House Made of Dawn

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF N. SCOTT MOMADAY

N. Scott Momaday is a Kiowa writer of novels, shorts stories, poems, and essays. He was born in Oklahoma before moving as a young child to Arizona and later New Mexico, living on reservations for the Navajo, Apache, and Pueblo peoples. He spent several years at the Jemez Pueblo, where his father worked as a teacher, and Momaday's experiences there inspired *House Made of Dawn*. *House Made of Dawn* was his first novel, and its publication in 1968 made Momaday a leading voice in Native American literature. He has continued to write since then, garnering acclaim and awards for many of his projects. Momaday also spent many years as an English professor at colleges and universities across America, including Stanford, Columbia, Princeton, and the University of Arizona. He holds 12 honorary degrees and was a trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After relegating Native American tribes and nations to reservations in the 19th century, the American government spent much of the 20th century passing legislation to push Indigenous people to assimilate into white American culture. Two significant policies enacted in the 1950s, which the characters discuss in *House Made of Dawn*, were termination and relocation. The policy of termination discontinued government support for Indigenous tribes and the protection of Indigenous-owned land, implicitly encouraging tribes to disband. The relocation policy, meanwhile, established infrastructure to move Native Americans off their previously-protected reservations and into urban areas. These policies led to the growth of Native American populations in cities, like the community that Abel finds in Los Angeles. The relocation policy offered minimal support to Native Americans after relocating them to cities, resulting in widespread poverty and generating controversy around both policies.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Literary critic Kenneth Lincoln described *House Made of Dawn* as the beginning of a "Native American Renaissance," which other scholars suggest includes works that reclaim and reevaluate Native American heritage. Two prominent novels from the Native American Renaissance are Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 novel *Ceremony* and James Welch's 1974 novel *Winter in the Blood*. *Ceremony* shares many similarities with *House Made of Dawn*, as Silko also uses a non-linear story to explore a Pueblo man's experiences after fighting in World War II. *Winter in the Blood* shares with *House Made of Dawn* themes of isolation that result from Native American characters' distance from their heritage. Writers in the second wave of this Renaissance include Louise Erdrich, whose debut novel *Love Medicine* (1984) follows a non-linear narrative similar to Momaday's. Like Momaday, Erdrich is a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** House Made of Dawn
- **When Written:** 1960s
- **Where Written:** Southwestern United States
- **When Published:** 1968
- **Literary Period:** Native American Renaissance
- **Genre:** Novel, Native American Literature
- **Setting:** Walatowa, New Mexico and Los Angeles, California
- **Climax:** Abel leaves Los Angeles and returns to Walatowa.
- **Antagonist:** Colonialist infrastructure
- **Point of View:** Third Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Trailblazer. N. Scott Momaday won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *House Made of Dawn*, making him the first Native American writer to win the award.

From Page to Screen. In 1972, filmmaker Richardson Morse partnered with N. Scott Momaday to write and produce an independent film adaptation of *House Made of Dawn*.

PLOT SUMMARY

House Made of Dawn employs a nonlinear narrative to follow its protagonist, Abel, as he navigates coming of age as a Native American man in a changing society. The story opens with Abel **running** along an empty Southwestern landscape. It then shifts back in time to July 20, 1945, as Abel returns from World War II to Walatowa, his home in the Jemez Pueblo. He is greeted by his grandfather Francisco, his only remaining relative. Coming home sends the addled, lonely Abel into a spiral of memories about his childhood in Walatowa as he struggles to reconnect with his homeland and community. These memories include the deaths of Abel's mother and brother when he was a child.

A white woman named Angela St. John employs Abel to cut wood for her at her house near the reservation. She is

struggling with her own mental health issues surrounding her pregnancy, and she finds herself at once irritated and aroused by Abel's stoic demeanor. Angela and Abel begin a sexual relationship. Around the same time, Abel is ritually beaten during a ceremony by an albino man. Abel later stabs the albino man to death, though the narrator provides no insight into Abel's reasoning.

In January 1952, a Kiowa priest named John Big Bluff Tosamah presides over a Pan-Indigenous peyote congregation in Los Angeles. His sermons reference the Bible, but he rejects Catholicism and other trappings of settler colonialism. He emphasizes the importance of the oral tradition, which he believes white people can never truly grasp after generations of cheapening and corrupting the power of words. Interspersed with his sermon are Abel's confused recollections of his murder trial, his prison sentence, and his sexual relationship with his social worker Milly.

The narration then shifts to the first-person perspective of Ben Benally, who is Abel's friend and roommate after Abel is released from prison and relocated to Los Angeles. After meeting each other at work in a factory, Ben tries to help Abel adjust to urban life. Unfortunately, Abel's reserved nature and occasionally violent temper prevent him from making a life for himself the way Ben has done.

Abel quits his job when his supervisor becomes too controlling, and he ends his friendship with Tosamah when the priest laughs at Abel one too many times for being "uncivilized." Abel finally snaps after a corrupt policeman named Martinez bullies and beats him in an alley. Abel decides to get revenge on Martinez, only for Martinez to beat him even more brutally. Abel ends up in the hospital, where Ben looks after him and Angela pays him a visit. She has given birth to a son since she last saw Abel, and she tells her son stories about a hero based on Abel.

Abel decides to return to his reservation. The night before he leaves, he and Ben attend a party with other local Native Americans to celebrate Abel's last night in Los Angeles. At the party, Abel sings the traditional Navajo songs that Ben taught him, including one about a "house made of dawn."

Abel returns to Walatowa at the end of February 1952. Francisco is dying, and Abel forces himself to push through his alcoholism and the remaining pain from Martinez's attack to care for his grandfather. As Francisco dies, he reflects on his life in Walatowa, speaking in a jumbled mix of Spanish, English, and Jemez about meaningful experiences throughout his life. In his last memory, Francisco recalls losing stamina in a race but continuing to run despite being out of breath.

After Francisco dies, Abel prepares his grandfather for burial and performs a ritual over the body. He then wakes the priest, Father Olguin, and demands he bury Francisco. Abel walks to the edge of town, where he sees a distant group of runners as the sun rises. He starts to run alone across the landscape, revealing the context of the opening scene of the book. Abel continues to run despite his exhaustion, and as he takes in the beauty of the natural world, he sings the song of the house made of dawn.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Abel – Abel is the protagonist of the story, but he remains an enigma for most of the narrative. The reader gets only sparse glimpses into his background and motivations, mirroring the confusion and lack of understanding that the characters around Abel feel about him. After the loss of his mother, Abel was raised by his grandfather Francisco, who tried to instill in Abel a connection to the land. However, Abel enlists to serve in World War II against Francisco's wishes, which means he must leave the Jemez pueblo—a move that begins Abel's slow process of growing up. Away from the Jemez pueblo, Abel experiences racism and violence, and he becomes dependent on alcohol. He murders an albino man, which results in a yearslong imprisonment, and he then is relocated to Los Angeles. Abel's mental health remains poor while living in the city, and he never truly adjusts to life away from the reservation. After a violent policeman, Martinez, beats Abel so badly that Abel is hospitalized, Abel returns to Walatowa to care for Francisco, who's dying. After Francisco's death, Abel carefully performs the burial rites. He then runs across the desert, **racing** at dawn like Francisco did in his youth, and he finally feels at one with the land of his ancestors. This signifies that Abel has matured and come into his own as a Native American man.

Francisco – Francisco is Abel's grandfather. After the deaths of Abel's mother and brother Vidal, Francisco is Abel's only living relative, and he becomes Abel's guardian. Before Vidal's death, Francisco endeavors to teach his grandsons how to live in harmony with the land. He explains how to interpret natural phenomena and tells the boys legends of the dawn runners. Francisco recalls his past as a **runner** throughout the story, and his last thoughts before he dies are of a race he ran as a younger man. In his youth, Francisco earned his place in the community by completing traditional coming of age rituals, and since then he has remained a prominent figure in the pueblo. Unlike Abel, Francisco never leaves his homeland, remaining connected to his native land for the entirety of his life. This grants Francisco a sense of clarity and peace of mind that Abel lacks. Francisco is also a religious man, and his beliefs bridge the divide between Catholicism and the traditional Jemez religion; he serves as a sacristan for the local Catholic Church while also observing traditional holidays and praying at the kiva. When Abel returns to the Walatowa at the end of the book, caring for the ailing Francisco gives him a sense of purpose and helps him break out of his anger and alcoholism.

Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah – Reverend Tosamah, also known as the Priest of the Sun, is a Kiowa priest in Los Angeles who holds Pan-Indigenous sermons for Native Americans in the city. He is educated and lives away from his ancestral reservation, which gives him a feeling of superiority over "primitive" Native Americans like Abel. Tosamah is amused by Abel's apparent lack of civilization, giving him the nickname "Longhair" to poke fun at Abel's distance from American modernity. He speaks about Abel as if he is a symbol of colonization's failure rather than an individual person. This frustrates Abel so much that he eventually snaps and physically attacks Tosamah, ending their tenuous friendship. Although Tosamah eschews Christianity as a colonialist "scheme" and presides over traditional peyote ceremonies, Ben notes that Tosamah is not connected to Indigenous spirituality in the way he would be if he'd grown up on a reservation.

Ben Benally – Ben Benally is Abel's friend and roommate in Los Angeles, as well as the narrator of "The Night Chanter." Ben is a religious man who believes strongly in the power of prayer through song. He teaches Abel Navajo songs about healing and of appreciating and connecting to the beauty of nature. Like Abel, Ben thinks fondly of his native reservation and wishes to return, but he has convinced himself that city life is superior to living off the land. He believes that the federal policies designed to force Native Americans to assimilate into white culture were designed with Native Americans' best interests in mind, since city life offers amenities and conveniences that "you'd be crazy not to want." This naïve faith in the American way of life prompts Ben to adapt more easily to life off of the reservation than Abel does. Ben tries to help Abel adjust to life in Los Angeles, and he worries when Abel's mental state deteriorates, but he is unable to protect Abel from the damage the city does to his psyche. When Abel decides to go back to Walatowa, Ben celebrates this choice and thinks longingly of Abel's return home. He promises Abel that he will also return to his own reservation one day, but the story never acknowledges if Ben keeps this promise.

Angela St. John – Angela St. John is a wealthy white woman who moves into the Benevides House near Walatowa. She and Abel have a brief sexual affair. Despite her privilege, Angela is troubled, afraid of her secret pregnancy, and disgusted by her own body. She employs Abel to chop wood for her, and she becomes both fascinated and frustrated by Abel's stoic silence. When she first indulges in a sexual fantasy about Abel, Angela imagines provoking him with deliberately racist language, and she displays a desire to sexually dominate him. However, she also watches a corn dance with reverence and respect, and she is gentle and kind when she visits Abel in the hospital several years after their affair. Her conflicting treatment of Indigenous cultures and people presents Angela as a complicated woman whose personal struggles can result in ignorance and insensitivity. Nevertheless, her last interaction with Abel in the hospital is one of genuine care.

Father Olguin – Father Olguin is the Catholic priest in Walatowa. Most of the townspeople prefer the traditional Jemez religion to Catholicism, leaving Father Olguin an outsider in the community. He attempts different strategies to cope with this alienation. In 1945, he tries to convince himself that he is connected with the ancient land of the pueblo, despite his "fear and revulsion" toward the Jemez people who exclude him. By 1952, though, Father Olguin has given up all hopes of connecting to the land or its people. Instead, he interprets his distance from the community as a sign of his piety. In 1942, Father Olguin also develops an attraction to Angela St. John, and he takes pleasure and pride in resisting that attraction. He frequently looks to the journal of his predecessor, Nicolás, for insight into preaching to the townspeople. At the end of the book, when Abel wakes Father Olguin to bury Francisco, Father Olguin is struck with a revelation and cries out that he finally understands.

Juan Reyes Fragua/The Albino Man – Juan Reyes Fragua, who is only referred to by name once in the novel, is the man whom Abel murders at the end of "The Longhair." During a ceremonial ritual, the albino man beats Abel with the body of a dead rooster. After the festivities end, Abel and the albino man drink together and have a conversation that the narration does not reveal. After this, they go outside together and Abel stabs the albino man to death, convinced that the man is his enemy. The omniscient narrator never provides the albino man's perspective, only showing him through the eyes of people who consider him ugly and evil. The albino man's true nature and motivations thus remain a mystery. Abel feels no remorse for killing him, since he is certain the albino man is his enemy, but this defense holds no weight in court and Abel is sentenced to prison time.

