré I. J. Galyen marrying the Cherokee known only as Natachee; great-grandparents the stalwart Keahdinekeah wedded to Guipagho the legendary warrior who died singing, then to Pohd-lohk the arrow maker who named infant Scotty Tsoai-talee or Rock-Tree Boy and across the prairies toward the Ohio River, Mary and George Scott from Appalachia; Grandfather Mammedaty or "Walking Above" the peyote priest with an artist's long, tapered hands and grandmother Aho whose name echoes the Kiowa for thanks, *a-hó*, and hill folk Theodore and Anne Ellis from Kentucky; and finally Huan-toa or Alfred Momaday among 1930s Oklahoma Native painters and Natachee "Little Moon" Scott his bride from Haskell Institute, the oldest surviving Indian college. "In devotion / to those whose names I bear / and to those who bear my names."[6] By this time the artist is the father of three daughters and a professor at Stanford where he earned his doctorate a decade earlier.

Animate place names continue to make the man: Washita River, Anadarko, Rainy Mountain Creek, Carnegie, Mountain View, Wasatch Range, Gallup, Shiprock, Chinle, Rio Puerco, Santa Fé, Valle Grande, Jemez Springs. These places store memories of Oklahoma arbors of willow and witch hazel, prairie grasshoppers and desert sidewinders, Southwest piñon pine and juniper, Pecos his first hunting horse and the Jemez Feasts of San Diego and Porcingula Our Lady of the Angels, ocotillo and mesquite, Sefora Tosa the beautiful Pueblo daughter who came daily to school for water, basalt, and calíche. To add visual accuracy to this imaginative recounting of tribal places and names, there are family album photographs of everyone and assorted places. Their story-names pool into one common headwater. "All the rivers ran down from that place, and many times I saw eagles in the air under me. And then there were meadows full of wildflowers, and a mist roiled upon them, the slow, rolling spill of the mountain clouds. And in one of these, in a pool of low light, I touched the fallen tree, the hollow log there in the thin crust of the ice" (N 169).

The Ancient Child (1989) is a crosscut pastiche of Momaday's Native heritage, Western popular culture, and modernist Euro-American education. Doubleday published the author's second innovative novel twenty years following the signature piece *House Made of Dawn*. The story lists its characters as a play: primarily thirty-five-year-old, mixed-blood Locke Setman or Set (Kiowa for bear) raised as an orphan in California, now a struggling artist in San Francisco; Grey the singly named, multiracial, kitsch mythic, nineteen-year-old medicine charmer coming of age in Oklahoma; her dreamed lover Billy the Kid, the romantic outlaw of border legend who notched his gun twenty-one times and was shot in the back at twenty-one by Sheriff Pat Garrett; grandmother Kope'mah, a granny Kiowa healer, and Lola Bourne a vexed urban siren; Bent Sandridge, Set's wise and kind stepfather, and Set-Angya or Sitting Bear, an ancestral ancient who carries his son's bones around as tribal talismans. Then there is the Bear, mythic guardian spirit and the artist's totemic protector and loyal adversary.

Clearly this is a work of maverick fiction that mixes history and fable, dream and reminiscence, folk legend and chant, tribal myth and popular culture. Between old and young feminine beauty, animal freedom and human despair, in-law and outlaw, West Coast art and Oklahoma red-dirt reality the story skips along in small bursts like a flat stone tossed across a pond of deep-currented dreams and memories.

Grey dandies with Western folklore and the unwanted lust of scurrilous men like the sullen Dwight Dicks who molests her as she fantasizes intimacy with Billy the Kid. When Set's unknown Kiowa grandmother Kope'mah dies, the California artist inherits through Grey a medicine bundle of bear-paw power that changes his painting career and sends him to Paris. Meanwhile, Grey daydreams a pop ballad chapbook of her outlaw fantasies with Billy the Kid, morphing between lifetimes and centuries, seeking teen destiny and true love. Bent the good father figure dies, and Set breaks down and through to his ursine guardian, Old Man Bear. He returns to Oklahoma, then to Lukachukai with Grey in her truck. Both go in search of beauty, or as the Navajo say *hózhóni* with twists—erotic, artistic, geologic, fantastic, familial, and mythic beauty of a sort few know. Grey lets on that she is fusional Diné and Kiowa, with Gaelic, French, and English blood tossed in. Her wounded lover grows whole again among Grey's Navajo relatives, and they conceive a multiethnic child.

