
FICTIVE TRANSFORMATION AND RESTORATION OF ORATURE IN N. SCOTT MOMADAY'S THE ANCIENT CHILD

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Abstract

Art not only emerges out of particular historical and material conditions but also negotiates with these conditions either to promote them or to resist them. An artist is always a man of social, cultural, ideological, racial, economic and political belongingness and cannot assume impartiality. N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child* demonstrates its author's belongingness to his cultural heritage of Native American tribalism, myth and orature. Momaday transforms orature into literature to restore the mythic oral tradition that was assaulted, suppressed, marginalized and discarded by Eurocentric project of annihilating assimilation. This paper studies the transformation of orature into literature in juxtaposition to the transformation of Setman; the westernized Native American painter and the protagonist of the novel, explores the relationship between art and culture and establishes that artist like a traditional Medicine Man can heal the wounded consciousness of his people by restoring their cultural heritage. The characters of Grey and Kope'mah, the two medicine women in the *Ancient Child* are primarily focused to create a link between an artist and a Medicine Man. Throughout the paper, the term of 'Native American' instead of 'Indian' is consciously used because Columbus had not discovered India but America and he confronted Natives instead of Indians.

Keywords: Native American, Momaday, Orature, Myth, Transformation, Restoration, Medicine Man,

1. Introduction

N. Scott Momaday in *The Ancient Child* (1989) transforms Native American orature into literature by incorporating the mythic elements of awe, astonishment, holy dread and belief into the plot of the story. He demonstrates the epistemological differences between Native American tribalism and Anglo-American metropolitanism by juxtaposing tribal and western identities of his protagonist Setman in the novel. Setman, a westernized painter, is brought back to his tribal roots under an emancipating influence of two medicine women; Grey and Kope'mah. The return of the 'native' is articulated in references to Kiowa myths of the bear boy. This paper reads *The Ancient Child* in context of the epistemological



paradigm of traditional Medicine Man who is believed to be a man of profound wisdom in Native American communities. The Medicine Man used to heal illness, make prophesies, guide the natives and restore the lost objects in ancient native tribes. This paper reviews the available scholarship, devises a theoretical framework and conducts the textual analysis of the novel to establish that art is medicine and an artist is a medicine man who can heal his nation's wounded consciousness, instruct his nation and restore his cultural heritage.

Arnold Krupat (1998) asserts that Native American literature is read in terms of Nationalism, Indigenism and Cosmopolitanism and “Indigenists take their perspective not so much from law and politics, as from a geocentric or place-specified philosophy” (p. 619). This paper studies *The Ancient Child* according to an indigenous perspective of Native Americans without involving into American nationalism or cosmopolitanism. Shari Huhndorf (2005) studies Native American Literature and its politics to suggest that “instead of addressing the dominant society or attempting to change it, scholarship must derive from and speak directly to Native communities” (p. 1621). This paper finds that Momaday is directly addressing his native people in *The Ancient Child* and his chief concern is restoration as well as celebration of a lost cultural heritage of native myth, tribalism and oral tradition. Robert Allen Warrior (1992) discusses the impact of metropolitanism on Native Americans and argues that capitalism results in disintegrated homelessness for them because they are “caught up in a battle of community values versus individualistic chaos rather than a conflict between one set of cohesive, livable values and another” (p. 237). This paper studies Setman’s entanglement between the materialism of Anglo-American capitalism and his geocentric tribalism which ultimately wins and brings the ‘native’ back to his tribal roots.

1.1. Research Questions

This paper conducts a textual analysis of Momaday’s novel to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the different features of Momaday’s art that he foregrounds to celebrate Native American myths, tribalism, and orature?
- 2) How does Momaday transform Native American orature into fiction to resist metroploitanism?