Milly – Milly is Abel's social worker with whom he starts a sexual relationship. Though Milly is more idealistic than Abel, believing in the American Dream and in Abel's personal potential, the two of them bond over their profound loneliness. Milly narrates a brief section in "The Priest of the Sun" in first-person perspective, reflecting on her past and why she is so alone. Abel cares for Milly, but his drinking and self-sabotage threaten their relationship, especially since she is professionally responsible for his well-being. Ben also likes Milly, and he hopes she will stay in his life after Abel returns to Walatowa. The story does not address what happens to her after Abel leaves Los Angeles.

Martinez – Martinez is a violent Los Angeles policeman who targets the city's Native American population. He extorts money from Ben and physically attacks Abel when he has no funds to give him. When Abel later tries to confront Martinez, the policeman beats Abel even more brutally, and Abel ends up in the hospital.

Porcingula – Porcingula is a young woman with whom

Francisco has a youthful dalliance. She shares a name with the Feast of Porcingula, a Jemez holiday in honor of Santa Maria de los Angeles. She is ostracized by the community because they consider her mother a witch, and Francisco eventually leaves Porcingula after she gives birth to a stillborn child.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Vidal – Vidal is Abel's brother who dies in childhood. He dies shortly after his mother, leaving Francisco as Abel's only remaining relative.

Aho – Aho is Tosamah's grandmother and the subject of his sermon about the power of words. In her lifetime, Aho is a storyteller who honors the oral tradition. She also bears witness as a child to the last Kiowa sun dance, which is interrupted by U.S. soldiers.

Fray Nicolás – Fray Nicolás is Father Olguin's predecessor as Walatowa's Catholic priest. His perspective is revealed through a journal that Father Olguin reads. Nicolás believes Indigenous religions are evil, equating them to devil-worship, and he grows increasingly unstable and paranoid in his later years in Walatowa.

Fat Josie – Fat Josie is a woman in Walatowa who tries to comfort Abel after the death of his mother and heals his back after he falls off a horse.

Cruz – Cruz is a disciple of Tosamah who lives with him and attends social gatherings with Tosamah, Ben Benally, and Abel.

TERMS

Jemez – Jemez is a pueblo in New Mexico, as well as one name for the Indigenous language of that area (also called Towa). **Abel** and his family members belong to the Jemez Pueblo, and **Francisco** often speaks in the Jemez language.

Kiowa – The Kiowa are an Indigenous tribe of America's southern plains. Most Kiowa people now live in and around Oklahoma. The Priest of the Sun, **Tosamah**, is Kiowa, and in one of his sermons he speaks about his return to the homeland of his people.

Kiva – A kiva is an underground place of worship for the Pueblo peoples. The religious characters in the novel often visit the reservation's kiva.

Mesa – A mesa is an elevation or hill with steep sides and a flat top. Mesas are common in arid environments like the southwestern United States, where the story is set.

Navajo – The Navajo are a Native American nation whose reservation is near the Jemez Pueblo. Navajo people generally refer to themselves Diné rather than Navajo. **Ben Benally** is a Navajo man.

Pueblo – *Pueblo* refers to Native American towns in the southwestern United States, as well as the Indigenous people who live there. These groups are known as the Pueblo people, while the locations are simply pueblos.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HOME, BELONGING, AND IDENTITY

House Made of Dawn follows Abel, a Native American man, as he returns home to be with his dying grandfather Francisco. Through the novel's examination of its complex characters, *House Made of Dawn* examines notions of a Native American identity and explores various paths available to Indigenous people in midcentury America. The book suggests that living in one's native land allows people to form meaningful connections with their homes that "alien and inferior" residents cannot achieve, and that doing so helps a person in turn discover who they are.

Ben and Abel, who move away from their reservations, yearn for home and often discuss returning. When Abel finally goes home to Walatowa, Ben imagines the joy and relief he would feel at returning to his reservation. The narrative, though, never resolves whether Ben will commit to uprooting his life in Los Angeles and return home. Tosamah, the Priest of the Sun, also lives away from the reservation. He is educated and proudly modern, looking down on the more traditional Abel for fulfilling the stereotype of a "primitive Indian"—but Abel also seems to be the only one of the three men who finds real peace, which he does when he returns home. The division between Native Americans who live on reservations and those who live elsewhere speaks to the diversity of the Native American experience more generally. The Indigenous characters bond over similar spiritual beliefs, but they also have different backgrounds, legends, and priorities. Rather than suggesting that there's only one way for people to feel at home and like they belong, *House Made of Dawn* highlights how place, connection to one's home, and relationships form a person's identity.

NATURE

The Native American characters of *House Made of Dawn* show great respect for the natural world, and the narrator follows suit; the story dedicates entire pages to descriptions of nature and characters' reactions to it. Francisco, one of the oldest point-of-view characters, has the strongest connection to nature. He communes with the crops

he plants, hearing and understanding the whispers of his corn. One of his last memories as he dies is a lesson he taught to his grandsons, imparting to them the importance of following nature's rhythms. On the hunt that marks Francisco's maturation into a man, he feels that both he and his horse have come of age at the same time.

Younger Indigenous characters share Francisco's instinctual respect for nature, but modernization from outside their reservation interrupts their connection to nature. When Ben teaches Abel some Navajo songs, he describes them as songs about "the way it used to be, how there was nothing all around but the hills and the sunrise and the clouds." Ben imagines a world without man-made inventions imposing on nature as holy and powerful, but that world is gone. At the end of the book, Abel runs across a valley to the point of exhaustion, until "he [can] see at last without having to think." Freed from his own worries, he takes in the landscape and finally connects with it. Abel's journey suggests that although Indigenous people's ability to become one with the natural world is inhibited by the industrial trappings of colonialism, Native Americans can still pursue that union.

RELIGION, CEREMONY, AND TRADITION

House Made of Dawn describes several ceremonies and festivals detail to showcase various Southwestern Native American religions. These ceremonies grant a sense of community, ecstasy, and understanding to the participants. They often coincide with revelations or moments of growth for the characters; for instance, Francisco is accepted as a voice in his community when he performs well as a drummer, and Abel first encounters the albino man during a ceremonial fight at a festival.

The characters also grapple with the significance of Catholicism in their lives. Tosamah, who distrusts Catholicism as a colonialist institution, condemns the "Jesus scheme" as a form of oppression. Francisco and Abel, on the other hand, find spiritual meaning in blending Catholic traditions with traditions of the Jemez religion. Tosamah is a religious man––he is a priest, in fact––but Ben Benally believes that his dismissal of Catholicism speaks to Tosamah's feeling of superiority and his disconnect from magic and superstition. Ben views magic as a fact of life that must be honored, and the profound effects of spirituality and ceremonies on the characters' lives suggest his view is correct. Still, House Made of Dawn presents traditional Indigenous religions and ceremonies, as well as Christian ones, as capable of providing comfort and community.

STORYTELLING

House Made of Dawn portrays many different modes of storytelling, switching between perspectives and narrative voices, as well as featuring lengthy segments in which characters tell stories to each other. The narrator acknowledges that the book itself is telling a story by opening and closing the novel with traditional Jemez words that mark the beginning and end of stories. This establishes the value of stories in *House Made of Dawn* and the Native American cultures it describes: the novel's events are not less important because they are fiction, and the stories that characters tell within this story are equally important. One chapter consists entirely of a sermon delivered by the priest Tosamah; in the sermon, he tells several stories, and he also explicitly emphasizes the importance of language and storytelling. Through this, he honors the oral storytelling tradition and describes his Kiowa grandmother's reverence for words, contrasting it with the fact that, in his view, white people take words for granted. The book's narrator adheres to this refusal to overuse words. The novel grants vivid descriptions to natural landscapes, but its descriptions of people and their motivations are left ambiguous. This ambiguity encourages readers to take responsibility for interpreting the story themselves, which in turn mirrors how characters within the novel must constantly work to interpret the various stories they hear and tell. The novel's unorthodox narrative structure highlights that words and stories are complex, and that working to find meaning in them is a sacred act.

CONNECTION VS. ISOLATION

Abel searches throughout the story for a sense of connection. As a child, he loses his father, mother, and brother in rapid succession. After a sexual experience as a young man, the woman he has sex with teasingly runs away from him, laughing at his attempts to "get her back." He similarly fails to form a meaningful connection with Angela St. John even after they begin a sexual relationship, as she is put off by his quiet and stoic nature. In addition to his isolation from the people around him, Abel feels distanced from his home and his people. He leaves the reservation as a young man to fight in World War II, which prevents him from coming of age as a member of his community. When he returns from the war, he tries to make a life for himself in Los Angeles, but he cannot connect to the people or the land there. The few relationships Abel does form are founded on a shared sense of isolation: he grows close to his social worker Milly when she realizes they are both "unspeakably lonely," and he bonds with Ben Benally over their desire to return to their communities on their reservations. When Abel finally does return to the reservation, he looks out over the plains, taking in both the landscape and the farmers working in their fields, and he finally feels at home. The peace that Abel feels at home contrasts sharply with his constant agitation while away from the reservation, and it suggests that accepting one's membership in an established community with a shared history can be an effective way to remedy loneliness.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RUNNING AND RACES

The story's emphasis on running and races, specifically the "race of the dead," represents both Francisco and Abel's connection to Walatowa and their community. Francisco is deeply connected to the community of Walatowa, and as a young man he often engaged in traditional community-wide footraces that strengthened his bond to the town. Francisco is introduced to the reader remembering his victory in a race that earned him a good hunt that year. Running is a tradition with spiritual and community-building significance, and Francisco's lifelong commitment to running demonstrates his unwavering connection to Walatowa.

Abel, on the other hand, feels detached from his community, and as such he does not run until he's an adult. Only when Francisco dies is Abel compelled to run, as he sees people running the race of the dead and decides to join them. Although Abel sees other runners when he decides to race, he quickly finds himself alone, and continues running across the plains to the point of exhaustion. Only then does he feel at peace and in harmony with his homeland. Abel's participation in the race of the dead signifies his acceptance of the traditions Francisco hands down to him. He takes on Francisco's mantle of a runner, joins the racers that Francisco showed him as a young boy, and begins to connect to Walatowa the way Francisco did by running through its landscape.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperPerennial edition of *House Made of Dawn* published in 2018.

Prologue Quotes

Dypaloh. There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the plain was bright with different-colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. The land was still and strong. It was beautiful all around.

Abel was running.

Related Characters: Abel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The novel opens with the word "*dypaloh*," the Jemez equivalent to the English phrase "once upon a time"––in other words, a word that introduces a story. The story acknowledges that it is a story, but that does not mean it does not contain truth, or that it is unimportant. This opening also pays close attention to the landscape, and in fact introduces the features of the natural world before introducing the protagonist. Abel, the main character, is introduced in the context of the Southwestern landscape, establishing the importance of nature and of Abel's personal relationship to the natural world. The narration also describes the horses in more detail than Abel, hinting at the meaningful relationships formed between Native American men and their horses throughout the story, and reiterating the equality of all creatures living off the land.

Characterizing the land as "old and everlasting" emphasizes that this land and its beauty existed before colonization and continue to exist in its wake, just like the Native American peoples and nations seen throughout the book resist colonialism simply by continuing to exist.

2. The Longhair, July 21 Quotes

[Abel's] 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. Francisco was the man of the family, but even [...] the boy could sense his grandfather's age, just as he knew that his mother was going to die of her illness. It was nothing he was told, but he knew it anyway and without understanding, as he knew already the motion of the sun and the seasons.

Related Characters: Abel, Francisco, Vidal

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Abel's sense of isolation begins at a young age, as he feels alienated among his own people due to his father's identity as an outsider. Though later chapters demonstrate that the

Jemez people of Walatowa live in harmony with surrounding Indigenous tribes and nations, those other peoples are still outsiders. Abel's father is one such outsider, and that alien status extends to his family, which establishes why Abel struggles to form meaningful connections even before he leaves Walatowa.

Although Abel is the protagonist, the novel does not often explicitly relate Abel's interior monologue to readers, and so this explanation of how Abel understands his family is one of the reader's first glimpses into the way Abel thinks. He has an innate awareness of how his community and his environment function, comprehending the fragility of his mother and grandfather without being told and without fully understanding how he knows. This inherent comprehension indicates that although Abel feels alienated from his community, he is still attuned to its values and traditions. He understands and respects the natural world, just as the adults of Walatowa do, and he grasps his family's place in that world.

