

Also published in the 1930s was D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936). Born on the Flathead reservation of northern Montana and adopted into the Flathead tribe, McNickle was a mixed-blood who worked for years as an administrator for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He helped found the National Congress of American Indians in 1944 and also served as the first chair of the department of anthropology at the University of Saskatchewan. *The Surrounded* tells the story of an assimilated half-blood wanderer named Archilde Leon who returns to his home on the Flathead reservation and attempts to reenter the traditional, tribal world there. Yet Leon and other characters appear shackled by some inexorable fate, trapped forever between worlds and identities. They are surrounded by dominant and hostile forces that are too strong to resist. The novel ends with Archilde Leon being arrested for complicity in two murders. A government agent underscores the futility and frustration of contemporary Indian life by observing, "It's too damn bad you people never learn that you can't run away. It's pathetic—."

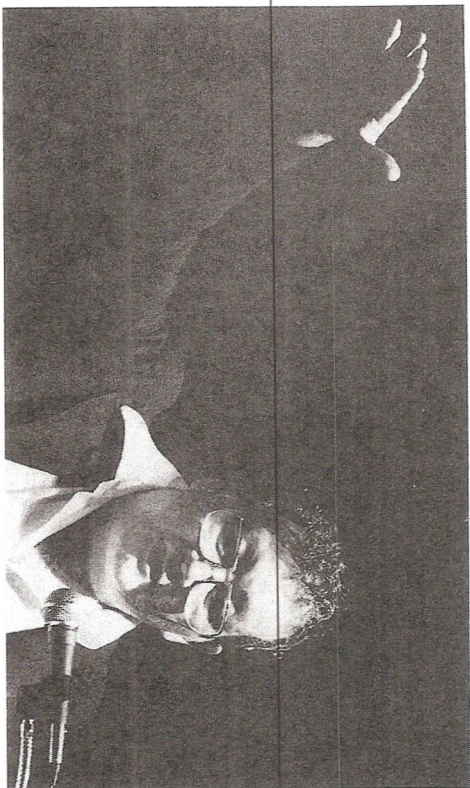
Although sales of *The Surrounded* were disappointing (the author's first royalty check amounted to only \$8.33), the publisher encouraged McNickle to begin work on a second novel. McNickle labored on the manuscript, off and on, during the next four decades, and not until a year after his death was the novel finally published. The main characters in *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978) are two ill-fated brothers in the fictional Little Elk tribe, a people deeply divided by their responses to the dominant culture. Bull is a tribal leader who tries to live a traditional life and keep apart from the whites, but his older brother Henry Jim chooses to live the white man's way. Neither response proves to be successful. When Bull attempts to resist the encroachment of white civilization on land sacred to the Little Elk people, he fails miserably. He fires his rifle at a hydroelectric dam being built in a Little Elk "power place," but the gesture only proves the futility of resistance. When he requests that a sacred medicine bundle be "repariated" to the tribe from a local museum, he is told that mice destroyed the bundle in the museum's basement. "There is nothing left to restore." Meanwhile, Henry Jim becomes thoroughly disenchanted with the white world. He moves out of his government-built house and into a tipi where he dies, no longer able (or willing) to speak English. As in *Sundown* and *The Surrounded*, there are hints in *Wind from an Enemy Sky* of the possibility of reconciliation and cross-cultural survival, but the overwhelming message is one of despair.

A more hopeful perspective informs the work of the central figure in the Native American literary renaissance of the late twentieth century, N. Scott Momaday. Born in Oklahoma in 1934, Momaday is Kiowa on his father's side and European American (and Cherokee) on his mother's. He first began writing and publishing poetry as an undergraduate at the University of New Mexico in the 1950s; he received a Stanford doctorate in American literature in 1963. He taught English and comparative literature at the University of California and at Stanford before joining the Native American Studies faculty at the University of Arizona.