2. Literature Review

Marie. M. Schein (1990) reads *The Ancient Child* as a prototypical transformation of a westernized Native American artist who is restored to his tribal roots after successfully combating the dilemma in which he is “forced to choose between the demands of his agent and public and the necessity to be faithful to his [mythic] inspiration” (p. 11). Setman, the protagonist of the novel, is a celebrated Native American painter and the market driven site upon which the discursive templates of Euro-American programming of assimilation are inscribed. He disentangles himself and his art from the merchandized artistic space of “popular taste and profitability” and returns to his tribal home to assert his “awakening to his individuality rather than to his vocation” (p. 13). He finds solace in myth and embraces his destiny of being The Bear Boy. Schein juxtaposes Setman and Stephan Daedalus to suggest that “unlike Stephan Daedalus who discovers the meaning of his life when he understands the call of art, Set is made to understand and respond to the call of his Indian origins” (p. 13). For Native Americans, land is not merely a means of cultivation and inhabitation but an absolute part of self that guarantees emotional, psychological and spiritual productivity. Set returns to his land to recognize his original identity as he realizes that “the artist’s creativity can only continue to produce if the artist can locate and be content with his true nature” (p. 14).

Alan. R. Velie (1994) suggests that Native Americans return to their tribal religion because they “have been motivated by nationalistic, ecological or spiritual considerations” (p. 135). Set’s return to



his tribal roots is the return of the native who anticipates the renaissance of Native American religion that ensures a coherent identity against a constructed image packed with incoherent, fragmented and contradictory values. The whites used Christianity, in guise of anthropology, linguistics and science, to construct a native's image as heathen, corrupt and frozen in time. Momaday's first novel *House Made of Dawn* is a "blend of Christianity and the religions that the tribes had practiced before their contact with white" but in *The Ancient Child* the traces of Christianity "have become a good deal fainter as the native elements have become stronger" (pp. 141- 144). Religion is not some abstract referent of individual practices but a concrete idea that turns rituals into collective ethnic belongingness. Velie perceives that as Native Americans "seek to establish their ethnicity, they revive tribal rituals and beliefs. Scott Momaday's fiction chronicles this trend" (p. 144).

Mathias Schubnell (1994) states that Setman practices tribal rituals and embraces his mythic identity of The Bear Boy by rejecting "commercialization of art" and situating his art in the spiritual framework of "myth, place and the human consciousness" (p. 469). Market pressure would never have allowed Setman to entertain the spontaneity of expression that his intuition had been bestowing on him. Setman returns to his primitivism because a "spontaneous, childlike expression, unmediated by rational control, commercial demands and false artistic mannerism" is possible only in relation to land, myth and the tribe (p. 477). Set was bound to become The Bear to paint what he actually wanted to paint. Alec Rekow (1997) traces the consistent appearance of mythical bear motif in *Beowulf* to assert that Beowulf can be read as Bee-Wolf or Bear-wolf because he possesses "bearlike strength", "unruly youth" and "shaman like abilities" (p. 154). Setman, being a bear, also possesses these qualities and Momaday has employed the myth of bear "as a mirror reflecting the aggressions, desires and fears" that lie beneath a manufactured consciousness (p. 156). Setman liberates his self from material constraints and seeks refuge in spiritual realm of his tribe. The bear can "heal its own wounds" provided that he comes back to the home (p. 157).

Susan L. Roberson (1998) traces Setman's return to his tribal home to state that "*The Ancient Child* plays out the paradigm of [Native's] return to the tribal landscape and return to the self" (p. 32). In western literary tradition protagonists like; Prospero, Gulliver, Robinson Crusoe, Tom Jones, Marlow and Huck Fin, go away from their home in order to learn and explore. In Native American tradition the heroes like; Set, Abel and Tayo come back to their indigenous tribes to explore their true identifications because the Native American novelist knows that "self-identity involves an ecology" (p. 33). Ecology determines Native consciousness and has a potential of converting an artist into a Medicine Man who can impart traditional wisdom, insight and security to his tribal fellow beings. The available scholarship on *The Ancient Child* predominantly discusses Setman's return to his roots but this paper moves a step further to explore Setman's conversion into a modern Medicine Man through his art. This paper establishes that Native American novelist plays out the traditional roles of Medicine Man by restoring traditional culture, myth and oral tradition, guides his native people back to their home, reconstructs the link between the physical and the spiritual, and saves them from cosmopolitan fragmentation, alienation and rootlessness.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Vine Deloria Jr. (2006) in *The World We Used to Live In* claims that "being a medicine man actually involved a search for truth" (p. 14) and in tribal Native American cultures Medicine Man used to heal illness, locate the lost objects, guide the hunters, make prophesies and create a link between men and cosmos. Native Americans believe that "the unity of life on the spiritual level enable[s] man and animal to exchange ideas" (p. 112), so Momaday's imagination, charged with his commitment to restore his tribal mythic structure in *The Ancient Child*, constructs a living relationship between the bear and the artist. The artist, like a Medicine Man, strives to search the truth of his individuality in proximity to his