❝ Then, through the falling leaves, he saw the machine. It rose up behind the hill, black and massive, looming there in front of the sun. He saw it swell, deepen, and take shape on the skyline, as if it were some upheaval of the earth […]. For a moment it seemed apart from the land; its great iron hull lay out against the timber and the sky, and the center of its weight hung away from the ridge. Then it came crashing down […].

Related Characters: Abel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Abel leaves Walatowa for the first time to fight in World War II. In one flashback to his time in combat, he regains consciousness on a wooded hill littered with corpses, and he sees a tank coming over the horizon. The narration only ever refers to this tank as "the machine," highlighting its status as an unnatural, manmade creation that Abel cannot even name. Despite this, Abel's first glimpse of the tank portrays it as not entirely inorganic, but instead an aberration of something natural––"an upheaval of the earth" that moves on its own. As it comes closer, however, Abel sees it as "apart from the land," something distinct and alien from the earth. After this realization, the narration once again reiterates the mechanized aspect of the tank, describing its "great iron hull" in contrast to "the timber" of the forest around it. As the tank comes "crashing down," it brings violence and destruction to the forest. The tank, therefore, is violent in its purpose as a war machine, and also in its careless destruction of nature. In this way, the tank mirrors the violence that colonialism brings to Native populations, which the novel describes at several points.

❝ He made his way along the incline at the edge of the cultivated fields to the long row of foothills at the base of the red mesa. When the first breeze of the evening rose up in the shadow that fell across the hills, he sat down and looked out over the green and yellow blocks of farmland. He could see his grandfather, others, working below in the sunlit fields. The breeze was very faint, and it bore the scent of earth and grain; and for a moment everything was all right with him. He was at home.

Related Characters: Abel, Francisco

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Abel has spent most of this chapter reflecting on his past in Walatowa and on his time fighting in World War II. After coming to terms with this part of his life, he is able to appreciate his home. What Abel pays attention to as he looks out over Walatowa speaks to what he values about the village. He takes in the beauty of the land, which emphasizes once again the significance of his connection to the natural landscape of his homeland. He also finds peace watching other people work with the land, which highlights Abel's appreciation for the community in Walatowa. More specifically, he sees his grandfather, Francisco, and the fact that Francisco is included in Abel's overview of "home" demonstrates how deeply Abel cares about his grandfather, even if he struggles to express it. For Abel, then, "home" means the land and people of Walatowa, and this sense of home is the only source of peace that Abel has. This peace doesn't last, though, and this passage foreshadows that by noting that "everything [is] alright with him" only "for a moment."

3. The Longhair, July 24 Quotes

She could think of nothing more vile and obscene than the raw flesh and blood of her body, the raveled veins and the gore upon her bones. And now the monstrous fetal form, the blue, blind, great-headed thing growing within her and feeding upon her. […] And at odd moments she wished with all her heart to die by fire, fire of such intense heat that her body should dissolve in it all at once. There must be no popping of fat or any burning on of the bones. Above all she must give off no stench of death.

Related Characters: Abel, Angela St. John

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Angela is first introduced as a somewhat out-of-touch white woman imposing on Walatowa, but this glimpse into her mind reveals the hidden depths to her character. Unlike Abel and most of the novel's other Native American characters, Angela feels no innate connection to the natural world, including her own body. The novel largely communicates the significance of the physical world by depicting characters in harmony with it, but Angela is disgusted with the body that grounds her in that physical reality. The fact Angela's self-loathing manifests as a disgust for her own body highlights the importance of the physical and natural world. Other characters respect the physical, natural world, and this grounds them. Angela feels alienated from her own body, and this leads to her fractured emotional and mental state.

Her hatred of her body is also distinctly gendered, as it stems in part from the "monstrous fetal form" in her womb (that is, she hates her body for being pregnant). The narration takes on Angela's voice as it describes the fetus as a parasitic monster, revealing how much Angela fears motherhood and once again grounding those fears in her hatred of her body.

4. The Longhair, July 25 Quotes

[Francisco] is evil & desires to do me some injury & this after I befriended him all his life. […] He is one of them & goes often in the kiva & puts on their horns & hides & does worship that Serpent which even is the One our most ancient enemy. Yet he is unashamed to make one of my sacristans & brother I am most fearful to forbid it. […] Why am I betrayed who cannot desire to betray?

Related Characters: Fray Nicolás (speaker), Francisco

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Fray Nicolás, the Catholic priest of Walatowa, confesses in a letter to his brother a feeling of personal betrayal after discovering a young Francisco is practicing both Catholicism and his peoples' traditional religion. In his journal entries prior to this letter, Nicolás has been dismissive of the Jemez religion, but his mental state has deteriorated, and he now reveals his zealous hatred for Indigenous religions, which he believes to be devil-worship.

Nicolás's absolute intolerance for the Jemez religion contrasts with Francisco's ability to believe "unashamed[ly]" in tenets of both Catholicism and the Jemez religion; this contrast emphasizes the stubborn arrogance of colonialism and colonial religions. Francisco is content to practice both religions, demonstrating that they do not have to be at odds. But the novel suggests that agents of colonialism will not settle for anything less than the total destruction of Indigenous traditions.

Nicolás's sense of betrayal is strengthened by the novel's implication that Francisco is Nicolás's illegitimate son. This implied relationship adds irony to Nicolás's question, "Why am I betrayed who cannot desire to betray?", as Nicolás has implicitly betrayed Francisco by refusing to acknowledge him as a son.

[…] there was no longer a white house of stucco and stone, looming out against the leaves of the orchard, but a black organic mass the night had heaved up, even as long ago the canyon had been wrenched out of time […]. It was no longer the chance place of her visitation, but now the dominion of her next day and the day after, as far ahead as she cared to see. […] In fact it was secret like herself, the Benevides house.

Related Characters: Abel, Angela St. John

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48-49

Explanation and Analysis

After Angela attends festivities for the feast of Santiago in Walatowa, she returns home to the Benevides house and finds her perception of it has changed. It is no longer just a house, but a feature of the landscape, something as integral

to terrain as the canyon. The description of the house mirrors the description of the tank Abel saw in the war; like the tank, the Benevides house becomes a "black [...] mass" "looming out" from the trees. While the tank was a "machine," however, the house is "organic." The tank represented Abel's unfamiliarity with manmade, colonialist technology, which inflicts violence on people and nature indiscriminately. On the other hand, the transformation of the Benevides house that this passage describes represents Angela's developing comfort with the natural world. She is no longer a visitor to this house surrounded by nature; she is at home there. She goes so far as to personify the house, seeing secrets within it that she feels she can relate to. This regard for the house's secrets suggests that Angela now sees the Benevides house––and, by extension, the natural world––as worthy of respect.

5. The Longhair, July 28 Quotes

❝ These [animals]––and the innumerable meaner creatures, the lizard and the frog, the insect and the worm––have tenure in the land. The other, latecoming things––the beasts of burden and of trade, the horse and the sheep, the dog and the cat––these have an alien and inferior aspect, a poverty of vision and instinct, by which they are estranged from the wild land, and made tentative. They are born and die upon the land, but then they are gone away from it, as if they had never been. [...] [M]an too, has tenure in the land; he dwelt upon the land twenty-five thousand years ago, and his gods before him.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

The novel's narration consistently pays close attention to nature, but this passage specifically uses nature to discuss the strength and significance of indigeneity. Animals native to their habitat, regardless of their position in the ecosystem, are better suited to live in that habitat than foreign and invasive species, per the novel. These native animals have adapted over thousands of years to suit the environment, while the "other, latecoming things" adapted to foreign lands. These animals brought to America by colonizers lack the connection to and understanding of the land that native animals innately possess. As such, the land does not honor these "alien and inferior" animals; they leave no mark and have no legacy.

The inferiority and alienation of foreign animals is shared, the novel suggests, by colonizers and their descendants, who similarly have no ancestral connection to the Americas. Native American nations and peoples structured their societies over generations to honor and adapt to their native lands, and as such, they, unlike colonizers, have "tenure" there. The connection of Indigenous people to the land is even deeper than the connection of native animals, because Indigenous people are also connected spiritually, as their gods are specifically the gods of their land.

❝ The people of the town have little need. They do not hanker after progress and have never changed their essential way of life. Their invaders were a long time in conquering them; and now, after four centuries of Christianity, they still pray in Tanoan to the old deities of the earth and sky and make their living from the things that are and have always been within their reach; while in the discrimination of pride they acquire from their conquerors only the luxury of example. They have assumed the names and gestures of their enemies, but have held onto their own, secret souls; and in this there is a resistance and an overcoming, a long outwaiting.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52-53

Explanation and Analysis

In this overview of the people of Walatowa, the omniscient narrator explains how holding onto tradition is a form of resistance. "Progress" is positioned as a colonialist pursuit that disrespects and devalues the Jemez people's "essential way of life." This perspective reframes a common racist, colonialist narrative that demeans Native Americans for being supposedly backwards or primitive. It asserts instead that the "progress"—of which European colonizers and their descendants are so proud—is not inherently good or valuable; in fact, holding to tradition instead of chasing progress is what makes Indigenous nations strong. This passage acknowledges the violent imposition of colonial beliefs and lifestyles on Indigenous peoples, but it rejects the notion that colonialism has erased Indigenous traditions. The people of Walatowa retain their traditional religion alongside Christianity, they continue to farm from and give back to the earth, and they hold onto their "secret souls" while adopting European names and lifestyles. Indigenous peoples' ability to keep hold of their traditions while colonizers "hanker after progress" allows the Jemez people––and, the novel implies, all the Pueblo peoples, and potentially all Native Americans––to "outwait" the colonial

regime in America.

6. The Longhair, August 1 Quotes

It made him glad to be in the midst of talk and celebration, to savor the rich relief of the coming rain upon the rows of beans and chilies and corn, to see the return of weather, of trade and reunion upon the town. He tossed his head in greeting to the shy Navajo children who hid among the camps and peered, afraid of his age and affliction. For they, too, were a harvest, in some intractable sense the regeneration of his own bone and blood.

Related Characters: Francisco

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

People from the pueblos surrounding Walatowa have come to the village to celebrate the Feast of Porcingula, and Francisco appreciates the festivities he walks through. The festival is a time for various towns and peoples to come together and celebrate their shared beliefs and heritage, and also to renew their commitment to friendship and unity. The Feast of Porcingula is a designated time for "trade and reunion." Francisco appreciates both the human and the environmental elements of the festival, highlighting the importance he grants to both his community and the land.

Francisco's belief that the children at the festival are "the regeneration of his own bone and blood" also speaks to the importance of traditional holidays and festivals in a colonized America. The Feast of Porcingula is a traditional celebration, and the children at the festival will be responsible for carrying those traditions into the next generation. They "regenerate" bloodlines that have existed in America for hundreds of years and carry on the traditions of their ancestors.

And then they were ready, the two of them. They went out into the darkness and the rain. […] When they were midway between the river and the road, they stopped. […] All around was silence, save for the sound of the rain and the moan of the wind in the wires. Abel waited. The white man raised his arms, as if to embrace him, and came forward. But Abel had already taken hold of the knife, and he drew it. He leaned inside the white man's arms and drove the blade up under the bones of the breast and across. […] [The white man] closed his hands upon Abel and drew him close.

Related Characters: Abel, Juan Reyes Fragua/The Albino Man

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

After the Festival of Porcingula, Abel and the albino man drink together at a bar and then walk into the night—and Abel then murders the albino man. The murder is narrated entirely externally, describing only the actions of the characters with no explicit insight into their thoughts or feelings. The clearest look at the characters' motivation is the simple line, "And then they were ready." This line suggests that Abel intends to kill the albino man before they leave the bar, and that the albino man, in some way, is prepared for that. The narration never allows the reader insight the albino man's mind; Abel considers him an enemy, and the description of the albino man as "the white man" positions him in opposition to the non-white, Native American Abel. On the other hand, the albino man approaches Abel "as if to embrace him," with no obvious aggression, and after Abel stabs him, the albino man only holds Abel close. Abel's assault on the man, on some level, is thus another instance when Abel is unable to be close to other people.

The murder also takes place "midway between the river and the road"—in other words, midway between tradition and colonial modernity. This is the space that Abel occupies throughout the novel. He has returned to Walatowa, but he has not completely left behind his experiences in the colonial world. This constant tension agitates Abel, provoking him to the kind of violence he directs toward the albino man.