The quest for identity—that central theme in the earlier novels of John Joseph Mathews and D'Arcy McNickle—was also an abiding concern in the poetry and prose of N. Scott Momaday. His own identity as a Native American was achieved through the active appropriation of his father's Kiowa heritage. "I think of myself as an Indian because at one time in my life I suddenly realized that my father had grown up speaking a language that I didn't grow up speaking," he once explained. "And so I determined to find out something about these things and in the process I acquired an identity; it is an Indian identity, as far as I am concerned." For Momaday, and the characters in his novels, the key to resolving the dilemmas and confusions of living in the modern world was to connect with the stories and traditions of one's ancestors. By knowing and telling those stories, one achieved a sense of identity that was certain and secure. "I think the storyteller in Indian tradition understands that he is dealing in something that is timeless," Momaday observed. "[When] I am telling a story, I am doing something that my father's father's father's father's father's father did."

House Made of Dawn (1968), Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, begins and ends with the traditional Pueblo words for starting (*Dyphabio*) and concluding (*Qesabab*) a story. The novel tells the tale of a young man returning home to the Jemez Pueblo from a series of displacements—from World War II, prison, and an urban ghetto in Los Angeles. Having been removed for so long from his family and community, Abel appears alienated and disconnected. His grandfather, Francisco, is the repository of the traditions of his people, and to him Abel is drawn. At first Abel tries "to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it. And yet it was there still, like memory, in the reach of his hearing."

KIOWA AUTHOR N. SCOTT MOMADAY WON THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR FICTION FOR HIS NOVEL *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN* (1968).



The key phrase is “*yet it was there still*.” As the novel progresses, Abel finds himself increasingly reintegrated into the world of his grandfather. He runs in the annual Jemez dawn race, dances to the traditional drumming at feasts, purifies himself with ashes and water, and sings the “house made of dawn” prayer from the Night Chant, a healing ceremony that promises restoration of wholeness and balance. Thus Abel obtains a sense of harmonious self-definition, something denied so many other characters in the earlier writings of Native Americans.

A year after the appearance of *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday published his highly imaginative *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969). Part personal memoir and part tribal history, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* describes the author’s pilgrimage to the grave of his grandmother, Aho, buried near Rainy Mountain in the Kiowa country of southwestern Oklahoma. Along the way, Momaday retraces the route his Kiowa ancestors took centuries earlier as they migrated from the mountains of the Yellowstone to the barren plains of Oklahoma. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is “preeminently the history of an idea,” Momaday explains in the prologue. As the Kiowa made their epoch journey, they came of age as a people and “conceived a good idea of themselves; they dared to imagine and determine who they were.” This act of imagination,

Momaday believes, is essential to self-definition. “We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves.” By the imaginative act of recalling Kiowa tribal history, Momaday joins himself to that story in the living present. “The journey herein recalled,” he concludes, “continues to be made anew each time the miracle comes to mind, for that is peculiarly the right and responsibility of the imagination.”

After two decades of pursuing his successful academic career, and writing poetry and nonfiction, Momaday published a second novel dealing with the quest for an Indian identity. *The Ancient Child* (1989) chronicles the life of an orphaned half-blood artist named Locke Setman, or Set, who grows up in San Francisco, severed from his father’s Kiowa culture and bereft of any coherent sense of who he is. His crisis of identity is intensified when he returns to his father’s grave in Kiowa country and begins to feel “as if some ancestral intelligence had been awakened in him for the first time.” Set’s crisis moves toward resolution as he enters more fully into the world of his Kiowa relatives, accepting a medicine bundle that once belonged to his grandmother and retracing the migration path of his ancestors. *The Ancient Child* ends with what Louis Owens calls “one of the only full recoveries” in Native American literature: “Like Abel, and like Momaday himself, Set is reintegrated into the mythic reality of his tribe; he has come home.”

No doubt, one of the reasons N. Scott Momaday’s writings have been so highly acclaimed is that they fit well within the modernist canon of the New Critical approach to literature. His protagonists—like those of other leading twentieth-century writers—suffer from alienation and deracination (the isolation of a person from a native or customary culture or environment). Cultural contexts are fragmented, and structures seem threatened by chaos. But what makes Momaday’s fiction so remarkable is that he infuses his work with a Native American perspective, showing that in the midst of late twentieth-century angst and anomie, an Indian world remains where ancient traditions endure and identities may be affirmed.

A similar hopeful quality is evident in the first novel of James Welch (Blackfeet/Gros Ventre), a writer who succeeded N. Scott Momaday to become the most significant Native American novelist of the 1970s. Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* (1974) describes the painful awakening of a sense of Indian identity in a nameless narrator who has lived for years within the confines of the dominant European American culture. The