Set ends the story on a landscape pilgrimage to the base of his namesake monolith, Tsoai the Rock-Tree (Momaday's childhood sacred name), generally known as Devils Tower, near Sundance, Wyoming. Overhead Ursa Major blesses him, as the Kiowa legend of the bear-brother and seven sisters clicks into place around the Rock-Tree clawed by the mythological brother in pursuit of his seven sisters climbing the magical tree and becoming the Big Dipper. The star shadow of the bear rises against the tower, a 1,267-foot volcanic laccolith the Lakota call Mato Tipi, the House of the Bear. The tale recedes into the fictive night shadows of mythic time, as the text ends with the stars of Ursa Major painted on a Kiowa shield: "*And the last of his dreams was that of children moving to a wall of woods. They bobbed and skipped and tumbled away in the distance. He watched them for a time, and then he could no longer see them. They had already entered into the trees, into the darkness.*"[7]

In the Presence of the Sun (1992) gathers sketches and poems from 1961 to 1991, adding to the earlier poems in Grey's alleged chapbook from the previous fiction. Momaday showcases his fey fascination with the gunslinger of Southwest *corridos* and cowboy ballads, "The Strange and True Story of My Life with Billy the Kid," including a visual/verbal section on Kiowa shields arcing back to illustrations in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*—the heraldic stories and black-and-white images of the Plains shields. These icons and tales exist separately as watercolor paintings *en face* with prose gloss in a signed limited edition, *In the Presence of the Sun: The Gathering of Shields* (1991). The last section of the book includes new poems, among them "Mogollon Morning":

> The long,
> Long bands of rock,
> Old as wonder, stand back.
> I listen for my death song there
> In rock. (IPS 129)

Mortality and human fragility weigh on the artist's mind in these silver years. Three times in the collection Momaday invokes the haunting couplet: "These figures moving in my rhyme, / Who are they? Death, and Death's dog, time." The book opens and closes with a charcoal self-portrait of the artist in side view, declaring by the end, "He is a bear."

Natachee Scott Momaday taught and wrote children's stories. Her son wrote and illustrated an Indian Christmas story in 1994, *Circle of Wonder*, dedicated to his granddaughter Skye. The text is lavishly watercolored around a Pueblo village grandfather and his orphan grandson Tolo, not unlike Abel's story in the first novel. Among the Jemez mission villagers, old man and grandson worship the winter eve Christ child and light the festive bonfire against night cold and snow. The boy loses sight of his grandfather and wanders into the mountains where a circle of firelight draws him to a grand scarred Elk. A wounded predatory Wolf joins the firelight circle, then an Eagle seeking warmth and safety in winter. All need compassion and comfort. Then Tolo understands the grateful firelight circle of wonder that fits into all the visionary circles of the world, the seasonal gift of the Christ child and wild animals, and the blessing of fire at dawn. Tolo wakes to the votive candle illuminating the Christmas crèche and knows that he is no longer poor or mute but blessed with the strength of the Elk and song of the Wolf. *Qtsedaba*, the tale ends ceremonially and mysteriously, as with *House Made of Dawn*. The book is written, illustrated, and designed to evoke ceremonial wonder in a child's eyes.

Momaday earned a Stanford doctorate in American literature, has taught more than four decades at UC Santa Barbara, UC Berkeley, Stanford, and the University of Arizona, and lectured at many other universities in the United States as well as abroad. He wrote more than a hundred weekly pieces for the Santa Fe arts and culture journal *Viva* in the early 1970s. He published political essays for *Ramparts*, eco-literary manifestos for the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, travel pieces for *New York Times Magazine*, and literary sketches and cultural treatises for East Coast magazines. Momaday traveled the world lecturing, won

the Academy of American Poets Prize, and received Italy's highest literary honor, the Premio Letterario Internazionale "Mondello."

Scott Momaday has written three full-length plays, and *The Indolent Boys* was performed and filmed at Harvard and across the country. He has crafted smaller theater pieces and screenplay narratives and assisted Richardson Morse in making *House Made of Dawn* into a feature-length film. He has done voiceovers for many a documentary for PBS, *National Geographic*, the History Channel, and HBO. His deeply resonant elocution and measured diction set a distinctive trademark of seasoned, cinematic narration. The living voice is his trademark.

In 1997, after thirty-four years of university positions, Momaday's *The Man Made of Words* was published by St. Martin's Press with illustrations by the author. Thirty-two collected essays, stories, and passages scan the primacy of language, significance of place, and centrality of storytelling in cultural definitions of tribal dignity, cultural wealth, and personal integrity. These are studies in Native ethnography, national etymology, and global philosophy. To read these essays and absorb their multidimensional grace, weight, and intelligence instills a sense of literary wonder, landscape beauty, ethnic dignity, and international regard. They are inspired by the creative originality and fresh vision of an artist-thinker seeing the world again as though for the first time—a reality made of sonorous and shaped language, a masculinity shaped by well-chosen, ringing cadences, a man imaginatively and truly made of words to live by. Readers will long parse and ponder these deep sources of Native thinking, speaking, and writing. They are the human evolution of eloquence and literacy in one man's Native work.

