



## Formal Architecture of Trauma in Momaday's House Made of Dawn: A Hermanian Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Judith Herman's (1992) post-traumatic stress disorder model is not only a thematic interpretation of the protagonist Abel's psychological state in Momaday's House Made of Dawn, but also the formal structure that governs the novel's narrative. The study uses Catherine Belsey's model of textual analysis as the research method. It analyzes the novel's three symptom clusters of: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction, and how they organize the novel's non-linear chronology, its polyvocal fragmentation, and its strategic use of silence at the formal rather than thematic level. The findings show that Abel's inability to speak is formally a representation of the colonial separation of an individual from his ceremonial language, the war flashback sequence is a formal representation of traumatic intrusion, and Herman's reconnection phase is formally represented in Ben Benally's Night Chant. This formal reading is represented in the article as an original contribution to trauma studies and Native American literary scholarship.

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## Introduction

Momaday's House Made of Dawn (1969) stands alone in American literature in the sense that it is widely believed to have sparked the Native American Literary Renaissance. It, in itself, is a period of transformative and ongoing literary production in which Indigenous voices first gained national and international critical attention, in 1969, a year in which it was published and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The novel tells the story of a young Jemez Pueblo man, Abel, who comes back from WWII psychologically shattered, unable to fit back in with his ceremonial community, and who is further uprooted when the federal urban relocation program drops him

off in Los Angeles. The novel traces his coming back, his violence, his incarceration, and the way he ultimately, limply, and hesitantly recovers through the ceremonial knowledge his grandfather passes on his deathbed. But the arc is not to be comforted by the comforts of traditional story: it is not linear, it is not tidy, and it is not most meaningful in what it says. This article focuses on this formal aspect: the novel's refusal to narrate, to convey its significance by means of a succession of events.

There is much critical literature on *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969), and it has generated many fruitful readings. But the novel's cultural and historical importance was set in the early studies, such as Velie's (1982) comparative examination of Native American literary masters and Lincoln's (1983) seminal account of the Native American Literary Renaissance. Schubnell's (1985) in-depth study of Momaday's cultural and literary background gave the biographical and anthropological background for the ceremonial symbolism in the novel. The first large-scale ceremonial reading of the novel is Scarberry-Garcia's (1990) classic book, which maps the specific Navajo and Pueblo ceremonies that serve as the basis for the structure and symbolism of the novel. In his significant study of the American Indian novel, Owens (1992) considers *House Made of Dawn* (1969) a key text in the process of Indigenous literary self-determination, in which Momaday uses the novel to wrest the Native voice from stereotypical colonial representations. Allen (1992) read the novel from a feminist and Indigenous spiritual perspective, and Ruppert (1995) explored a more nuanced reading of the novel's mediation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous narrative conventions.

This body of scholarship is impressive, and this article is an extension of this body of scholarship. What it has not done is to consider the formal structure of the novel in the light of trauma theory, especially the question of whether the formal strategies that have been noted by earlier critics are aesthetic choices or necessities imposed by the logic of traumatized consciousness itself. As a systemic approach to academic study, trauma theory was most vibrant in the early 1990s. Herman (1992) provided the first clinical description of the three symptom clusters of hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction, the non-linear temporal structure of traumatic memory, the dissociation between event and meaning, and the triphasic recovery model of safety, remembrance, and mourning, and reconnection. The same year, Felman and Laub (1992) expanded the framework into literary and testimonial analysis: they suggest that trauma cannot be represented in a conventional narrative, but that formal strategies of fragmentation and incompleteness are required to get close to the truth of trauma. Caruth (1996) has most clearly elaborated the literary-theoretical implications of this argument: Literature can perform the structure of traumatic experience itself. This is the theoretical apparatus that these scholars have set up, and it has proved to be very fruitful for literary studies. But its use in Native American fiction is mostly thematic: critics observe that Native American characters have historically inflicted trauma on them and dissect what kind of trauma this is. What has not been developed, however, is the formal argument: the suggestion that the traumatic condition not only supplies the content of these novels but also dictates the formal choices that are used to organize their narrative architecture.