tribal collectivity, ecological horizontality and mythical originality. For Momaday, Native American ways of existence ensure a prosperous survival. Felix. S. Cohen (1952) celebrates Native American norms of democracy, self-government, agriculture, social harmony and liberty to claim that America and American values primarily belong to natives and we should not americanize the natives but strive for "Americanizing the white man" (p. 191). Momaday's pen americanizes the white-washed native artist by fetching him back to the real American tradition and makes *The Ancient Child* a rehabilitating work of power-literature that questions, challenges and rejects western paradigms of literary productions.

Sarah Eden Schiff (2011) expresses that Native American writers produce power-literature to assert a "claim on American citizenship in artistic realm" by seeking the "recovery of traditional myths" (p. 98). Myth must not be assumed as some abstract metaphysical absence because Native Americans own myth as a concrete material presence. Myth and existence work in a relation of mutual reinforcement in which myth answers the disturbing questions and the human beings furnish myth to comprehend what is otherwise incomprehensible. Myth becomes a sort of knowledge omitting reservoir and Momaday's keenness turns the myth of Bear Boy into a dependable source from which his protagonist could seek guidance. Myth is a nation's collective memory. Arnold Krupat (1995) considers the return of the natives to their roots as a "centripetal structure of return" that involves not only a "movement out of progress or advance" but also entails a "movement back, a return to memory" (p. 567). Momaday situates his text in close relation to the memory that must not be read as some individual memory but as racial memory that makes an artist assume the responsibility of traditional Medicine Man. Momaday invokes myth to rearticulate tribal oral tradition because myth, memory and oral tradition are not only interlinked but also interdependent. Both myth and oral tradition evoke "awe, astonishment, imagination, belief [and] holy dread" (Momaday, 1996, p. 308) and *The Ancient Child* is saturated with the characteristic features of myth and oral tradition. Myth celebrates Native American existence and puts forward the case of native resilience to challenge and reject the stereotypical notion which (mis)claims that Native American stories are nothing but "harmless fables and record of victimization" (Cooper, 1994, p. 17). Myth transcends victimization and produces the oral tradition which stares back at the victimizer and tells him; once it is equipped with a responsible pen, it has a potential to "speak, listen and remember" (Momaday, 2007, p. 16) what is otherwise unspeakable, inaudible and indistinguishable.

Amelia. V. Katanski (2009) proposes that oral tradition provides Native American writers with "the codes necessary for self-determination" because stories are taken as "repositories for the cultural and historical knowledge" (p. 57). Momaday's *The Ancient Child* represents one such story by uniting the elements of myth, oral tradition, and transformation. It is pertinent to remember that the historical and the cultural knowledge for the Native American writers is not merely "a romantic thirst for knowledge" but "a violent quest for redress" (Schiff, 2011, p. 100). Jung, Eliade and Compbell recover cultural myths for understanding human existence but Momaday recovers myth to change the existence of his fellow Native Americans. He is an activist and believes that "racial memory automatically preserves narratives of a communal past but requires activism through the act of storytelling" (p. 107). Momaday's story must be analysed as an act of resistance rather than a hollow retrieval of a vanished Native American identity. Alica. A. Kent (2007) establishes that Native American novels have responded vigorously against the "cultural construct" of "vanishing American" that held the belief; "American Indians would soon die out as a culture and as a people" (p. 76). Murtaza and Bhatti (2016) trace Euro-American history of literature and anthropology to express that the white man has always believed that Native Americans are doomed to be wiped out because of their being primitive, alcoholic and dependent. Kent also observes the similar conceptualization of Native Americans in American culture which perceives the natives as "public welfare dependents, alcohol and tobacco addicts and beleaguered primitives doomed to extinction" (2007, p. 78). Momaday reacts strongly against such stereotypes and produces



The Ancient Child to announce that Native Americans and their cultures are dynamic enough to adjust into the postmodern world without sacrificing their indigenous tribalism. Rey Chow (1996) observes that “what confronts the Western Scholar is the discomforting fact that natives are no longer staying in their frames” of Vanishing Indian Identity (p. 123). They had always been the men of dynamic tradition and now they are using the pen to convert their oral stories into written texts for reclaiming their legitimate place in American literary and cultural life. Pulitano (2003) suggests that “the future of Native studies lies in challenging the status quo, in breaking down the hierarchy of center and margin and claiming a space of its own” (p. 97). Momaday’s *The Ancient Child*, as demonstrated in the textual analysis of its story, claims space for Native American existence and literature by projecting that a responsible pen can create a liberating tradition.