8. The Priest of the Sun, January 26 Quotes

"And in his hurry he said too much. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' It was the Truth, all right, but it was more than the Truth. The Truth was overgrown with fat, and the fat was God. The fat was *John's* God, and God stood between John and the Truth. […] He had said all there was to say, everything, but he went on. 'In the beginning was the word….' Brothers and sisters, *that* was the Truth […]

[O]ld John was a white man, and the white man has his ways. […] He talks about the Word. He talks through it and around it. […] And in all of this he subtracts the Truth.'"

Related Characters: Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82-83

Explanation and Analysis

In his sermon to the congregants of the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue, Tosamah discusses the spiritual significance of Truth. He believes that language is the key to expressing Truth, but overusing language cheapens it and dilutes its connection to Truth. Tosamah insists that the Biblical John struck at the heart of Truth when he wrote "In the beginning was the word," but then John continued to write after that, weakening his message.

This, Tosamah argues, is the flaw of white culture and religion. White people talk "through" and "around" the Word that leads to Truth, unlike Native Americans, who honor the Truth by speaking more straightforwardly. Tosamah adds that Christianity itself encourages this distance from Truth, and in fact John's faith in his God is what stands between John and Truth.

This passage also highlights that despite Tosamah's dislike of Christianity as a colonial religion, he recognizes value in some of its teachings, acknowledging that John is correct that "in the beginning was the word." However, in John's devotion to Christianity, and his "hurry" to spread the Gospel, John says "too much" and diminishes the power of the Word.

> When he had told his story once, simply, Abel refused to speak. […] That was good, for he should not have known what more to say. Word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, *their* language, and they were making a bad job of it.

Related Characters: Abel, Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah, Father Olguin, Juan Reyes Fragua/The Albino Man

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

When Abel is put on trial for killing the albino man, he finds himself unable and unwilling to navigate the court system. He views the murder he committed as a reasonable, justified act, but he can't express that to the court. The values that prompted him to violence are Jemez values, while the court operates in English as an agent of colonialist bureaucracy.

Abel's belief that he only needs to tell his story once, "simply", also echoes Tosamah's sermon on the differing approaches to storytelling and language taken by white and Native American people. Abel uses words "simply" and straightforwardly to express the truth. The white men in court, on the other hand, use language not as a conduit for truth, but as a weapon to dismantle and "dispose" of Abel. Abel has no respect for this process, and he even notes that the white men are "making a bad job" of their attempts to dispose of him. This recalls the passage about Native Americans withstanding and "outwaiting" colonialism, as the violence of colonial language fails to erase Abel, leaving him intact to continue his quest for meaning and connection.

> "No test is completely valid," she said. "Some are more valid than others."

But Milly believed in tests, questions and answers, words on paper. She was a lot like Ben. She believed in Honor, Industry, the Second Chance, the Brotherhood of Man, the American Dream, and him––Abel; she believed in him. After a while he began to suspect as much […].

Related Characters: Milly (speaker), Abel, Ben Benally

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Milly is Abel's social worker who seeks to help him assimilate to white urban society after his release from prison. She tries to assess his mental state with a series of tests, and when Abel responds poorly to the tests, she reassures him that "no test is completely valid." This explanation reveals that despite Milly's limited understanding of Abel, who is generally opposed to bureaucracy in all forms, she is determined to find a way to relate to him. She tries to meet Abel at his level, but she doesn't understand where he is coming from or why he is resistant to her tests.

Milly's fundamental misunderstanding of Abel stems from her own naïve idealism. She trusts the American institutions that she works for because she believes in American values like honor, hard work, and kinship. Since she doesn't see the

inherent violence of the colonial state, which continues to try to wipe out Indigenous cultures, she blindly trusts the promises of that state. However, her idealism also allows her to believe in Abel. That unwavering faith overcomes Abel's distrust of Milly, and the two eventually begin a sexual relationship.

She had been in Los Angeles four years, and in all that time she had not talked to anyone. There were people all around; she knew them, worked with them––sometimes they would not leave her alone––but she did not talk to them, tell them anything that mattered in the least. […]

And then one day he was there by her door, waiting for her. It was a hot, humid afternoon and the streets were full of people when she walked home. And he was waiting for her. […] He was saying something, trying to tell her why he had come, and suddenly she realized how lonely they both were, how unspeakably lonely.

Related Characters: Abel, Milly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

The novel plays with various ways of storytelling throughout the narrative, and after Milly's introduction the story briefly switches into her perspective. Like Abel, Milly struggles with loneliness and with feeling alienated from her peers. Though she is surrounded by people in Los Angeles, she does not feel a meaningful connection with any of them. This sense of disconnect mirrors Abel's feelings about the city, but unlike Abel, Milly has no community she can return to if she leaves Los Angeles, suggesting that colonialist America's lack of tradition and community leaves white people without reprieve from the systems of isolation they have created.

Milly is one of the few people in the story with whom Abel forms a connection, and that connection is founded on their mutual loneliness. When Milly finds him at her home, he is a solitary figure apart from the crowds of people she passes on the street. He cannot express how he feels in words, since Milly and Abel still stand on opposite sides of a cultural divide about the function of words. But their feelings of loneliness are similar enough that Milly understands Abel without words.

10. The Night Chanter, February 20 Quotes

We went up there on the hill, him and me, with Tosamah and Cruz. There were a lot of Indians up there, and we really got going after a while. […] Somebody built a fire, and we heated the drums until they were good and you could really hear them. Mercedes Tenorio had some turtle shells and she started doing a stomp dance.

You can forget about everything up there. […] We could see one whole side of the city, all the way to the water, but we couldn't hear anything down there. All we could hear was the drums and the singing.

Related Characters: Ben Benally (speaker), Abel, Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah, Cruz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127-128

Explanation and Analysis

To celebrate Abel's last night in Los Angeles, Ben, Tosamah, and Cruz bring him to a party outside the city. As the novel continues to explore different modes of storytelling, this chapter is told entirely from Ben Benally's first-person perspective. This shows the reader an insider's perspective on Native American urban life, which contrasts with Abel's perspective as an outsider to that world. This party represents an escape from that urban life, which the book establishes as stifling and lonely. The Native American partygoers physically distance themselves from Los Angeles, and though the city remains visible, the festivities drown it out. These festivities take the form of traditional Pueblo songs and dances, allowing the partygoers to celebrate their heritage and traditions as a community. In this way, the party becomes a moment of resistance to the assimilation expected of them in the city. The novel frames the party as a temporary microcosm of the community that Native Americans sacrifice when they leave their reservations.

He was a longhair, like Tosamah said. You know, you have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was, how you grew up and all. Sometimes it's hard, but you have to do it. Well, he didn't want to change, I guess, or he didn't know how. […] He was going to get us all in trouble, Tosamah said. Tosamah sizes him up right away and warned me about him. But, you know, Tosamah doesn't understand either. He talks pretty big all the time, and he's educated, but he doesn't understand.

Related Characters: Ben Benally (speaker), Abel, Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Tosamah describes Abel as a "longhair" to poke fun at his stereotypically Native American traits, with the word "longhair" evoking the image of a man who retains his traditional long hair rather than cutting it to assimilate with Western styles. Ben is in favor of assimilation, since he, like Milly, holds an unfounded faith in American way of life. He does not gloss over the difficulty of assimilation; he understands that it is an act of sacrifice, of one's background, identity, and past. However, Ben also believes this sacrifice to be worth it in order to live "in a place like this" away from the reservations. He doesn't fully understand Abel's reluctance to assimilate, as Ben cannot tell if Abel is willfully resisting change is or simply unable to adapt. Ben does relate to Abel, though, especially compared to Tosamah, who never lived on a reservation and "doesn't understand" the labor required for assimilation.

"They gave him every advantage. […] But was he grateful? Hell, no, man, he was too dumb to be civilized. So what happened? They let him alone at last. They thought he was harmless. […] But it didn't turn out that way. He turned out to be a real primitive sonuvabitch, and the first time he got hold of a knife he killed a man. That must have embarrassed the hell out of them.

"[…] They put that cat away, man. They had to. It's part of the Jesus scheme. *They*, man. They put all of us renegades, us diehards, away sooner or later."

Related Characters: Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah (speaker), Abel, Ben Benally

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131-132

Explanation and Analysis

Tosamah sees Abel less as a human being and more as a representative of how colonialism has failed. He disparages Abel as "dumb" and "primitive," mocking both Abel and colonialism's attempts to force "civilization" upon people resistant to it. According to Tosamah, Abel's "primitive" nature overpowers his military training and renders him useless to the colonial institution. Then, when the colonial machine loosens its grip on him, Abel immediately resorts to mindless violence. Tosamah is entertained by this perceived primitivism, celebrating it as an embarrassment to agents of colonialism (in this case, the American justice system). He sees himself as Abel's ally, implicitly including Abel in an "us" against the colonialist "*they*". He includes himself among the "renegades" like Abel that resist colonialism and are punished by society. His description of Abel is so rude and dehumanizing, though, that Abel loses his temper and, after this speech, ends his friendship with Tosamah by physically attacking him.

[Tosamah] doesn't know how it is when you grow up out there someplace. […] You grow up in the night, and there are a lot of funny things going on, things you don't know how to talk about. A baby dies, or a good horse. You get sick, or the corn dries up for no good reason. Then you remember something that happened the week before, something that wasn't right. You heard an owl, maybe, or you saw a funny kind of whirlwind […]. And then you *know*. You just know. Maybe your aunt or your grandmother was a witch. Maybe you knew she was […]. You just know, and you can't help being scared.

Related Characters: Ben Benally (speaker), Abel, Reverend John Big Buff Tosamah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131-132

Explanation and Analysis

Though Tosamah is a priest of the pan-Indigenous peyote religion, he is dismissive of many Pueblo superstitions and spiritual beliefs. Ben attributes this scorn to Tosamah's disconnect from the pueblos themselves.

Throughout the book, Indigenous characters display a deep, often religious connection to their homelands. This connection allows Pueblo people to see magic in their lands and their communities that is not obvious to outsiders. This magic is as much a source of fear as a source of wonder. Ben often takes comfort in his religious beliefs, but he "can't help being scared" of witches and the unexplainable, unspeakable "funny things" that occur "in the night." He describes these occurrences as "things you don't know how to talk about" and states that to know a relative is a witch, "you just know." This lack of discussion and presence of inherent understanding suggests that this knowledge of

magic cannot be explained to people who have not grown up with it, which explains Tosamah's ignorance. Ben's use of second person in his description also universalizes the experience, implying that Native Americans on reservations across the Southwest, and potentially around country, might relate to him.

He was going home, and I wanted to pray. Look out for me, I said; look out each day and listen for me. And we were going together on horses to the hills. We were going to ride out in the first light to the hills. We were going to see how it was, and always was, how the sun came up with a little wind and the light ran out on the land. We were going to get drunk, I said. We were going to be all alone, and we were going to get drunk and sing. We were going to sing about the way it always was. And it was going to be right and beautiful. It was going to be the last time. And he was going home.

Related Characters: Ben Benally (speaker), Abel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

Ben narrates the implosion of Abel's life in Los Angeles, and his subsequent decision to return to Walatowa; Ben has chosen not to return to his reservation. Ben's repetition of "he was going home" has an almost jealous tone to it. It speaks to Ben's own desire to return to his community, a fantasy that he indulges in with Abel. He imagines riding a horse again with his friend, and his narration emphasizes the landscape to demonstrate his desire to reconnect with the land. Ben imagines the reservation as a place of freedom and pleasure, where he and Abel can "get drunk and sing." Singing, for Ben, is a deeply religious act, as the Navajo prayers he teaches Abel all take the form of songs. Getting drunk and singing is therefore a joyful way to reconnect with his religion; his desire to sing "about the way it always was" also reiterates that Ben's favorite prayer songs praise the land that he has left in favor of the city. On the reservation, Ben would be able to live life "as it always was," according to the traditions of his people, in a life that is "right and beautiful." Since Ben does not leave Los Angeles, though, only Abel has a chance at that life.

11. The Dawn Runner, February 27 Quotes

In the only possible way, perhaps, [Father Olguin] had come to terms with the town [...]. To be sure, there was the matter of some old and final cleavage, of certain exclusion, the whole and subtle politics of estrangement, but that was easily put aside [...]. That safety––that exclusive silence––was the sense of all his vows, certainly; it had been brought about by his own design, his act of renunciation, not the town's. He had done well, by the town, after all. He had set an example of piety [...].