In this study that formal argument is taken seriously and applied to *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) as its main source. The formal aspects of the novel (its non-linearity, its various focalizing points, its concerted silences, its ceremonial style) are not viewed here as the stylistic choices of a talented writer working in a modernist vein, but rather as formal

requirements imposed by the colonial trauma the novel attempts to articulate. This argument has ramifications that extend beyond this individual text: If Herman's (1992) trauma model can be shown to function as formal architecture in *House Made of Dawn* (1969), Native American literary criticism has a more rigorous analytical tool available to it for reading formal aspects of Indigenous fiction than has been offered by the literature. Drawing on Belsey's (2005) model of text analysis, the study reads both as formal features—silences, structural gaps, competing narrative voices, etc., and as ideologically and culturally loaded events. Herman's (1992) clinical framework and Belsey's (2005) formal-cultural method form the study's analytical engine. Although *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) has been the subject of much critical scrutiny. There is a lack of published work that has claimed systematically that the PTSD model (Herman, 1992) applies to the formal architecture of the novel. The existing scholarship on the novel is descriptive, using trauma theory to note the psychological symptoms of the novel without analyzing their function in the novel's non-linear construction, strategic silences, and polyvocal narration.

This allows for the most formally innovative elements of this novel, those that make it a formal revolutionary in Native American literary history, to go without a theoretical account. Therefore, the present study fills in this gap by claiming that the three symptom clusters in Herman's (1992) formulation exist as the organizing principles of the formal architecture of the novel. To examine Herman's PTSD model as the formal architecture of *House Made of Dawn* and analyze the encoding of colonial trauma in Abel's inarticulateness and the novel's use of silence in the process of coding colonial trauma in relation to Herman's PTSD, this study answers the questions: a) What are the formal workings of *House Made of Dawn* as a PTSD framework as espoused by Herman (1992)? b) What is the significance of Abel's inarticulateness and the novel's use of silence in the process of coding colonial trauma in relation to Herman's PTSD? This study is limited to *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) and focuses on the formal aspects of the text: time, narration, and silence, rather than on the biographical and/or anthropological contexts. Two directions of significance may be identified: one is that it provides a more rigorous account of the novel's formal achievement than existing literature; second, it and other texts that have been and will be influenced by it show that Herman's (1992) PTSD framework can serve as a formal as well as a thematic analytical instrument for Native American literary criticism, thereby extending its influence beyond this one study.

## **Literature Review**

The study of trauma and its relationship to literary form has a history of over 30 years of productive theoretical work. This discussion was not established in literature but in clinical psychiatric and psychoanalytical. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) is the first sustained effort to apply the clinical knowledge of traumatic experience to the literary and testimonial texts. Their main thesis, that "trauma is a basic disruption of the capacity for narration," and that the disruption "is formally traceable in the text that the traumatized subject has produced, or that has been produced about him," is the methodological principle extended here. Thus, as Felman and Laub (1992) demonstrated, testimony, both in the literary/historical sense and in the clinical sense, is not an unmediated view of the traumatic event, but a formal act in and of itself, determined by what the traumatized consciousness can and cannot transmit. The idea that the form of a trauma is as honest as its content is their own is the formative backbone of the formal argument they make here.

The main theoretical framework of the study is taken from the work of Judith Herman (1992), *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman's description of PTSD concentrates on three major symptom clusters: hyperarousal (the continual condition of heightened physiological alertness and preparedness for threat that trauma creates), intrusion (the involuntary re-experiencing of trauma through flashbacks, nightmares, and sensory intrusion), and constriction (the numbing of emotional and perceptual capacity as a defense response to overwhelming experience). Herman also suggests a three-stage recovery: safety, remembrance/mourning, and reconnection, where the survivor first establishes a safe physical and psychological environment, then works through the traumatic memory, and finally, rebuilds relationships and returns to a meaningful life. Herman's model is important for this study's argument because it has a temporal dimension: traumatic memory cannot be brought under chronological order but must be structured by emotional intensity and intrusive recurrence, and thus breaks down the then and now into one another, which can be concealed or faithfully rendered by literary form. *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) is a recreation of it.