3. Methodology

This paper answers the research questions by conducting a qualitative textual analysis of *The Ancient Child*. The analysis aims at reading the primary text in accordance to the theoretical framework devised for this paper. The characters of three main characters named as Setman, Grey, and Kope'mah are evaluated to develop a link between art and human rehabilitation on one hand, and on the other hand, to explore the fictive restoration of orature in the novel.

4. Textual Analysis and Discussion

“Sometimes, medicine men simply have an extended vision that enables them to see such a long distance that they locate the missing thing”, says Deloria in *The World We used to Live In* (2006, p. 67). Momaday’s *The Ancient Child* interweaves the lives of a dying great grandmother Kope'mah, her grandson Setman and her great granddaughter Grey who “never had...to quest after visions” (Momaday, 1989, p. 12) yet visions are bestowed upon her because she is destined to become a medicine woman; through the blood memory she inherits from her great grandmother, and is bound to bring the lost Setman back to his tribal home. Roberson (1998) believes that women “give life and connect life” (p. 36) in Native American cultures. Zinn (1980) asserts in *A People’s History of the United States - 1492- Present* that the Spaniards who traveled with Columbus were surprised at seeing the empowered Native American women. Momaday’s text from its very beginning has projected an image of empowered native woman who is neither a victim of patriarchy like Maggie, Tess, Nora, and Aunt Jennifer, nor a usurper like Belinda, Rabeecca Sharp, Miss Havisham, Hedda, Abigail, and Christine. The native culture is matriarchal; not in the sense of exact opposite of patriarchal but in the form of life nurturing empowerment, that turns Kope'mah into a medicine woman “when she was still a girl and could not have dreamed of such a gift” and makes her “always careful to use [the gift] rightly” (Momaday, 1989, p. 21). The blessed must have to maintain the delicate balance between the blessing and the responsibility it demands to ensure social harmony. Neither Kope'mah nor Grey has any power in her individual capacity but within a strong communal framework that empowers both of the women in the first place. Being a visionary woman, Kope'mah is bound to invite her grandson and ensure the necessary meeting between Grey and Setman who feels “a strange feeling” at the very moment he arrives at his tribal home, “as if some ancestral [not personal] intelligence had been awakened in him for the first time” (p. 64). The gift must be delivered to the next generation because it is a collective ancestral heritage that must be preserved and not some stupid cultural baggage that should be discarded. Momaday’s novel highlights as well as celebrates the existence of Native American medicine people and presents a case in which two medicine women save the soul of a westernized native by making him embrace his true identity. If one extends the saving as well as a liberating project of two woman to encompass the role of Native American fiction in saving the tribal heritage of natives, one will realize that a committed artist like Momaday is himself a medicine man who is visionary enough to look beyond distances and bring the marginalized native mythic tradition back to its rightful central place in American literary life.