Related Characters: Francisco, Father Olguin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

After the narrative moves away from Father Olguin for seven years, it finds him again just as alienated from the people of Walatowa as he was in 1952. Now, though, Father Olguin has convinced himself that this separation is proof of his holiness. As a representative of the colonial religion, Catholicism, Father Olguin has occupied a tenuous place in Walatowa throughout the novel. However, figures like Francisco demonstrate that many residents of Walatowa hold both Catholic and traditional religious beliefs. There might be, then, a way for Father Olguin himself to integrate into the Walatowa community, if he accepts that the townspeople will practice Catholicism in tandem with the religion of their ancestors. Instead, he remains unwilling to accept this duality, convincing himself that his distanced relationship with the town is "the only possible way" he could ever make a place for himself in Walatowa. He refuses to question what flaws he might possess that turn the townspeople away from him, and instead positions himself as above them, an "example of piety" for them to look up to from afar.

[Abel's] own sickness had settled into despair. [...] His eyes burned and his body throbbed and he could not think what to do. The room enclosed him, as it always had, as if the small interior, in which this voice and other voices rose and remained forever at the walls, were all of infinity that he had ever known. It was the room in which he was born, in which his mother and brother died.

Related Characters: Abel, Francisco, Vidal

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

Abel returns to Walatowa as Francisco is dying. For all of Abel's life, Francisco has cared for and looked after him; now, at the end of Francisco's life, Abel must step into the role of caregiver and help his grandfather pass away comfortably. This role reversal emphasizes Abel's development since the start of the novel, as he has matured into a man capable of caring for the person who raised him. This growth does not mean Abel forgets his past, however, nor does it mean that he has fully let go of his trauma. His return to Walatowa is a return to the past, which includes the premature deaths of his mother and brother. Contending with the pain of the past is a necessary step in Abel's journey as he decides to live in the traditional town of Walatowa rather than a modernized metropolis. Abel's grief for his family is part of his identity, just as his birth was and the death of Francisco will be.

> They must learn the whole contour of the black mesa. They must know it as they knew the shape of their hands, always and by heart. […] They must know the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the seasons and the years, and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, where all things were, in time. […]
>
> These things he told to his grandsons carefully, slowly and at length, because they were old and true, and they could be lost forever as easily as one generation is lost to the next, as easily as one old man might lose his voice, having spoken not enough or not at all.

Related Characters: Abel, Francisco, Vidal

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

As Francisco dies, he remembers a series of meaningful moments in his life. One of these is a memory of showing Vidal and Abel the landscape and teaching them how to measure time with the seasons—and, more broadly, how to live as one with nature. The Native American characters in the novel have continually emphasized the importance of connecting with land, and here Francisco explains one reason why this connection is so significant. His ancestors, and accordingly Vidal and Abel's ancestors, established their place in the universe in relation to the natural world around them. As such, the Pueblo people still look to their environments to "reckon where they were, where all things were, in time."

Francisco teaches this way of thinking to his grandsons as a deliberate attempt to preserve their people's traditions. Previous passages have explained that since colonialism works to erase Indigenous traditions, continuing those traditions is an act of resistance against oppression. However, Francisco knows these traditions are easily lost, especially since colonialist factors work to suppress them. If his generation fails to impart the significance of these traditions on the younger generation, the traditions will be lost "as one generation is lost to the next." It is therefore Francisco's responsibility to teach his grandsons, so he does not become the old man who loses his voice "having spoken not enough or not at all."

> […] he saw the dark shape sauntering among the trees, and then the others, sitting all around, motionless, the short pointed ears and the soft shining eyes, almost kindly and discreet, the gaze of gray heads bidding only welcome and wild good will. And he was young and it was the first time he had come among them and he brought the rifle up and made no sound. He swung the sights slowly around from one to another of the still, shadowy shapes, but they made no sign except to cock their heads a notch, sitting still and away in the darkness like a litter of pups, full of shyness and wonder and delight.

Related Characters: Francisco

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

A young Francisco undertakes a hunting trip on his own to prove himself as a grown man and capable hunter in his community. When he makes camp for the night on this hunt, he wakes to find a pack of wolves watching him from the distance. Though the situation is dangerous, the narration holds no sense of urgency or fear. Instead, the wolves and Francisco regard each other with mutual curiosity and respect. The wolves recognize that Francisco lives in harmony with nature, so they bid him "welcome and wild good will." Francisco is too young to entirely trust his place in nature, so he points his gun at the wolves. But even this gesture of potential violence does not turn the wolves

against Francisco. They remain at a distance from him, and Francisco recognizes a youthful perspective in the wolves that mirrors his own, comparing them to "a litter of pups." Though Francisco raises his gun, he does not shoot it or make any noise. This indicates that although Francisco's youth might render him insecure about his place in the natural world, he ultimately understands that place and instinctively honors it.

He had begun at the wrong pace, another and better man's pace, had seen the man come almost at once to the top of his strength, hitting his stride without effort […]. And like a fool he had taken up the bait, whole and at once, had allowed himself to be run into the ground. In the next instant his lungs should burst, for now they were burning with pain and the pain had crowded out the last and least element of his breath, and he should stumble and fall. But the moment passed […] and the next and the next, and he was running still, and still he could see the dark shape of the man running away […] like a motionless shadow. And he held onto the shadow and ran beyond his pain.

Related Characters: Abel, Francisco

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Francisco's last memory before he dies is of a race he ran as a young man. The language of physical exertion and pain as he runs parallels the pain of dying. This is particularly pronounced as Francisco struggles to breathe, feeling as if "his lungs should burst." Despite this pain, Francisco continues to run. As Francisco's difficulty breathing makes clear that he is dying as he remembers this race, the description of his opponent as a "motionless shadow" calls to mind an embodiment of death itself. Francisco "held onto the shadow," as if he is aware of his coming death and runs towards it with acceptance. As he passes the shadow into death, Francisco "[runs] beyond his pain," leaving behind the pain of dying as he accepts death.

On a more literal level, the difficulty of this race contrasts with the race Francisco often references as a story, when he won against talented runner. This establishes a lesson that Abel learns this in the book's next and final chapter: running is not always enjoyable or easy, but pushing through the pain of running can make success even more satisfying.

12. The Dawn Runner, February 28 Quotes

He was running, and his body cracked open with pain, and he was running on. He was running and there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing. […] He saw the slim black bodies of the runners in the distance, gliding away without sound through the slanting light and the rain. […] His legs buckled and he fell in the snow. The rain fell around him in the snow and he saw his broken hands […]. And he got up and ran on. He was alone and running on. […] Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky.

Related Characters: Abel, Francisco

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

After Francisco's death, Abel runs into the plains to run the race of the dead, a tradition his grandfather taught him. He honors Francisco by finally embracing the traditions his grandfather valued, after spending the story torn between Jemez traditions and the lifestyles expected in urban America.

Abel honors his late grandfather by following in Francisco's footsteps as a runner. One of Francisco's passions as a young man was running, which helped him connect with his community and his religion. Caring for the dying Francisco forced Abel to develop into a man mature enough to look after someone else in addition to himself, and just as Abel took on the role of caregiver that Francisco occupied for most of his life, Abel now takes on the role of runner. He ensures that Francisco's fears about the loss of Jemez traditions over time stay unrealized by taking responsibility for keeping those traditions alive.

Abel's run across the land also helps him forge a connection to it. He has struggled his entire life with feelings of isolation and alienation, but as he runs, his worries disappear, and he is motivated only by "the running itself and the land and the dawn." He finds peace as the bodily experience of running allows him to live in the moment and appreciate the landscape around him. The "pure exhaustion" unburdens his mind, and he can "see at last without having to think." He realizes that nature does not exist to be rationalized or interpreted; it simply *is*, and its presence alone is worth appreciating.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

The prologue opens with the word "dypaloh," the Jemez equivalent to the English "once upon a time"––a word that begins a story. In an ancient and beautiful landscape, Abel **runs** along an empty road at dawn. His upper body is bare, and his skin is covered in rain, burnt wood, and ashes. In the vast landscape, he almost looks like he is standing still, "very little and alone."

Beginning the book with "dypaloh" introduces the importance of storytelling in the novel. It frames the following events as a story, but their status as a story doesn't negate their importance. This prologue also introduces the protagonist, Abel, who appears small in comparison to the landscape. The description of Abel as "very little and alone" foreshadows the isolation he will feel throughout the story, while introducing him running across the landscape introduces the significance of Abel's connection to both nature and running.

1. THE LONGHAIR, JULY 20

The year is 1945 in the village of Walatowa in Cañon de San Diego (Canyon of Saint James), which runs through a valley of hills and cultivated fields. In the summer, the townsmen work all day in the fields, and on full moons they work all night as well. They consider especially fruitful harvests to be a gift from God.

As a story about Native American identity, the novel pays particular attention to ideas of ancestral homeland. Establishing the landscape and traditions of Walatowa before introducing any characters or plot elements of this section of the book emphasizes how the story and its characters will be shaped by their native lands.

An old man, Francisco, drives a team of roan mares with a wagon by a river bend. He finds a dead sparrow hanging from a reed, and he is disappointed that he didn't encounter a bird with more beautiful feathers. He cuts the bird from the reed, letting it fall into the river, then sets a snare using the reed. He continues on with the horses, singing a traditional Pueblo song as he brings them onto the road to San Ysidro.

Francisco lives in harmony with the land. He looks for beauty in plants and wildlife while also making practical use of them. He is also in touch with the traditions of his people, which he casually honors with a song as he walks.

On the road, Francisco recalls participating in a **race** meant to ensure good hunting and harvests. He defeated the best runner in the race by striking him in the face, but even after ensuring his victory he continued running at full speed just for the sake of running. He was an impressively successful hunter that year.

For Francisco, racing is and was a way to connect with his own body and the traditions of his people. His belief that the race helped his hunting speaks to Francisco's faith in a higher power, but his underhanded method of winning the race reveals that Francisco can be sly and resourceful.

Francisco stops at a bus junction. He anxiously smooths his new shirt and checks the wagon and horses to make sure "everything [is] in order." The bus arrives, and Abel, Francisco's grandson, stumbles out. Abel is drunk. He falls against Francisco, hurting the old man's bad leg, and doesn't seem to recognize his grandfather. Francisco almost cries, but instead he laughs and turns away from the bus. He helps Abel lie down in the wagon, and then Francisco starts walking back to bring his grandson home.

Francisco's anxiety upon greeting Abel indicates the distance that seems to have developed between the two, and his desire to ensure that "everything is in order" suggests Francisco cares for his grandson and wants to rebuild their relationship. Abel, on the other hand, is completely unprepared for this reunion, demonstrating his unstable mental health. Though Francisco is saddened and perhaps hurt by Abel's condition, he immediately assumes the role of caregiver for his grandson.

2. THE LONGHAIR, JULY 21

Abel sleeps through a whole day and night in Francisco's house. The following dawn, he goes out and takes in the landscape. The story moves back in time to when Abel is 5 years old. He and his brother Vidal ride on horseback with Francisco. Vidal brings Abel to a canyon alongside the face of the red mesa, which makes Abel feel claustrophobic and prompts him to cry. They return to their grandfather and watch him work with other men, digging a ditch to bring river water farther inland.

The story has already started playing with time by beginning with a prologue that doesn't define where it falls in the timeline of the story. As Abel (and, by extension, the reader) moves through his memories, that commitment to non-linear storytelling continues. The catalyst for Abel's consideration of the past is his view of the landscape, highlighting the significance of returning to one's native land.

On breaks during the work day, the workers and their families sit on the ground in groups divided by family and clan. They eat food that Abel and Vidal's mother brings. Abel does not know who his father is, but other townspeople say that he was an outsider (they believe he was Navajo, but don't know for certain). This marks Abel's family as "somehow foreign."

Abel's family is not completely ostracized by the community––the men work beside Abel's grandfather and eat food shared by his mother. Still, the unknown ancestry of Abel's father means Abel feels alienated and "foreign" even in his own pueblo.

Abel's family is led by Francisco, but Abel can sense that Francisco is growing old just as he can sense that his mother will die soon of her illness. He understands this innately, the same way he understands the sun and the seasons. When his mother dies, Abel cannot bring himself to visit her grave for a long time. He remembers her beauty and her soft voice.

Despite the fact that Abel is the novel's protagonist, the narrative does not offer much insight into the way he thinks. The suggestion that Abel innately understands the world around him even at a young age is one of his first elements of characterization.