Caruth (1996) explores the literary-theoretical implications of Herman's clinical account, focusing especially upon the formal consequences of traumatic experience for narrative structure. The formal implications of Caruth's (1996) central claim that trauma is 'a wound inflicted upon the mind' and that it 'misses' the traumatized subject at the moment of its occurrence and returns belatedly as intrusive repetition are obvious: a literature that takes trauma seriously cannot simply report the event of trauma but must find formal strategies to represent the belatedness, incompleteness, and recursive temporal structure of traumatic experience. LaCapra's (2001) work takes this argument in a historical and ethical direction, by positing a difference between 'acting out' (the unconscious repetition of traumatic patterns) and 'working through' (the conscious, narrative processing of traumatic experience). This distinction can be correlated to the formal structure of *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) quite precisely: The non-linear flashbacks of Abel and his inability to speak in his own defense are formally equivalent to acting out; the Night Chant and the dawn run are formally equivalent to working through.

The most systematic study of formal strategies used by literary fiction to represent traumatic experience is that offered by Whitehead (2004) finds four main formal strategies that trauma fiction typically uses: intertextuality (the layering of traumatic texts to create meaning through their accumulation), repetition (the repetition of traumatic figures and events throughout the narrative), a dispersal of narrative (the distribution of traumatic testimony across multiple voices and multiple perspectives), and temporal disruption (the non-linear, recursive organization of narrative time). In *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969), all four of these strategies are in operation, and Whitehead's (2004) taxonomy will give form to the kind of things Herman's (1992) clinical framework suggests will happen. Balaev (2008) provides a fruitful critique of the prevailing trauma theory tradition, pointing out that the theory had grown too individualistic and psychological, while neglecting the collective, cultural, and historical aspects of traumatic suffering. The critique is especially relevant to the reading of Native American fiction in which the trauma is always individual and collective, psychological and physical. Luckhurst (2008), also argues for a more historical approach to the literary representations of trauma, acknowledging that the theory's clinical roots needed to be complemented through historical and cultural study.

The most important step in the specifically postcolonial use of trauma theory has been taken by Craps's (2013). The dominant Euro-American trauma theory tradition (Herman, Caruth, LaCapra) systematically privileges the experience of trauma for other postcolonial and Indigenous communities in relation to a Eurocentric emphasis on the Holocaust and its aftermath, argues Craps. This article's response to the call for a trauma theory that will seriously consider the 'out of bounds' traumas, the colonial genocides, the ecological destructions, the cultural suppressions that the dominant tradition had bracketed, is his? The most recent important contribution to Herman's framework is Kolk's (2014), which shows, through neuropsychological research, that trauma lives in the body as well as the mind, and that components of traumatic injury must be addressed somatically to be effective. This is directly relevant to the somatic reading of *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) presented here: Abel's body, its violence and its alcohol dependency and eventual recovery through ceremonial physical movement, is the novel's body of colonial traumatic injury and its possible healing, and Kolk's (2014) framework gives the clinical legitimation for reading it as such.

### **Review of Scholarship of the Selected Novel**

Velie(1982) was one of the first ones to the field of academic studies to recognize Momaday as a literary artist of great importance that stood shoulder-to-shoulder with other key figures of the Native American Literary Renaissance, such as Welch, Leslie Silko, and Vizenor. Velie's interpretation of *House Made of Dawn* focused on Momaday's exploration of traditional Pueblo and Navajo ceremonial forms, which he claimed were the basis of Momaday's formal innovations, rather than modernist literary precedents. This argument, that the novel's formal features are indigenous and not of Euro-American origin, is a crucial one for the reading of the novel that is being offered here. However, this study takes this argument one step further than what Velie would likely have envisioned: not only are the novel's formal features indigenous, but they are necessitated by the trauma that colonial disruption of those indigenous traditions has produced.

The study of Native American literature has been put in its historical and cultural context by Lincoln (1983), who contends that the novel is a form of recovery: a renaissance in the literal sense, an awakening of Indigenous voice after a large measure of colonial suppression. Generative as this frame is, this linear contrast between a time of cultural suppression and a time of cultural recovery has been questioned as a contradiction to the novel's own avoidant linearity. The most detailed contextual study of the novel was that of Momaday (1985), which meticulously traces Momaday's biographical, cultural, and literary influences. Schubnell's book is a necessary resource for anyone interested in the ceremonial practices of the Momaday novel, such as the Jemez Pueblo corn dances and the Navajo Night Chant, as well as the Kiowa oral traditions that shape the symbolic system of the novel. The article is based on Schubnell's work in context, yet it is developed specifically formally and theoretically in a direction that Schubnell's contextual work does not go.