The tribal mythic tradition of Native American culture pursues horizontality of cosmic existence in which human beings, flora, fauna, land and deities are interconnected as well as interdependent. The Anglo-American Christian capitalism, on the other hand, advocates that nature, land and human beings exist in a vertical hierarchy and man can use nature to his own advantage. A medicine man is a carrier of the cultural heritage and must preserve the horizontal relationship against the threatening verticality imposed by the Anglo-American capitalism. Grey, being a medicine woman, is inclined to respect the unity of existence with her horse and she is “determined to have it, not to own it in the ordinary sense but to have it at the disposition of her will” (p. 27) and her movements are “athletic and animalistic” in presence of [both] men and horses” (p. 19). One must have to possess Kope’mah’s “otherworldly intuition, a kind of holy madness, a wild and native intelligence” (p. 33) to comprehend why Grey “dreamed of sleeping with a bear” (p. 29) even before her knowing anything about the existence of Setman who is destined to become the bear boy and her husband. None can comment upon any discourse unless he enters that discourse. Anglo-American tradition objectified Native American cultures and constructed sweeping generalizations to (mis)represent as useless what was actually valuable in its own unique native ways. Set wants to convert his inborn “uniquely valid” (p. 37) visions into creative art but the market works to convert him into a manufacturer of commercialized artistic specimens. Setman; caught up between the demands of his intuitive vision and commercial pressure, realizes that he has “compromised more than he knew” (p. 38) because “those who exhibited his work, who praised and purchased it, and who demanded its proliferation began to determine it” (p. 36). Setman must let his tribalism determine his art and “endeavor to save his soul” (p. 38) by bringing “some crucial memory, deeply buried, to the surface” (p. 140) of his mind and canvass. Setman paints his vision and calls it “Night Window Man” in which “a grotesque man with red hair and red dress” emerges from a “blue and grey background” as if he were “about to be transformed” (pp. 106-107). The transformation in Setman’s painting anticipates Set’s transformation into the bear boy after his successful resistance against the discursive techniques of Anglo-American capitalism. He is destined to acknowledge the horizontality of cosmic existence and feel no shame in accepting his mythic identity of a bear. Set is bear. He is sacred the same way a bear is sacred in Native American myth and must revive what is hibernating in his ancestral unconsciousness. He must have to bring his unconscious to the conscious level because he has learnt in school that “art [is] resistance” (p. 57). It seems that Momaday himself is Setman because he has also resisted against the commercial demands of popular literature by reviving as well as celebrating Native American myth of the bear boy. Bruce Jackson (2006), while discussing the popular American literature and mass media presentations, expresses that it is common to see a “smart Indian gave up all home life, all association with family friends and tribe, to become a devoted sidekick of a white man” (p. 13). Momaday resisted against this stereotype in *The Ancient Child* and brings his native protagonist back at home. Instead of reproducing popular cultural motifs of assimilation and metropolitanism, Momaday has produced an alternate version of separation and tribalism. A Native American artist is a modern Medicine Man who must produce medicine in form of his art and cure his nation from the ills of hierachal verticality by projecting a world in which spirits, nature, a horse, a bear, a great granddaughter, a grandson and a great grandmother enjoy the horizontality of cosmic existence.

Cultural heritage is the medicine that medicine people must preserve and transfer to their generations. Kope’mah performs this duty and asks Grey to handover Setman the medicine bundle that contains items related to bear. Grey tells Setman that “the grandmother, Kope’mah, wants me to give you back your medicine. It belongs to you. You must not go without it” (Momaday, 1989, p. 72). Though Kope’mah is already dead before Setman’s arrival at the tribe, yet Grey uses present indefinite tense ‘wants’ instead of past indefinite ‘wanted’ and demonstrates that Kope’mah is still communicating with her from her grave and she can still hear “the voice of the grandmother on the water” (p. 101). Lundquist (2004) juxtaposes epistemological difference between Native American and Christian religions to suggest



that Christianity believes in “sin repentance, salvation, redemption and eternal life” in front of heaven and hell but Native Americans, as he quotes Deloria, “see themselves returning to nature, their bodies becoming the dust of Mother Earth” (p. 217). The native is earth bound because he identifies with earth in a familial relationship and “it does not matter if he lives or dies because he is in the process of rediscovering his voice” (p. 214). Though Kope’mah is dead yet she is always instructing Grey who is “becoming a medicine woman because it was in her to do so, it was her purpose, her reason for being” (Momaday, 1989, p. 173). This is the compound of the blood memory, the ancestral intelligence, and the collective tribal unconscious which is being transferred from Kope’mah to Grey who must further deliver it to Setman and learn how to keep her “desires under her control” and follow “the rhythms of the natural world” (p. 176). Anglo-American world is the system of capital, desire and competition whereas Native American living is the culture of tribe, support and benevolence. Grey could have kept the medicine bundle to her own self but she does not do so. She could have felt envious of Setman’s fortune if she had not been guided by the belief that “her destiny was singular and that she must accept certain very serious responsibilities” of being a medicine woman (p. 169). Grey must assist Setman in restoring his true identity. Is Momaday not projecting himself in Kope’mah and Grey’s characters? The question can be answered in affirmative because Momaday’s pen also transfers the cultural heritage of mythic oral tradition onto the page and makes the reader witness Setman’s mythic transformation into the bear boy.