The book cover of *In the Bear's House* fronts a bear cub's elongated saffron face drawn by the author. The left eye is stretched diagonally upward and peers wistfully at the reader, a blue-shadowed, brown eye dilated with darkness, contemplating time and eternity. Alert, muted, visually asymmetrical, dumbfounded with wonder, hunger, and interest in the world—the blue-visioned bear cub seems to gauge the viewer's curiosity. At the bottom of the cover Momaday scripts the title in his own hand.

In ancestral western Siberia the artist learned of native bear feasts with the sacrificial bear presiding in his own house. Those ceremonies traversed the Bering Straits, down across the Canadian prairies with the Diné and others, into the Southwest intermountain plains and deserts where the Kiowa artist lives out his life as an ursine grandfather: "Something in me hungers for wild mountains and rivers and plains. I love to be on Bear's ground, to listen for that old guttural music under his breath, to know only that he is near. And Bear is welcome in my dreams, for in that cave of sleep I am at home to Bear."[8]

This miscellany of dramatic dialogues, new poems, and passages arrived in 1999 on the millennial eve. Again self-illustrated, the collection underscores that the artist, like his father before, has been drawing and painting seriously for twenty-five years since he turned fifty. His health at times precarious, Momaday is clearly looking at time, human creativity, and eternity through his spirit guardian's eyes. "To an Aged Bear" ends with a pairing attempt to hold close to Old Man's temporal courage:

Mortality
Is your shadow and your shade.

Translate yourself to spirit;
Be present on your journey.

Keep to the trees and waters.
Be the singing of the soil. (IBH 64)

The philosophic "Bear-God Dialogues" between Urset, the original Kiowa Grandfather Bear, and Yahweh, Lord of Western history known to Native belief as The Great Mystery, foreground the collection with a deeply wizened sense of humor and play. Two old chiefs sit and talk of things temporal and time immortal, one earthbound, aged, and crotchety, heavy with living, the other all-knowing, compassionate, and sharp-tongued, lonely and unable to die. Imagine Orson Welles holding Socratic court with Sitting Bull. They talk of huckleberries and prayer, trout and time, dreams and freedom, wonder and thanksgiving, hunters and stories and feasts, silence and grace, dogs and speech, thought and the bones of the dead, time passing and the present moment. The eight-part dialogues end with Yahweh "out of time" and off to a meeting.

The poems that follow, old and new, constellate around old man bear, the embodied spirit of the wilderness, Momaday says, from Siberia and Moscow, to T'umen and Altamira, to Tucson, Arizona, and Jemez Springs, New Mexico. The gathering ends reprinting the prose outtake of the bear hunt from *House Made of Dawn* and the Kiowa legends of the bear-brother and seven sisters from *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Finding a bear paw print near his family home in the mountains of Jemez Springs, the artist offers his earthly tribute to this intermediary of the immortal gods and mortal wilderness spirits: "And all who should lay eyes upon my work would know, beyond any shadow of a doubt, how much I love the bear whose print this is" (IBH 61).

Mysterious, chiseled, and crafted, Momaday's fictions and prose memoirs appeal to broad audiences. The poetry and drama take more time among readers who plumb the art of oral traditions, poetics of the spoken voice, aesthetics of the song-line, penetrance of the literary vision. His historical, political, literary, and ecological warnings lay largely unnoticed until collected in *The Man Made of Words*. Examine the cultural expanse and textural quality of this man's lifework. His words will be pondered and remembered for a long time. They reach back into the ancestral Native past, forward into America's future with the resurgence of tribal cultures. Ours today is a time of reconciliation, new visions, coming together, rebirth and tribal continuation. N. Scott Momaday will long be regarded as the Grandfather Bear of a Native American Renaissance in Western letters.

NOTES

1. N. Scott Momaday, "Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu," *In the Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, 1961–1991* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 88. (Subsequent references will be inserted parenthetically in the text as IPS followed by the page number.)

2. N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1968), 198.

3. N. Scott Momaday, "Earth I Gave You Turquoise," *Angle of Geese and Other Poems* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1974), 10. (Subsequent references will be inserted parenthetically in the text as AG followed by the page number.)

4. N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 4. (Subsequent references will be inserted parenthetically in the text as WRM followed by the page number.)

5. Momaday, "The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee," *In the Presence of the Sun*, 16.

6. N. Scott Momaday, dedication to *The Names: A Memoir* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976). (Subsequent references will be inserted parenthetically in the text as N followed by the page number.)

7. N. Scott Momaday, *The Ancient Child* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 315.

8. N. Scott Momaday, *In the Bear's House* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 11. (Subsequent references will be inserted parenthetically in the text as IBH followed by the page number.)