The most influential ceremonial reading of the novel is by Scarberry-Garcia (1990). Scarberry-Garcia attentively analyzed the text and showed how the novel's structure mirrors that of the healing ceremony explicitly called into play at the novel's climax, the Navajo Night Chant, and his symbolic language is arranged around the ceremonial principle of *hózhó*, the Navajo idea of beauty, balance, and right relations between people and their world. The novel, she argues, is

about healing, for its arc is one of fragmentation and then ceremonial healing, though Scarberry-Garcia does not put this trajectory in the clinical terms of Herman (1992). This article makes explicit for the first time a relationship between the ceremonial principle of *hózhó* and Herman's third recovery phase: reconnection. Louis Owens reads *House Made of Dawn* (1969) as a politically motivated act of cultural self-determination, suggesting that Momaday's account of Abel's story is not primarily a psychological case study but an allegory of the larger plight of Indians in post-contact America.

Allen (1992) introduced a distinctly feminist and spiritual Native American perspective to the novel, viewing the novel's ceremonial symbolism as stemming from a gynocentric cosmological tradition that has been ignored by European colonization. The significance of Allen's reading for this study is that it brings to the foreground the communal and spiritual aspects of the ceremonial healing process, of which the novel provides a formal account, aspects that Herman's (1992) clinical model does not fully take into account, though the article does recognize them as necessary contexts for the formal argument of the novel. Ruppert (1995), constructs a sophisticated analysis of the novel's formal strategies as a process of cultural mediation, a process in which the novel does not totally engage either Indigenous or non-Indigenous epistemological or narrative traditions. This article's argument is directly tied to Ruppert's concept of mediation, the formal features of *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) that this study reads as enactments of Herman's (1992) trauma framework are also acts of mediation between the clinical language of post-traumatic stress disorder and the ceremonial language of Jemez Pueblo healing and the novel's formal power is precisely that it holds both registers simultaneously without resolving either. The research gap in the existing literature has been identified as follows: Although there is a considerable amount of scholarly work about *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969), none has used Herman's (1992) PTSD construct as a systematic rather than thematic analytic tool. The previous trauma readings only make descriptions of Abel's symptoms; they do not show how those symptoms shape the novel's non-linear structure, strategic silences, and polyvocality. This is the main reason for the study.

## **Methodology**

The design of this study is qualitative and interpretive. It uses the model of textual analysis of Belsey (2005) as the main research method and Herman's (1992) model of PTSD as the main theoretical tool. Belsey's (2005) premise, that literary form is always already enveloped in cultural and historical conditions, is echoed in the study by reading the formal elements of *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969), its temporal organization, narrative absences, and ceremonial language as the culturally and ideologically charged events.

## **Research Paradigm**

The study is based on the constructivist paradigm of research, which recognizes that meaning does not exist within the text, but is rather created through a process of negotiation between text, reader, and culture. This paradigm is suitable for the formal-interpretive approach of the research: Herman's (1992) PTSD framework as a formal architecture in *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969) is an interpretive claim, not an empirical finding. The constructivist paradigm emphasizes the importance of interpretative rigor, theoretical consistency, and cultural specificity, which are evident throughout this study's analysis.

## Textual Analysis

The research method of this study is based on Catherine Belsey's (2005) model for Textual Analysis. Belsey (2005) suggests that literary texts are not 'closed, stable containers of determinate meaning', but rather 'open signifying systems', meaning that meaning is produced by the interplay of formal decisions, cultural ideologies, and reader responses. This study applies her model, which has three analytical commitments, which this study touches directly concerning *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969). First, the idea of ideological critique: formal decisions do not merely reflect aesthetic preferences but are influenced by and influence cultural and historical contexts in which texts are created. The implications here are that Momaday's formal decisions: the novel's non-linear chronology, strategic silences, and its ceremonial structures can be understood as culturally required reactions to the colonial condition the novel occupies. Second, the commitment to intertextuality: literary texts never operate in isolation; they always engage with other texts and traditions, other ways of knowing, and meaning is created in the interactions, not in the individual texts. In this context, it is a traditional practice that works in tandem with the Navajo healing tradition and with Herman's (1992) description of therapeutic reconnection, the Night Chant. Third, and most important for this study, the refusal to read formal absence as absence is the most semantically focused moment of the text: what it doesn't say, what it must preserve, what it leaves open are not failures of expression but rather the moments of the text. That is, in *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969), it is Abel's inarticulateness that is not the novel's fault, but rather its most direct formal expression: the silence that is the most accurate expression of the colonial rupture the novel is attempting to represent.