Transformation is restoration. A disturbed Setman comes back to western world to fight the battle between his instinctual spontaneity and manufactured rationality. Under the enormous influence of medicine bundle, he is haunted by Grey’s primitive beauty which was “more than beautiful” and “infinitely interesting” because Grey is a kind of woman who could have never been presented “in a museum or a history book or a fashion magazine, or in an opera or on the streets of the great cities of the world” (p. 114). Setman touches the medicine bundle one night and felt “he had come in the presence of the darkest power” after he “had a vision of the grandmother” (p. 115). That same night Grey “entered the cemetery and lay on the grandmother’s grave. She placed her ear to the cool fresh earth and listened” (p. 116). Grey asks Kope’mah “can [Set] suffer and delight hugely, anciently, with respect and belief? And is [Set] then the bear, Grandmother?” and the grandmother replies from her grave, “Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes” (p. 116). This would seem fantastic, irrational, abnormal and impossible in Anglo-American tradition but in Native American culture it is normal for a medicine woman to converse with the dead as elaborated extensively by Deloria Jr in *The World We Used to Live In* (2006). Moreover, in the mythic oral tradition of natives, the awe, astonishment, belief and sacredness are not some aberrations but the very characteristic features of orature. Astonishment grips the reader during the whole process of Setman and his art’s transformation. It seems Momaday, like an ancient grandparent, is telling a sacred oral story to an audience of perceptive natives who are listening to the fall and rise of their indigenous cultures. Orature demands interconnectivity between listening, speaking and remembering. It demands the telling of an event in connection to some myth that emerges from past, deals with present and leads the listeners into future. Story telling is communal but writing is individualistic: one means company whereas the other means isolation. Murtaza et al. (2020) asserts that Sherman Alexie’s “aesthetics of resistance in his poetry and fiction demonstrate a great range of experimentation violating the traditional rules of Euroamerican literary canon” (p. 69). If one extends Murtaza’s assertion to read Momaday in comparison to Alexie, one will find that Momaday also challenges Eurocentric notions of fiction writing and rejects the principles of necessity and probability in his novel. He adopts the traditional requirements of plot, action and characterization within the traditional framework of an oral story. This generic adaptation suggests not only the dynamic nature of oral story but also establishes that native cultures are resilient enough to survive against the forces of assimilation and annihilation. Setman; on the verge of an annihilating assimilation, is saved by his ancestral consciousness that produces a “profound lucidity” in



his visionary art and “he was filled with purpose and confidence” (Momaday, 1989, p. 216). Native American culture had never experienced existential crises and absurdity of meaninglessness before the Anglo-American tradition assaulted their epistemological and ontological belief systems. Setman, must have to restore his ancestral epistemology that ensures his existence as a confident being on one hand and binds him with communal duty and purpose on the other hand. “He must be true to the story” (p. 216) and accept his transformation into the bear boy because transformation of self is the restoration of self.

Setman’s transformation into bear is accelerated when he opens the medicine bundle and his id, once trapped into the web of hierachal superego, is released and induces in him aggression that could not have been tamed even “if a hundred woman loved him” (p. 235). Bear is ferocious and untamable in Native American tradition. Setman; the bear, is kept in hospitalized bondage for six weeks in vain. The doctor could have said nothing except (mis)understanding that Setman is “dangerously self-centered” (p. 235) and “capable of violence” (p. 242). Is aggressive self-realization equal to nihilistic self-annihilation? Yes, it is so in Anglo-American epistemology. But, in Native American tradition, self-realization in relation to cultural myth is the ultimate goal of being. Though the doctor could tell Setman “wonderful stories [about bears], gleaned from the annals of folklore and witchcraft and medical mythology” yet the narration is nothing but an empty white babble devoid of any “sensitivity or shame” (p. 241). The doctor could have known Native American mythology but he as well as other whites cannot comprehend the spiritual significance attached to Native American myths. There is always a fundamental difference between a material quest for knowledge and the spiritual thirst for redress. Myth performs the function of redress and only a Native American could tell a story the way it should have been told. Doctor’s narration, instead of bringing any relief for Setman, results in awakening genuine anger in Set and he punches doctor’s face with the ferociousness of a bear. Despite (owing to) his Anglo-American education and medical training, the doctor could only tell Setman that “the bear is an ancient symbol of the perilous aspect of the unconscious” (p. 242) because he cannot look beyond his discursive Eurocentric discourse. Momaday is well aware of this discursive formation of Eurocentric perception, so he not only owns the myth of the bear but also narrates it in Native American way. The narration for creating a meaningful impact depends upon; what is the historicity of an event, how the event is perceived, why its narration is necessary and how it should be narrated. Momaday, instead of indulging into Eurocentric vagaries of realistic fiction, reproduces a mythic environment that restores an ancient myth by transforming orature into literature.

