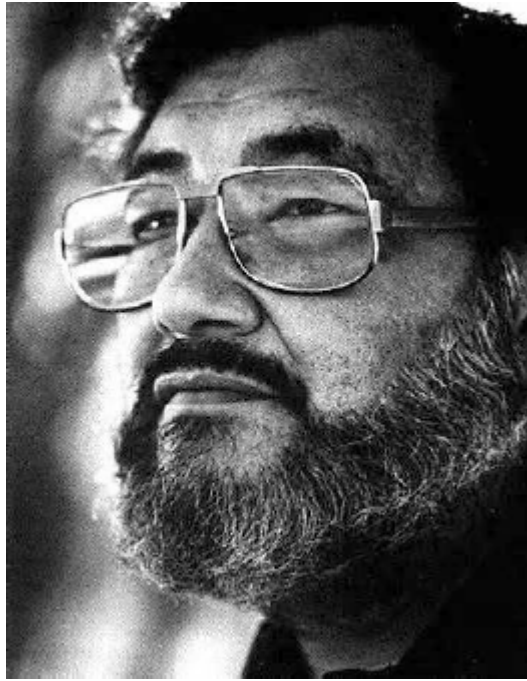


ANALYSIS

House Made of Dawn (1968)



N. Scott Momaday

(1934-)

“Oklahoma-born author of Kiowa ancestry whose books include *House Made of Dawn* (1969, Pulitzer Prize), a novel about a young Indian man unable to be at home in either the white or his ancestral society; *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969), Kiowa legends told in relation to history and his own youth; *Angle of Geese* (1973) and *The Gourd Dancer* (1976), poems; and *The Names* (1976), a memoir. He was a professor of English at Stanford (1972-81), from which he received a Ph.D. for his critique and edition of the poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, and has more recently been on the faculty of the University of Arizona.”

James D. Hart

The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(Oxford 1946-83) 501

“Momaday lives another life, however [outside the university], as a Kiowa tribal dancer and chronicler of Indian experience in this country. ‘None but an Indian, I think,’ he has said, ‘knows so much what it is like to have existence in two worlds and security in neither.’ In *House Made of Dawn*, his prizewinning first novel, Momaday recounts the adventures of an Indian named Abel, a man who survives World War II only to discover, as Momaday put it, that he can neither ‘recover his tribal identity nor...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....’ The language of *House Made of Dawn* paradoxically conjoins the lyrical and the violent. Abel and his fellow runners run, we read, ‘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 on dues and divide the world’.”

David Minter

The Harper American Literature 2
(Harper & Row 1987) 2188

“Momaday won a Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn*, which appeared in 1968 while he was teaching at the University of California. It tells the story of a young Indian, Abel, who, upon returning to his reservation in San Ysidro, New Mexico, after military service in World War II, tries to cope with the pressures and temptations to live in the white world and his conflicting desire to resume the ancient Indian way of life symbolized by his grandfather. In this conflict, Momaday vividly juxtaposes the poetic, earth-centered culture of the Indians and the prosaic, materialistic lifestyle of the whites. Abel comes to epitomize the modern Indian dilemma as he is seen running across the landscape, symbolically trying to return to the ancient ways of his forefathers while never quite being able to reach the continually expanding horizon. Abel’s race, Momaday suggests, is a futile one—lost before it was begun. The vision of a unified natural world that characterizes the American Indian view of a harmonious, borderless existence is inevitably circumscribed into oblivion by the white man’s exploitive possession and control of that world.”

Richard M. Leeson
Cyclopedia of World Authors II, Vol. 3
ed. Frank N. Magill
(Salem 1989) 1061

“From his father’s family he received Kiowa storytelling traditions and a love of the Rainy Mountain area of Oklahoma. His mother, whose paternal great grandmother was Cherokee, gave him admiration for literature written in English and the example of how a willful act of imagination could create an ‘Indian’ identity... He attended reservation, public, and parochial schools, a Virginia military academy, the University of New Mexico (political science), the University of Virginia (to study law briefly), and Stanford, where he received his M.A. and Ph.D. and was strongly influenced by his teacher and friend Yvor Winters. Momaday’s teaching career includes professorships in comparative literature and English at Berkeley, Stanford, and the University of Arizona and extensive travel, particularly in Russia and Germany. Considering his varied background, it is not surprising that he has developed a catholic reading taste that ranges from American Indian oral narratives to works by Tuckerman, Melville, Dickinson, Joyce, Faulkner, and, especially, Isak Dinesen....

House Made of Dawn, a powerful novel about an alienated Jemez Pueblo World War II veteran, is told from different viewpoints and exhibits styles as direct as Hemingway’s, as dense as Joyce’s, and as resonant as the songs of the Navajo Night Way ceremony, the source of the novel’s title.”

Kenneth M. Roemer
The Heath Anthology of American Literature 2
(D.C. Heath 1990) 2038

Michael Hollister (2015)