## Analysis and Discussion

The analysis that follows is structured around Herman's (1992) three symptom clusters and her triphasic recovery model, and the formal operation of these three is traced across the structure of the novel through close textual analysis using the method of Belsey (2005). The focus is on moving an overarching argument that these formal features are not aesthetic but structural choices, necessities of the logic of colonial traumatic experience. Perhaps the most formally impressive example of the working of Herman's (1992) model of constriction as narrative architecture is when Abel enters the canyon in the second section of *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969). Momaday's rendition of his situation is not characterization, but a formal argument:

He walked into the canyon. He could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it. Not dumb. silence was the older and better part of custom still but inarticulate. (Momaday, 1969, p. 58)

The difference between inarticulateness and dumbness lies in the analysis. Abel is not mute; he is able to speak both physically and mentally. What he has lost is the linguistic and ceremonial repertoire (prayer, song, the cadence of the ancestral language) that makes up and constitutes his Jemez identity and by means of which he expresses it. In the distinction is the specificity of the shutdown, the constriction, Herman (1992) calls it the shutdown of expressive and emotional capacity under the pressure of overwhelming experience. In Momaday's case, the ceremonial register is the one that has been cut off by colonial violence and war trauma. Reading as Belsey (2005) does, this would be the most formally focused ideological statement in the novel: the

language of the colonial project is not just wounded but ruptured as well, and it is the language of the wound, its very language, that must be torn and ultimately healed. If Abel is excluded from the colonial world, he cannot enter the old rhythm of the tongue since the colonial rupture has removed him from the ceremonial world which gives meaning to that rhythm, and so the novel's own formal silence, in its refusal to report what Abel is saying in her interior monologue, in its emphasis on gap and ellipsis, formally enacts the same rupture at the level of the text.

In addition, Herman's (1992) formal notion of symptom cluster intrusion most precisely captures the war flashback scene that opens the Los Angeles portion of the novel. The sequence comes out of nowhere, without preparation or contextual framing. It comes in the same way that intrusive re-experiencing comes into traumatized consciousness:

The silence had awakened him — and the low, even mutter of the machine coming... He saw it swell, deepen, and take shape on the skyline, as if it were some upheavals of the earth... His mouth fell upon the cold, wet leaves, and he began to shake violently... the machine bore down upon him, came close, and passed him by. (Momaday, 1969, p. 22)

Three formal aspects of this text provide a clinical version of Herman's (1992) description of intrusive re-experiencing. But first, there's no sound: the flashback is activated by the lack of sound, not by a particular sound, so there's a formal encoding of the hyper-vigilant nervous system constantly monitoring the environment for threat. Secondly, the temporal markers that keep the machine in the past (the war or 'he remembered') are absent, so that the flashback is not only in Abel's conscious present, but also in the narrative present, which never allows for such distance in time. Thirdly, the body reacts first, before the mind has time to register: Abel's mouth goes to the wet leaves, and he shakes violently before he has time to engage the brain. Kolik (2014) describes this exact order in clinical trauma: The body's reaction to the trigger comes first; before the person is even aware, the traumatic memory, due to the bypass of the normal cortically mediated interposition between stimulus and response, "short-circuits". Momaday's formal representation of this series is not only psychologically true, but also structurally true to the non-volitional, non-cognitive nature of traumatic intrusion.

Similarly, Abel's compound marginalization (his mixed-blood status, his fatherlessness, his alien status both in Jemez Pueblo and in white America) provides the pre-war base on which the trauma of the war is constructed, and Momaday encodes this base in the novel's retrospective third section, providing the formal statement rather than dramatic elaboration. The text that sets up the prior condition of Abel is:

He did not know who his father was. His father was a Navajo, they said, or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal somehow foreign and strange... His mother died in October... Something frightened him. (Momaday, 1969, pp. 8–9)

The telescoped or elliptical syntax of the sentences, for example, 'they said,' 'somehow,' 'something' — formally presents the fragmentation of Abel's self-knowledge: the basic facts of his identity (his father, the fear he felt of his mother's death) are only available as rumor, approximation, and unnamed dread. Herman (1992) suggests that trauma undermines the survivor's ability to present themselves in a coherent narrative and that Abel's state is not caused by the war itself, but rather by a pre-existing colonial state of incompleteness of identity which the war catastrophically exacerbated. It is well that Belsey (2005) would describe the syntactic



fragmentation of this passage as being ideologically charged; the colonial project that makes Abel's father 'an outsider anyway', has resulted in a subject that is grammatically marked by the 'colonial rupture' (not 'I am this' but 'they say perhaps this, or this, or this'). The formal incompleteness of the sentence is the formal inscription of identity violence of the colon.