Setman eventually returns home to meet Grey; the medicine woman who dreams about “hawks and horses, the sun rising, and clouds bursting with rain....deities and mythic heroes” (p. 247) and feels enlivened during storms “for they were innately powerful and their power informed her spirit” (p. 250). Set could have restored his mythic individuality only in the presence of a woman who has power enough to tell buried Kope’mah that “grandmother, [Set] has come” (p. 251). Proper Native American ceremonies; in proper native environment, restore Setman to his proper native identity of the bear and bind him into the wedlock with Grey. Grey tells Setman, “You are Set; you are the bear; you will be the bear, no matter what. You will act accordingly, in the proper way because there is no other way to act” (p. 271). Momaday’s liberated and liberating art, like the art of a medicine man, narrates the story in proper native way, heals the wounds of assaulted native consciousness, locates the lost cultural heritage of myth and restores the vital oral tradition which was long suppressed, marginalized and discarded as cultural baggage.

1. Conclusion

Art is medicine and artist should be a responsible medicine man. The textual analysis of *The Ancient Child* demonstrated that the interconnection between art and artist is not odious but essential.



An artist can redress human suffering through his art. He essentially belongs to a community and his art should reflect his nation's existential concerns. Momaday's belongingness to his native men and women is evident throughout the story of *The Ancient Child*. He selects a myth, transforms it into a novel and restores the aspects of oral tradition. The novel cannot be comprehended in its entirety unless one understands the implications of native oral tradition. Oral tradition among natives is not some sort of 'art for art sake' aesthetics but 'art for life sake' project and functions within the framework of mythical structure, communal involvement, cultural bondage and tribal purpose. It involves awe, astonishment, magic, and belief system. The fantastic events of the novel must not be juxtaposed with magical realism because they are not meant to make readers transcend their immediate historical conditions but are directed to make the natives comprehend their real socio-cultural situations. Magic realism provides escape from history but the magic in native oral tradition is a direct engagement with past, present and future. Oral tradition aims at remembering past, comprehending present and guiding people into future by rehabilitating the shattered consciousness of its participants. Momaday's art has performed these very functions of oral tradition in *The Ancient Child*. Kope'mah and Grey are representatives of traditional medicine people and cure Setman's illness by bringing him back to his tribal roots. What is Setman going to paint is of utmost importance. Is he also a medicine man? Yes he is going to become a modern medicine man as his paintings, after his transformation, are transformed as well. Instead of listening to the commercial demands of capitalism, a transformed Setman listens to the "wind and the birds and the thunder rolling on the cliffs" (p. 291) and his brush starts celebrating the horizontality of cosmos. His paintings are going to heal the wounds and locate the lost cultural heritage. He is going to perform the functions of medicine man in apparently a different context but inherently in tribal spirit. Spirit and the function of spirit matters the most and the form can be transformed to articulate the spirit. Is Momaday himself a modern medicine man? Yes, he is. He transforms orature into literature and restores the medicine in form of his art that has a potential of healing Native American wounded spirit.

The future researcher can employ the analytical model devised in this paper to investigate the resistance of Native American writers in literary and socio-political contexts. He can explore the ways in which Native American fiction engages with the issues of tribalism and metropolitanism. This paper invites Pakistani writers, critics and researchers to think about a pertinent question: Do we Pakistanis have a cultural, artistic and epistemological tradition? If yes, we must strive to restore it back in postmodern cosmopolitan world. If our colonial baggage makes us believe that we don't have a tradition, we must produce our own. It is the responsibility of artists, critical thinkers and intelligentsia to interact with socio-political conditions of global world and assert our national consciousness the way Native American writers and theorists have asserted. Rules are for the weak and norms are imposed upon the nations that deny the existence of their own tradition. We must own our national tradition, transform it and restore our own national consciousness.

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