In another childhood incident, Abel is cursed by an outsider woman whom the townspeople consider a witch. Afterwards, he hears a loud moaning wind, and for the rest of his life he associates that sound with anguish. He hears that sound again when Vidal dies a few years later, and he believes he finally understands the witch's curse. Abel looks at his brother's body at the funeral. He observes that while all the life is gone from Vidal's face, all the pain is gone as well.

The townspeople's distrust of the outsider woman highlights the community's exclusivity, and their belief that she is a witch speaks to the superstition and faith that is entrenched in the pueblo. Vidal's death is another moment in which Abel is isolated, and this leaves Francisco as Abel's only surviving relative. Abel's observation of Vidal's body demonstrates that even at a young age, Abel perceives that life and pain are inextricably linked.

On January 1, 1937, Francisco wakes the 17-year-old Abel before dawn and they travel to Sia, a neighboring Pueblo nation. A local man gives them coffee while they wait for dawn. When the sun starts to rise, they go outside and join the Navajo and Domingo elders. People begin to sing and dance, and wildlife run down from the hills. Abel watches the crows and thinks that they must be cold. He redirects the attention to the dance, which he describes as "nearly perfect." Later in the ceremony, Abel has sex with a playful young woman. Afterwards, she runs away, and he is too drunk to chase her.

At the ceremony, members of neighboring Pueblo nations unite and celebrate elements of their shared belief systems. Nature is integral to these ceremonies, as the running wildlife are as significant to the ceremony's success as the dancers. Although everyone enjoys the ceremony, Abel doesn't believe that the dance is flawless, describing it as only "nearly" perfect. His isolation continues through this ceremony, despite the communal aspect of the celebration—for instance, his lover runs away from him, and he fails to chase her.

The story shifts to explain the Eagle Watchers Society, an important group among the local Pueblo nations. It is the principal ceremonial organization of the Bahkyush, immigrants from the city of Bahkyula who moved to the Pueblo nations several generations ago, after their population was decimated by persecution and plague. One day, after helping break a horse for a rancher, Abel is walking home. He sees a pair of golden eagles flying together. The female eagle carries a rattlesnake. She drops it, and the male eagle swoops down and swiftly finishes the kill. Instead of picking the snake back up, the female eagle flies away, and her mate follows.

The story's attention to the history of the Bahkyush demonstrates the importance of Indigenous history and stories throughout the book. Meanwhile, the golden eagles, which hunt together in perfect tandem, represent a sense of connection and freedom. They are connected to each other and to nature, displaying a confidence of their place in the world that teenaged Abel lacks.

Abel describes what he saw to the chief of the Eagle Watchers Society, who then allows Abel to join the Society on their eagle-hunting trip. The men hunt rabbits and use them as bait, pausing the hunt at intervals to pray. A pair of eagles see the prey, and the female descends to hunt. Abel grabs her legs and brings it to the other men. They don't notice when Abel starts to cry with empathy for the eagle. That night, Abel leaves dinner by the campfire and looks at his captured bird. Filled with "shame and disgust," he strangles the eagle.

Eagle-hunting is a sacred act among the Eagle Watchers Society, and they imbue that act with holiness by punctuating the hunt with prayer. Abel feels a connection to the eagles, but his empathy and respect for them does not stop him from killing the captured eagle. Despite his instinctual emotional response, Abel believes that killing the eagle is the right thing to do, and so he does it.

Time moves forward further as Abel prepares to leave Walatowa. Francisco is distraught at his grandson's decision, and he doesn't see Abel off when the bus arrives for him. Abel has never been in a motorized vehicle before, which only increases his simultaneous excitement and dread at leaving behind all he has ever known. As they drive away, he doesn't remember to look back at the fields until it is too late.

Abel's departure from Walatowa signifies the division between the pueblos and the rest of America. The technological advances that most of America takes for granted have not reached the pueblos, which prioritize tradition and lacks access to many resources available outside of pueblos and reservations.

Abel remembers the time leading up to his departure, but he doesn't recall much of his time away. One moment that he remembers with clarity, though, involves him waking up surrounded by dead soldiers. He has grown used to the explosions of mortar fire, and now that the battle is over, the silence is unsettling. He looks at the sun and sees a tank––which he can only identify as a machine––appear on the horizon. It passes by him, leaving Abel trembling alone among the corpses.

The story does not spend much time describing Abel's time in combat, but his loss of memory contrasted with his clear recollection of this traumatic moment suggests that serving in the army significantly damaged Abel's mental health. His repeated description of the tank as simply a machine paints a picture of the tank as an unnatural and violent machine imposing on the woodland battlefield.

Back in 1945, Abel takes in the silence of Walatowa at dawn. The sunrise appears to light the sky on fire. A car appears on a hill and drives by. Abel stands for a long time, looking for something, though he doesn't know what. The sun rises completely above the horizon.

Having returned to Walatowa, Abel tries to reconnect with the land. The car in the distance suggests that Abel cannot entirely leave behind the modern, technology-dependent world, but he is able to stand in silence and take in the dawn. Dawn—the start of a new day—suggests this is a moment of growth and change.

At the local mission, the priest Father Olguin prepares to say Mass for his congregation, which includes Francisco. An unfamiliar white woman enters, but she does not take the sacrament. After Mass, she introduces herself to Father Olguin as Mrs. St. John. She explains that she and her husband live in Los Angeles, but she has taken up residence at the Benevides house in Los Ojos and needs local men to cut firewood for her.

The relationship between Indigenous religions and Christian spirituality runs throughout the book. Francisco sang traditional Jemez songs earlier in the story, but he is also regularly attends Mass, indicating that he is comfortable with both the traditional religion and Catholicism. Mrs. St. John's entrance into Mass implies that she is unafraid to insert herself into Native American spaces to make requests, which speaks to her privilege and status.


Abel returns to his grandfather's house, but Francisco is not there. The men have yet to speak to each other. The rooms of the house are small, bare, and white, so in the late afternoon Abel follows the river to the hills along the red mesa. He looks over the farmland and sees Francisco and other men working in the fields. For a moment, Abel is at peace as he recognizes that he is home.

Abel's first real moment of peace since his introduction comes as he looks over Walatowa. He feels a genuine connection, however briefly, to the land of his ancestors and to his fellow community members working in the fields. The fact that Abel's mental health deteriorated so severely when he was cut off from the land and people of Walatowa emphasizes the importance of those connections.


3. THE LONGHAIR, JULY 24

Abel takes the job cutting wood for Angela St. John. When he comes to her house, she is prepared to negotiate his wages, but he shuts her off and states his price without bargaining. Watching Abel work brings Angela pleasure that seems to be erotic. She also recognizes and relates to the "useless agony" that Abel inflicts upon the wood he cuts.

Abel approaches business with a straightforwardness that Angela is not used to, which reflects their different backgrounds and worldviews. In the last chapter, Angela introduced herself as "Mrs. St. John," emphasizing that she is married, yet she feels no guilt about her attraction to Abel. However, Angela's empathy for the wood's "useless agony" suggests she has other internal conflicts to work through.


When Angela is alone in the afternoon, she speaks to a child in her womb and searches the wind for bad omens. Abel comes inside to discuss the wood he's cut, and he is amiable despite his reserved nature. When he tells Angela matter-of-factly that he will take his payment when he finishes cutting the wood over the weekend, she grows offended at his disinterest in money. She challenges him, but he stays silent, which irritates her further. She imagines provoking him into sex with obscene, racist language. She restrains herself, since she knows Abel would have no reaction. She takes some comfort in the power she holds over him as his employer.

Angela's private anxiety about her pregnancy informs her desire for power and control in her relationship with Abel. He challenges her implicit privilege as a white person and his employer by refusing to shift his perspective on money to match hers—that is, he's not going to let her rile him up.

Abel leaves, and Angela reflects on her own body. She cannot see it as beautiful, perceiving it only as a disgusting collection of flesh and bones that feeds the "monstrous fetal form" inside her. She sometimes wishes to burn to death, so that her entire body will be destroyed. Angela goes outside and looks at the firewood, thinking of the violence that divided it. One of the nearby plateaus was once decimated by fire, and Angela imagines flames spreading across the "flesh" of the now-dead trees. She sets the firewood in the hearth, but the flames seem only to burn the wood's outside, leaving the core intact.

While most of the novel's Native American characters find peace connecting to the physical world, Angela is disgusted by it. This disgust is largely directed at her own body, as she grapples with what seems like an unwanted pregnancy, but her self-loathing also affects her view of the world around her. She sees violence in the act of chopping firewood and personifies the trees that burned in the way she longs to.

Father Olguin visits the Benevides house and invites Angela to the town's celebration of the feast of Santiago. She accepts, and though Father Olguin wants to linger and look at her, he departs. Angela thinks of a corn dance she saw at Cochiti. She was struck by the seriousness with which the dancers took their duty. She believes the dancers achieved spiritual freedom by seeing beyond the landscape and its colors, seeing instead "nothing in the absolute." She envies this ability, and she believes Abel shares this perception of nothingness when he chops wood. However, he fails to see all the way to "the last reality," so Angela is confident she can dominate him.

Though Father Olguin, a man of the church, is Angela's primary contact in Walatowa, she sets out to explore the pueblo's native religion. After witnessing the devotion of ceremonial dancers in Cochiti (another New Mexico pueblo), Angela has become convinced that the Pueblo religions allow people to see past the trappings of physical reality. As Angela considers Abel's spirituality, she reaffirms her desire to control and sexually dominate him.

4. THE LONGHAIR, JULY 25

At the feast of Santiago, Father Olguin tells a story about Santiago. In the story, Santiago disguises himself as a peasant and saves the lives of an elderly couple who offer him hospitality. They kill and cook their only rooster to thank him. Later, Santiago wins the hand of a princess in a tournament, but the king dislikes Santiago and orders him killed. The rooster emerges from Santiago's mouth and warns him of the king's order, and Santiago defeats the royal soldiers. At the end of his travels, he sacrifices his horse and the rooster to create cultivated plants and domestic animals for the Pueblo people.

The plot of the novel pauses for Father Olguin to tell the story of Santiago. Decentering the plot for a seemingly minor sermon highlights the importance the novel grants to all stories and to the act of storytelling itself. Father Olguin's description of Santiago is also striking in that it reflects the history and legends of the Pueblo people as well as Catholic legends. This element of the story demonstrates how Catholicism has blended with native religions in the pueblos.

Later that afternoon, Father Olguin walks through Walatowa with Angela. He stops to talk to some townspeople, and Angela moves on without him. She appreciates the strong and varied scents of the village, and she follows the sound of drumming to the Middle, an ancient ceremonial area in the center of Walatowa. Father Olguin joins her, and they watch the ceremony begin. Several men and boys ride into the Middle on horseback, and Angela recognizes Abel among them. Another rider is a large albino man in dark glasses. The men compete to pull a rooster from where it is buried in a hole in the ground, and Angela is frustrated at Abel's lack of grace in his attempts. She deceives him with a smile as he passes her.

The Middle's location in the center of the town displays the care and respect that the people of Walatowa feel for their ceremonies. The fact that the Middle has remained the central point in the town also reflects the importance of tradition in the ceremonies and in the way of life in Walatowa. Abel continues to annoy Angela with his lack of guile and grace; manipulation and deception come easily to her, while Abel is consistently straightforward and honest.

The albino man grabs the rooster, and as he passes Angela, she is disgusted by his ugliness. Once he has the rooster, the other men wait for the winner to choose one of them. He chooses Abel, trapping Abel's horse against the wall and beating Abel bloody with the body of the rooster. When the albino man drops the rooster's dead body, the townswomen throw water on it as a sacrifice. The experience exhausts Angela. She feels emotionally drained and like she's been sacrificed, which reminds her of reminds her of the first time she had sex.

The ceremony becomes violent once the albino man seizes the rooster. This display of ritual violence and Angela's disgust at his appearance are the only pieces of concrete characterization the story offers for the albino man, leaving his motivations largely a mystery. The ceremony itself is emotionally taxing on its audience, and Angela's response reveals that despite her lust for Abel and her desire to dominate him, she bears some trauma surrounding sex.