Likewise, the rooster pull scene is an example of the hyperarousal symptom cluster that works as a form of physical and ceremonial performance (Herman, 1992). Abel joins in with the ceremony, but with his body shielded from the frailty that complete ceremonial involvement would imply, and Momaday suggests that this hyperarousal is embodied in the actual nature of Abel's physical participation:

Abel rode one of his grandfather's roan black-maned mares and sat too rigid in the saddle... He had put on his old clothes... When it came Abel's turn, he made a poor showing, full of caution and gesture. (Momaday, 1969, p. 35)

Momaday's most compressed formal description of what hyperarousal does to ceremonial participation is in its title: 'full of caution and gesture'. Where the ceremony calls for the total body and the total self, Abel can only offer the form of participation and not the spirit. He mimics the moves of a rider who is fully present but can't get there himself. Hyperarousal creates a defensive rigidity, a continual bracing for possible danger, because it is difficult to be open and trusting when engaged in ceremonial participation, according to Herman (1992). Abel's stiffness in the saddle is the somatic expression of this defensive bracing, and Momaday's formal focus on the posture of the body over the state of the mind is a precursor to Kolk's (2014) clinical observation that trauma is first experienced in the language of the body. The ceremony shows his condition in many ways, including the fact that ceremonies are supposed to be participatory events, which involve exactly the kind of body openness and trust that trauma eradicates.

In the same way, the killing of the albino is a formal crisis point in the novel, when Abel's traumatized consciousness operates according to its own rules, not those of the dominant culture's law and morality. Momaday portrays the action with such physical exactitude that it would be that of a witness, not a judge:

Abel leaned inside the white man's arms and drove the blade up under the bones of the breast. He felt the pain come sharp and cold under the flesh and the flesh split open and the steaming gore fell out upon his hand. (Momaday, 1969, pp. 81–82)

The formal necessity of this physical precision: location of blade, temperature of pain, texture of gore, is not gratuitous but rather insists on the physicality of the event against an abstraction or symbolism. The interpretive context to which the trial seeks to bring Abel himself does not exist, and Father Olguin's later testimony at trial goes so far as to try to produce it: 'in his own mind it was not a man he killed'. It was something else indeed... An evil spirit' (Momaday, 1969, pp. 101–102). But Herman (1992) suggests that trauma creates a certain kind of 'traumatic logic'; a kind of causal reasoning that is internally coherent in the traumatized system of world view, even if it looks irrational to the outside observer, and Abel's act is a perfect instance of such logic: in the Jemez system of world view, of which his wounded consciousness is only a partial inhabitant, the albino is a witch figure, a manifestation of the evil the ceremonial order must expel. This is an arrangement that the colonial legal system cannot tolerate, and Abel is

convicted for an act whose cultural logic is insightfully analyzed by Herman's (1992) description of traumatic reasoning.

Further, the Night Chant, sung by Ben Benally in the Los Angeles section of the novel, is most explicitly a ceremonial enactment of Herman's (1992) reconnection phase, the third and final stage of trauma recovery. Momaday's (1969) formal reproduction of the restorative sequence of the chant in the body of the novel is itself a formal occurrence:

I started to sing all by myself... Tsegihi. House made of dawn, House made of evening light... Restore my feet for me, Restore my legs for me, Restore my body for me, Restore my mind for me... May it be beautiful all around me. In beauty it is finished". (Momaday, 1969, pp. 146–147)

The sequence of healing is restorative, following the somatic logic of Herman's (1992) recovery model: feet, legs, body, mind, and moving ceremoniously across the body, as if in a logical progression. The Night Chant is not a theistic prayer per se, but it is a speech act: Navajo ceremonial custom holds that the act of singing 'restore my feet' triggers the restoration it calls for. This is what Belsey (2005) would identify as the 'performative capacity of language', language that does not describe, but performs, and the presence of the Night Chant in the novel is the performative enactment of Herman's reconnection phase on the level of the text itself. The chant is not a symbol of healing, but the formal opening of healing. That Ben sings it in Los Angeles—"the colonial city," as the chant calls it, far from the ceremonial geography named in the chant, is not an oxymoron but rather a testament to the formal strength of the oral tradition: the ceremony's efficacy as a healing experience is not only in its geographical positioning.

