

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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N. Scott Momaday (1934-)

The Way to Rainy Mountain and The Names

The Way to Rainy Mountain (1969) is a short book that poetically retraces the route of the Kiowa two hundred years ago from the northern Rocky Mountains onto the Great Plains and down to Oklahoma. It is in three parts, "The Setting Out," "The Going On," and "The Closing in," and is framed by a brief "Introduction" and "Epilogue." Within each of the parts the narrative proceeds through the representation of the three different kinds of material: myth, history, and personal memory, distinguished by three different type faces. There are also ink drawings and designs by Al Momaday, Momaday's father.

Thus *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is in a sense collaborative autobiography, a tradition in Native American personal narrative. Coup stories and hunting stories were often told by several people, with one supporting or adding to what another said, and the tribal histories such as "Winter Counts" were kept by one person, but when they were told, they could be filled out by other people's memories. Momaday's collaborators are not only his father but also the old anonymous myth tellers and the other Kiowa he interviewed.

The selection below is the beginning of "Setting Out."

Momaday's *The Names* (1976) is more like a family scrapbook. It has old family portraits and snapshots with handwritten captions. The material is also more specific to Momaday himself and his family, especially his mother. Had Momaday not first published his novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968; Pulitzer Prize 1969), *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, and several other books, there probably would have been no occasion for publishing *The Names*; nevertheless, the comments on imagination and the reconstruction of his childhood definitions of "Indian" go well beyond the material of the celebrity autobiography.

The texts below are from *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (New York: Ballantine, 1969) and *The Names* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). Matthias Schubnell, *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1985), provides useful biographical information. *Ancestral Voices: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday*, by Charles L. Woodard (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989), provides further information.

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