

Classic Poetry Series

Navarre Scott Momaday
- poems -

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Navarre Scott Momaday(February 27, 1934)

Navarre Scott Momaday is a Native American author of Kiowa descent. His work *House Made of Dawn* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969.

Momaday is considered the founding author in what critic Kenneth Lincoln has coined the Native American Renaissance.

House Made of Dawn is considered a classic in Native American Literature.

Background

N. Scott Momaday is the son of writer Natachee Scott Momaday and painter Al Momaday.

Momaday was born on 27 February 1934 at the Kiowa-Comanche Indian Hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma, South Central United States.

He is enrolled in the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma and also has Cherokee ancestry from his mother.

Literary career

Momaday received his Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1963. Momaday's doctoral thesis, *The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* was published in 1965.

His novel *House Made of Dawn* led to the breakthrough of Native American literature into the American mainstream after the novel was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969.

House Made of Dawn was the first novel of the Native American Renaissance, a term coined by literary critic Kenneth Lincoln in the Native American Renaissance.

The work remains a classic of Native American Literature.

A Simile

What did we say to each other
that now we are as the deer
who walk in single file
with heads high
with ears forward
with eyes watchful
with hooves always placed on firm ground
in whose limbs there is latent flight

Navarre Scott Momaday

Angle Of Geese

How shall we adorn
Recognition with our speech?—
Now the dead firstborn
Will lag in the wake of words.

Custom intervenes;
We are civil, something more:
More than language means,
The mute presence mulls and marks.

Almost of a mind,
We take measure of the loss;
I am slow to find
The mere margin of repose.

And one November
It was longer in the watch,
As if forever,
Of the huge ancestral goose.

So much symmetry!—
Like the pale angle of time
And eternity.
The great shape labored and fell.

Quit of hope and hurt,
It held a motionless gaze
Wide of time, alert,
On the dark distant flurry.

Navarre Scott Momaday

Before An Old Painting Of The Crucifixion

I ponder how He died, despairing once.
I've heard the cry subside in vacant skies,
In clearings where no other was. Despair,
Which, in the vibrant wake of utterance,
Resides in desolate calm, preoccupies,
Though it is still. There is no solace there.

That calm inhabits wilderness, the sea,
And where no peace inheres but solitude;
Near death it most impends. It was for Him,
Absurd and public in His agony,
Inscrutably itself, nor misconstrued,
Nor metaphrased in art or pseudonym:

A vague contagion. Old, the mural fades...
Reminded of the fainter sea I scanned,
I recollect: How mute in constancy!
I could not leave the wall of palisades
Till cormorants returned my eyes on land.
The mural but implies eternity:

Not death, but silence after death is change.
Judean hills, the endless afternoon,
The farther groves and arbors seasonless
But fix the mind within the moment's range.
Where evening would obscure our sorrow soon,
There shines too much a sterile loveliness.

No imprecisions of commingled shade,
No shimmering deceptions of the sun,
Herein no semblances remark the cold
Unhindered swell of time, for time is stayed.
The Passion wanes into oblivion,
And time and timelessness confuse, I'm told.

These centuries removed from either fact
Have lain upon the critical expanse
And been of little consequence. The void
Is calendared in stone; the human act,

Outrageous, is in vain. The hours advance
Like flecks of foam borne landward and destroyed.

Navarre Scott Momaday

Eagle Feather Fan

The eagle is my power,
And my fan is an eagle.
It is strong and beautiful
In my hand. And it is real.
My fingers hold upon it
As if the beaded handle
Were the twist of bristlecone.
The bones of my hand are fine
And hollow; the fan bears them.
My hand veers in the thin air
Of the summits. All morning
It scuds on the cold currents;
All afternoon it circles
To the singing, to the drums.

Navarre Scott Momaday

The Delight Song Of Tsoai-Talee

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 lustre of meadows
I am an eagle playing with the wind
I am a cluster of bright beads
I am the farthest star
I am the cold of the dawn
I am the roaring of the rain
I am the glitter on the crust of the snow
I am the long track of the moon in a lake
I am a flame of four colors
I am a deer standing away in the dusk
I am a field of sumac and pomme blanche
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
I am the hunger of a young wolf
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the Gods
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to everything that is beautiful...
You see, I am alive, I am alive

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The Earth

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.

For we are held by more than the force of gravity to the earth. It is the entity from which we are sprung, and that into which we are dissolved in time. The blood of the whole human race is invested in it. We are moored there, rooted as surely, as deeply as are the ancient redwoods and bristlecones.

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