Late that night, a sleepless Father Olguin, dressed in a sweatshirt, smokes some cigarettes and reads a journal from 1874 written by a priest called Nicolás. Most of the rest of the chapter consists of these journal entries. On November 16th, he writes about his persistent cough and two brothers, Viviano and Francisco, who cause trouble at church. The next day, he briefly paraphrases a Biblical verse about gift-giving. In following entries, he speaks to God about his illness and mentions visiting an old woman on her deathbed. The old woman dies, and when he attends her funeral, he is displeased that her family and community follow traditional burial rites. Nicolás also notes that despite their mischief, he believes Viviano and Francisco to be good and pious altar boys.

Father Olguin's casual dress and fondness for cigarettes humanizes him, depicting the priest as an ordinary man instead of a holy, unapproachable figure. Nicolás is also a simple human man, prejudiced against the traditions of the Pueblo people and struggling to control his altar boys. The fact that a younger Francisco served as an altar boy explains his continued devotion to the Church as an old man. The chapter's shift to Nicolas's point of view as Father Olguin reads the journal is also another moment in which the story subverts standard, single-perspective storytelling.

On Christmas Day, Nicolás writes about the Christmas Mass and the logistical difficulties of obtaining a statue of an infant Jesus. He also complains about the chanting and drumming outside the church and hopes Francisco will come by. The next entry is from January 5th the following year. Upon Nicolás's return from a missionary trip to Cuba, he hears that an albino child named Juan Reyes Fragua has been born in the village. Nicolás advises the parents to baptize the baby as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Nicolás's illness continues to worsen.

The story continues to portray Nicolás as an ordinary man with mundane concerns like acquiring an appropriate statue for Christmas. The albino baby Juan Reyes Fragua is most likely the same albino man Abel encountered during the ceremony; if this is the case, this journal entry is the only time the albino man is ever referred to by name, another way in which the story refuses to share Fragua's perspective with the reader.

Father Olguin reads a letter written from Nicolás to Nicolás's brother in October 1888. Nicolás thanks his brother for his gift of books and reflects on the death that approaches as his health deteriorates. He tells his brother that Francisco has betrayed him by continuing to practice his people's traditional religion, which Nicolás equates with Satanism. Nicolás is personally wounded by this betrayal. He relates a time when a young Francisco fell into the river and Nicolás had the boy stand naked by the fire to warm up. The tone of the letter grows increasingly unhinged as Nicolás accuses his brother's wife of turning his brother against Nicolás. He closes the letter with long, rambling ponderings on God.

Nicolás's hatred of Indigenous religions becomes clearer in his letter to his brother. He holds the traditional colonialist view that non-European religions are akin to devil worship, and this belief renders Nicolás horrified at Francisco's continued loyalty to his native religion. His distrust of Indigenous religions is strengthened by his growing paranoia. As Nicolás's mental state worsens, he reveals the extent of his attachment to Francisco, and his anecdote about forcing the boy to stand naked hints at potential abuse.

Father Olguin finishes reading. He takes comfort in associating himself with the holy Nicolás. He goes back to sleep, but he has a deformed eye that doesn't close properly. At the Benevides house, Angela returns home. The house seems to her "a black organic mass" birthed from the canyon, rather than a man-made construct. She no longer sees the house as a place she is visiting, but instead as her dominion for the foreseeable future. She feels that the house, like her, carries secrets.

Despite the instability Nicolás displays towards the end of his life, Father Olguin still considers his predecessor a holy man whom he should emulate. Angela has thus far lacked the reverence for and trust in nature that the Native American characters share, but as she comes to see the Benevides house as "organic," she feels more at peace in the house and recognizes it as its own entity.

5. THE LONGHAIR, JULY 28

The omniscient narrator offers a long, vivid description of the landscape. The narration follows the summertime activities of many native animals, including snakes, foxes, bobcats, mountain lions, and several species of birds. These animals are connected to the land, unlike the "alien and inferior" animals brought to the Americas by European colonists. The indigenous people of the land have a similar connection to it, having occupied the land for 25,000 years. The people are not eager for change, and even after Europeans forced new languages and religion upon them, the people retain their "essential way of life." This commitment to the past is an act of resistance.

The story continues to emphasize the beauty and richness of the Southwestern American landscape, and it lays out explicitly why many Indigenous people chose to pursue an intentional connection to nature. Native animals have adapted to thrive in their natural environments, and similarly, the novel suggests that Native people are better suited to live on their homelands than colonizers. Native Americans' do not reject the technology of their colonizers because they are unadvanced, but because they value their traditions more than that technology.

Abel walks through the canyon above the plain. He considers his return home a failure. He has not said what he wants to say to Francisco. Worse, Abel has lost his connection to his people's language, robbing him of the ability to pray or sing with them. He finds some peace walking through the canyon, but he lacks the words to articulate its beauty or the beauty of his town. He wants to sing of this beauty, but he can't.

Though Abel has returned home, he has failed to connect with his loved ones or with the community as a whole. Even while he is surrounded by people, Abel's isolation persists. Leaving Walatowa distanced Abel from the Jemez language, robbing him of the words he needed to connect.

Abel approaches the Benevides house. Inside, Angela waits for him. She hears him arrive and start chopping wood, and she listens to the rhythm of his work. Later, she walks to a bathhouse where an attendant gives her a mineral bath. Rejuvenated, Angela returns home and finds Abel on the front stoop. The sun has set, and the air seems colder than it should. Angela brings Abel inside for coffee. She expected to greet him with amusement, but she is only "grateful and chagrined." She senses that Abel has an instinct for power and sex that she hovers around like a fire.

The contrast between Angela's social and financial privilege and Abel's lack of it is exemplified as Angela enjoys a mineral bath while Abel performs manual labor. Despite this inequality between them, Angela loses her sense of control over Abel when she invites him inside. When sex becomes a possibility rather than a fantasy, Abel has the power. As Angela is drawn to Abel, the imagery of fire calls to mind Angela's self-loathing and desire to burn away her body.

Angela asks Abel if he finds her beautiful. When he says no, she asks if he would like to have sex with her. He says yes, and the two have sex. Elsewhere, an old man rests after a long day of labor in the fields. His lame leg suggests the man is Francisco. Under the whispers and noises of the plants and wildlife, the old man hears the vibration of an evil presence. He is too old to fear this presence, and he responds only with sadness. The old man walks out of the cornfield, leaving behind the albino man, who watches him from a hidden spot behind the stalks.

Angela and Abel share a mutual passion for each other, but their relationship also enables the tendencies that prevent them from forming meaningful connections, as Angela's insecurity allows Abel to avoid making himself vulnerable. On the other hand, Francisco connects easily with the natural world and senses the presence of danger. His premonition of evil is the second indication, after Angela's repulsion during the ceremony earlier, that the albino man is dangerous.

6. THE LONGHAIR, AUGUST 1

Father Olguin goes about his life and work as usual, convincing himself that he is content and at one with the ancient land. Other Navajo families and people (who self-identify as *Dîné*) travel to Walatowa on horses and wagons for an upcoming ceremony. While Father Olguin does his work, he thinks of Angela. He imagines visiting her, easing her loneliness and earning her envy, all while piously resisting his attraction to her. He rings a bell to call for noontime prayer, then he departs to visit Angela.

Father Olguin, as the pueblo's representative of the Catholic Church, lacks the connection to the earth and the community shared by those with ancestral ties to Walatowa. He tries to convince himself otherwise, but his connection to the Church distances him from the other residents of Walatowa. Father Olguin is also not as holy as he likes to believe; he takes perverse pleasure in resisting his lust for Angela.

Angela invites Father Olguin in, and he doesn't notice that she is surprised to see him. She has drawn all the shades in the house. Father Olguin makes himself comfortable and lectures Angela about the history of the town and its ceremonies. She loses interest and listens to the thunderstorm outside, yearning for the rain. When the priest finishes speaking, Angela laughs and mockingly responds with the first line of the Act of Contrition.

Father Olguin continues to reject obvious truths––first he convinced himself that he is a member of the community, and now he ignores Angela's blatant disinterest in him. He is an agent of Catholicism, the primary force behind undermining traditional religions, yet he presents himself as an expert on Indigenous ceremonies. The Act of Contrition functions as an apology to God, and Angela's mocking use of it in response to Father Olguin is an act of disrespect against him and the Church he represents.

Father Olguin drives recklessly back to town from the Benevides house, narrowly avoiding hitting several children and animals. He is struck with "fear and revulsion" for the many people he passes. A smiling infant and celebrating people's laughter worsen Father Olguin's insecurity. Back at the Benevides house, Angela watches the thunderstorm. She lets the loud thunder and bright lightning become all she can perceive, and she stands in the doorway breathing the electrified air. Everything else seems to fall away.

Angela's mockery has pushed Father Olguin's underlying insecurities to the surface. He is so caught up with his own anxiety, he disregards the safety of the people around him, forsaking the compassion expected of a priest. As Father Olguin's emotional state worsens, Angela's improves. Instead of seeing "nothing in the absolute," as she once wished for, she now finds peace in perceiving only one element of nature.

The celebrations have begun. An old man in ceremonial clothing painstakingly makes his way to the Middle. He is most likely Francisco, but the man is once again not called by name and identified only by his age and his disabled leg. He appreciates the smells of the festival and the various languages spoken by those who have traveled to celebrate. He appreciates the beauty of the Navajo people and the art they create.

The ceremony is a moment of unity and celebration among the Pueblo people in the area. It allows the different nations, towns, and tribes to honor and learn about each other's cultures, fostering goodwill and respect.

In the Middle, Francisco bows before the kiva (a place of worship), though it is not yet decorated for the celebration of Porcingula. He imagines the procession that will take place after Mass. The parade will involve comedic reenactments of Spanish history, including a wooden bull, clowns, and children in blackface. With difficulty, Francisco climbs up a ladder and enters through the kiva's rooftop entrance. The kiva reverberates with the sounds of drums and thunder as the storm reaches Walatowa.

The Feast of Porcingula is a festival in honor of Santa Maria de los Angeles. It combines aspects of Catholicism with traditions of the Jemez religion, just as Francisco does in his personal religious observances. The casual acceptance of blackface in the Spanish-inspired element of the ceremony also speaks to how colonizing nations spread racism and bigotry across the world.

Francisco leaves the kiva with other holy men to watch a pantomime involving a horse and a bull. The horse is portrayed by a talented dancer whose movements seem holy and unearthly, while the bull is deliberately clumsy and chased by a group of clowns in blackface. Francisco reflects on the role of the bull as an object of mockery and hatred, and he muses that the men have grown less strict about preserving tradition. He thinks about winning a **race** against its best runner, and about the times he portrayed the bull.

Francisco's position in the kiva among other holy men highlights his role as a religious leader in Walatowa. He remembers participating in the parade, and he also recalls the footrace victory he thought about in the first chapter, emphasizing its significance in his life. His musings on the upkeep of tradition also highlights that tradition must be purposefully preserved, and that communities decide for themselves what aspects of traditions they want to perpetuate.

The celebration ends, and the storm moves away from the plain. Most of the visiting families leave, except for a handful of young Navajo men who remain at a bar. At the bar, Abel and the albino man conduct a whispered conversation. Throughout the discussion, Abel smiles, and every so often the albino man lets out a thin, weak laugh. They leave the bar and pause midway between the river and the highway. The albino man moves as if to embrace Abel, but Abel draws a knife and stabs him in the heart. For a moment, the albino man stands still, his hands on Abel's shoulders, looking into "the black infinity of sound and silence."

The narration remains distanced from Abel and the albino man, never allowing the reader to know what they discuss. This distance remains when Abel kills the albino man; the narration describes the action without explaining Abel's internal monologue or his motivation for the murder. Abel kills the man between the river and the highway, a symbolic halfway point between the realms of the modern and the traditional. Abel has been languishing in this unresolved intermediate space since he came back from the war, and his turmoil has culminated in violence. As the albino man dies, he sees a "black infinity" that resembles the "nothing in the absolute" that Angela believes will bring inner peace.

The albino man pulls Abel close to him, holding him tight even as Abel tries to move away. Abel pulls out the knife and stabs the man again and again, until finally the albino man falls down dead. Abel's terror and disgust fades, replaced with "a cold, instinctive will to wonder and regard." He kneels by the corpse to examine it, and he stays there for a long time.

Abel avoids closeness with other people, but the albino man forcibly draws Abel close as he dies. When the man is finally dead, Abel's brief surge of emotions fade, and he returns to his usual reserved state. He looks at the corpse with the curiosity and "wonder" with which he looks at all of nature.