In the end, the formal closure of the novel, Abel's run at Walatowa in the morning, is the most complete formal enactment of Herman's (1992) reconnection phase that the text offers. Instead, Momaday calls it a formal return, which is a closed circle at the end of the novel where Abel runs at dawn. The final section has a feel of a conclusion of a ceremony more than a conclusion of a story:

"Abel ran. He was running, and under his breath, he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he ran on the rise of the song... he held on to the shadow of the song... ran beyond his pain... House made of pollen; House Made of dawn. Qtsedaba". (Momaday, 1969, pp. 211–212)

The paradox which underlies this passage, 'There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song', is the formal solution to the novel's inarticulateness encoded throughout. Abel cannot speak; he cannot pray or sing in the traditional sense, but he runs with the words of a song, and the running is the enactment in the body's transference of the ceremonial geography of the song. Herman (1992) claims that reconnection is not a process of restoring the pre-traumatic self; the self can never be put back together in the same way, but rather a process of creating a new self, one that can live in a meaningful way with the wound. That's what Abel's dawn run is about, not so much the restoration of a ceremonial fluency that he never really had as the creation of a bodily-ceremonial interaction that is not about the elimination of the pain. The words of the Night Chant: 'House made of pollen, House Made of Dawn' speak the wound (Abel had no voice) and the healing (he had the words). Here, Belsey's (2005) open signifying system is realized to its fullest: meaning is produced by the irresolution of the passage, by its failure to resolve the tension between speechlessness and song. The silence

that has haunted the novel here is most powerfully silent, as the silence that a man can run away from, in the words of a ceremonial song that he cannot sing completely but that he cannot quite forget.

## **Conclusion**

This study has suggested that Herman's (1992) concept of post-traumatic stress disorder is not simply a thematic description of the psychological state of the novel's protagonist, but the underpinning formal structure of the narrative of *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969). The analysis has shown that Abel's inarticulateness, his inability to pray, to sing, to speak the old ceremonial tongue, is a formal component and a strategy for making visible the colonial break between a person and the language through which his identity is made. Herman's (1992) symptom of intrusion is formalized in the war flashback sequence, which suddenly bursts into the novel's present without warning or context, mimicking the pre-cognitive, involuntary nature of traumatic re-experiences. Hyperarousal, as the defensive posture of "bracing against vulnerability" to prevent full ceremonial participation, is formalized in the rigidity of Abel's body posture in the rooster pull. The Night Chant and dawn run create, via ceremonial language and movement, a new relationship with the Jemez ceremonial world, neither denying the wound nor giving way to it, that can be interpreted as the reconnection phase of Herman's triphasic model of recovery.

The methodological aspect of the study is not very different in significance. This article argues that formal analysis and cultural critique are not competing but complementary analytical strategies by reading Belsey's (2005) model of textual analysis as an analysis of the formal absences, the silences, the gaps, the strategic incompleteness of the novel as an ideologically charged event instead of an aesthetic failure. In Belsey's (2005) view, literary silence, as the inarticulateness of Abel's character, does not signify a lack of meaning but rather the convergence of meaning: the methodological authorization to read inarticulateness as the most semantically concentrated point in the novel. When applied together, Herman's (1992) clinical approach and Belsey's (2005) formal-cultural method represent an analytical machine that generates insights that are not possible from a single approach.

The formal argument has implications that go beyond the one text. The PTSD model (Herman, 1992) can be shown to function as a formal architecture in *House Made of Dawn* (Momaday, 1969). Native American literary criticism, therefore, gains a more formal analytical tool for reading the formal dimensions of Indigenous fiction than is available in the literature. Rather than stylistic choice or modernity, the non-linear temporalities, strategic silences, polyvocal narrations, and ceremonial structures seen in a large body of work from Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) to Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) to Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018), might better be read as formal requirements imposed by the colonial traumatic condition. This article is a calling card to that larger formal project.

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