

# N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn

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## N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn

House Made of Dawn, the novel that began the AMERICAN INDIAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE, is Scott Momaday's masterpiece. He originally conceived the work as a series of poems, but under the tutelage of Wallace Stegner at Stanford, Momaday reconceived the work first as a set of stories, then as a novel. House is the story of [Abel](#), an Indian from the Pueblo Momaday calls "Walatowa," a fictionalized version of Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico, where Momaday grew up. Abel returns from World War II a victim of what we would call today "post-traumatic stress syndrome." He is unable to speak, even to his grandfather, Francisco, who raised him.

Abel, who is drunk when his grandfather picks him up on the return to the reservation, is based in part on a veteran that Momaday knew at Jemez, but also in part on Ira [Hayes](#), the Pima Marine who raised the flag at Mt. Suribachi, and was memorialized in the statue that became the symbol of the Marine Corps. Hayes couldn't adjust to civilian life, and died drunk in a ditch on the reservation.

The Indian veteran who is a hero in war but cannot find a niche in civilian life when he

returns to America has become an archetype. Abel's name (Momaday only gives him one) suggests the biblical victim, and many readers assume the Cain who lays him low to be white society. But readers should remember that in the Bible Cain is Abel's brother, and the characters in *House Made of Dative* who cause Abel the most harm are indeed his fellow Indians. Furthermore, Abel's troubles begin even before his stint in the army. He is illegitimate, and as a result has always been an outsider at Walatowa. The war exacerbates his problems, but they started at his birth.

Abel's first t...

... middle of paper ...

...se of hendiadys, simple clauses linked with "and:" "The feasting had begun, and there was a lull on the town." Faulkner's influence can be seen in the stream of consciousness passages and the use of the bear as a symbol of the wilderness.

But Momaday's novel is distinctly Indian as well. Cherokee novelist and critic Louis OWENS says: "What has matured with Momaday is not merely an undeniable facility with the techniques and tropes of modernism, but more significantly the profound awareness of conflicting epistemologies [Euro-American and Indian]. . Momaday's novel represents more fully than any Native American novel before it the "assertion of a different perspective (92)."

#### Works Cited

Momaday, N. Scott. *House Made of Dawn*. New York: Harper, 1968.

Owens, Lewis. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Norman, OK: U Oklahoma P, 1994.

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