7. THE LONGHAIR, AUGUST 2

The celebration continues with a procession. The horse and bull return, and long lines of dancers perform in perfect unison to the beating of the drums. Francisco leaves early and rides his wagon into the field. He finds his snare by the river, but it is empty. The river has risen and sprung the trap. Francisco listens to the drummers as he hoes the cornfield. He can imagine the dancers; this is his first time missing their performance. He fondly says Abel's name to himself, knowing that he is alone again.

Francisco is attuned enough to the world around him that he senses when he has lost Abel. He leaves the ceremony for the first time in his long life to tend to his crops. Along the way, he checks the snare he set in the first chapter, bookending this section by ending it where it began. This kind of circular storytelling recurs throughout the book.

8. THE PRIEST OF THE SUN, JANUARY 26

This chapter moves to Los Angeles in 1952. It begins by describing the spawning process of fish off the coast of southern California that throw themselves out of the water and onto land. On land, they are helpless.

The fish jumping out of their natural habitat mirrors Abel's previous hardships outside Walatowa and foreshadows the further difficulty he will have adjusting to life in Los Angeles.

Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, also known as the Priest of the Sun, lives with his disciple Cruz above a church called the Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission. The chapel is run-down, and Tosamah leads it with "both arrogance and agony." He begins to preach about the beginning of the Gospel of John, peppering his sermon with slang and casual exclamations. Tosamah emphasizes the first line, "In the beginning was the Word." He believes that this line epitomizes the holiness of Truth, and that convoluting Truth with overly complex sentences weakens it.

Tosamah's church follows the tradition of the Peyote Religion (also called the Native American Church), a multifaceted religion that adapts Christian theology to coexist with the religions of many Native American nations and tribes. Though Tosamah displays a dislike of Christianity, he finds value in the first line of the Gospel of John. Tosamah's devotion to the power of Truth also adds a new lens to how the novel portrays storytelling, as storytelling becomes a means to preserve truth.

Tosamah blames John and his followers for overcomplicating God's Truth with their wordy gospel. Tosamah tells his congregation this is the way of white men. They do not grant stories the reverence that Native Americans do, and they "dilute" language's power by overusing it and taking it for granted.

Tosamah explicitly articulates that Christianity is the religion of white colonizers, a notion that characters in the novel's first section alluded to but never said outright. He builds an anti-colonialist argument by asserting that Native American modes of storytelling honor the truth more than white Christian texts.

Tosamah tells the congregation an ancient story that his grandmother taught him, emphasizing the durability of the oral tradition. In the story, which takes place during a famine among the Kiowa people, one man hears a voice of thunder and lightning while searching for food. The voice belongs to Tai-me, a supernatural being with the feet of a deer and a feathered body. Tai-me promises to give the Kiowa whatever they want if they bring him with them. After concluding the story of Tai-me, Tosamah turns his attention back to John. Tosamah asserts that John failed to comprehend that the Word is older than silence, and silence is made of the Word. With this, the tired priest dismisses his congregation.

Tosamah's story highlights the lasting power of the oral tradition, as he knows well a story passed down verbally through generations. The story itself uses words sparingly, never overexplaining ideas or plot points, which speaks to Tosamah's belief that Native American cultures and stories don't overuse language.

The scene transitions suddenly to Abel, who thinks about fish and the sea even though they are not of his world. He thinks of what his friend Benally told him about Navajo religious ceremonies that connect people to the earth, but the vast sea and spawning fish seem removed from that earth.

Fish continue to represent Abel's alienation from the world around him. Los Angeles is a coastal city, while Abel spent his youth building a connection to the desert plains of Walatowa. The sea and fish are so far removed from what Abel is familiar with, they might as well be from another world.

The scene shifts again as Abel, cold and in pain, wakes up hungover in an industrial area by the sea. He once loved his body, but as a young man he fell off a horse and injured his back. Though Fat Josie, a woman in Walatowa, healed the injury, Abel still remembers feeling like his hurting body betrayed him. He thinks of Angela, and of the trial he faced for killing the albino man. He'd had little interest in the trial, which he found "ceremonial, orderly, civilized."

Abel's dislike of his body mirrors Angela's disgust of her own body, further highlighting that their relationship was one between two deeply troubled people. His sense that his body betrayed him also reveals how much Abel values loyalty. He does not *care about the values espoused by the criminal justice system. His description of the trial as "civilized" echoes the common racist notion that Native Americans are uncivilized or primitive in contrast to white people. Abel's disdain for the "civilized" trial suggests that he doesn't see the merit in what white American society considers civilized.*

At the trial, Father Olguin argues that Abel was not in his right mind when he committed the murder. Father Olguin has little notion of how to describe Abel's actions, since he can't understand Abel's motivation. Abel admitted to killing the albino man and has not spoken since. He is disdainful of the discussions around him in court, but he feels no need to participate since he is disconnected from "*their* language." To Abel, the murder was simple and justified: the albino man was his enemy.

Abel remains fundamentally misunderstood by those around him, and he makes no effort to help others understand him or to try to understand others. He has no connection to the language or proceedings of the white American court system. Abel has a strong, clear moral code, but no one besides him knows what that code is.

The narration moves back to Abel waking up, and it follows his confused, disjointed thoughts as he takes in his surroundings. He thinks of old men **running** in white leggings, then of his disconnect from the world around him, then of fish. He recalls filling out a form with basic information about himself. As he recalls his prison cell and the bus that took him to war, the questions become more personal. He wishes to be drunk.

Abel's thought of old men running refers to the dawn runners, a tradition that is explained later in the novel. His continued reflections on fish and his place in the world makes clear that Abel is aware of his own isolation, but he doesn't know how to remedy it. He has been dehumanized as both a soldier and a prisoner, and now that he is once again an individual, he doesn't know how to handle himself.

Abel's fragmented psyche continues to recall his past, revealing that the questions were posed by Milly, his social worker. He remembers in detail the night he had sex with her. She believes in Industry, Brotherhood, the American Dream, and––most surprising to Abel––in Abel himself. He listens to the powerful, overwhelming crashing of the sea.

Milly, as a social worker, is an agent of the government, and is thus entirely removed from Abel's frame of reference. She believes in an idealized version of America, seeing it as a land of possibility rather than a nation that colonized the land of Abel's people. Despite this, the two form a relationship.

Back at the chapel, Tosamah prepares his congregation for a peyote ceremony by explaining the botanical properties of the peyote plant. He has painted his skin for the ceremony. The ceremony begins, and Tosamah presides over it with care for each detail, including the arrangement of the altar, the rolling of cigarettes, and the blessing of incense. After this, the congregation eats peyote buttons. They drum and dance around a fire, sharing a rush of intense and varied emotions that seems to mirror the liveliness of the flames. The congregation forms a circle, and people voice their thoughts, feelings, and drug-fueled impressions. One man, Ben Benally, sees a "house made of dawn." As the ceremony concludes, Tosamah steps outside and blows an eagle-bone whistle in four directions.

Tosamah pays careful attention to the traditions of the peyote ceremony, and the narration itself does the same, narrating each element of the ceremony in detail. This attention to detail challenges a prevailing racist assumption that Native Americans are savage or uncivilized, as the characters conduct the ceremony with respect and care for their ancestors' traditions. Additionally, this introduction of Ben Benally, who becomes a significant character later in the story, establishes him as a religious man with a spiritual connection to Indigenous religions.

Abel lies helpless and in agony on the ground. He remembers how the childless Fat Josie cheered him up after his mother died. The memory is interrupted by a single thought––"Milly?" Abel is afraid. He is always afraid, since he knows something he can't imagine lingers at the edges of his consciousness.

Like the spawning fish, Abel lies helpless on the ground of an unfamiliar terrain. He yearns for Milly, someone with whom he formed the beginnings of a connection, but he remains fundamentally alone. He is alienated even from his own mind, which he doesn't fully understand.

Abel's thoughts become fractured again. He remembers a white soldier describing Abel whooping and dancing around bullets. He thinks of Milly, and briefly his awareness returns to his injured body, but then he slips back into his memories. He hunts waterfowl at night with Vidal. He lifts a dead bird and the narration's structure takes on a stream-of-conscious form as Abel imagines telling Milly about the dead bird and his pain.

As Abel loses control of his consciousness, he thinks of people who have shaped his life. Vidal shaped his childhood, while Milly is a figure from his adulthood, and recalling her briefly forces him back to reality. He also thinks of his time in the war; his fellow soldier's description suggests that Abel was more at home in combat than he is during times of peace.

Abel remembers that his relationship with Milly became meaningful when they realized how lonely they both were, and the narration slips into Milly's first-person perspective. She describes her impoverished rural childhood. The land is unfruitful, so her father starts to think of it as his personal enemy. Milly marries a man who soon abandons her, leaving her to raise their daughter Carrie on her own. Carrie dies of illness when she is 4 years old.

Abel's relationship with Milly is one of the few meaningful interpersonal connections he forms in the story, and that relationship comes from their mutual feelings of isolation. Like Abel, Milly comes from a rural background, but her father hates the land while Abel's family reveres and respects it. The brief shift into Milly's first-person perspective is another instance of the novel playing with different modes of storytelling.

Abel recognizes that he will die of exposure if he remains on the ground, so he forces himself to get up. He travels through back alleys, trying to avoid being seen. He stows away in the back of a pickup truck, which he rides for a while. When it stops, he gets out and continues traveling in the shadows. His pain eventually overcomes him, and he sees Milly and Ben **running** on a moonlit beach.

The story does not explain Abel's reluctance to be seen; it may be a leftover instinct from his time as a soldier that leads him to avoid being observed while injured, or it might be a matter of pride that prevents him from seeking help. Despite his loneliness, he continues to avoid people, but his image of Milly and Ben highlights how he longs for connection.

9. THE PRIEST OF THE SUN, JANUARY 27

The entirety of this chapter comes in the form of one of Tosamah's sermons. He lovingly describes the landscape of his native Oklahoma, including a landmark known as Rainy Mountain. The area surrounding Rainy Mountain is completely desolate, allowing observers to feel isolated and to then imagine the moment of Creation.

Tosamah's sermon is adapted from an autobiographical account that N. Scott Momaday later published in his book The Way to Rainy Mountain. The shared backgrounds of Tosamah and Momaday suggests that the educated but flawed Tosamah is the character who represents the author most closely.

Tosamah describes a visit he took to his grandmother's grave. His grandmother, Aho, lived during the "last great moment" of the Kiowa people. The U.S. Cavalry eventually drove the Kiowas off their land and imprisoned them at Fort Sill. Tosamah describes the history of the Kiowas' migration to the Southern Plains, which he followed to travel back to Aho's grave. In the story he tells, he connects to his ancestors by connecting to the land they traveled across; his grandmother had that connection innately, as she was able to perfectly visualize places she had never been.

Tosamah recognizes and resents the violence of colonialism, which robbed the Kiowa people of their land and traditions. His journey to connect with his ancestral land also serves to connect him with his past, highlighting once again how integral homeland is to Native American identities.

In Tosamah's sermon, he describes seeing Devils Tower (a butte that stands over the prairies). Tosamah believes that Devils Tower is a natural feature that generates "an awful quiet in the heart of man." In the Kiowa legend of Devils Tower, seven sisters escape up a tree when their brother turns into a bear. The tree grows higher, becoming Devils Tower, and the sisters ascend to become the stars of the Big Dipper.

The story has already shifted into first person for Tosamah's sermon, and as he tells the legend of Devils Tower, it shifts again into an emotionally distant, matter-of-fact third person. This narrative voice echoes the novel's third-person narration in its moments of distance from the characters' thoughts and feelings, which suggests that this mode of storytelling is an element of some Native American traditions.

Tosamah discusses Aho's reverence for the sun. As a child, she attended the last Kiowa sun dance in 1890, which she knows as "Sun Dance When the Forked Poles Were Left Standing" because the soldiers interrupted before the ceremony was finished. He remembers hearing his grandmother pray in a language that he doesn't understand, but which he recognizes as sorrowful.

Aho's memory of the incomplete sun dance emphasizes that U.S. colonialism not only tore Indigenous people from their homes; it also undermined their traditions. The fact that the ceremony was interrupted by soldiers also reiterates the inherent violence of colonialism. The aftermath of that violence is a loss of culture, which Tosamah illustrates with his inability to understand his grandmother's native language.

Tosamah recalls the wise old men who used to visit Aho's house. They are severe, quiet, and dedicated to tradition. Their wives serve them, chatting in their kitchens in bright, ornate clothing. The children, including young Tosamah, play together outside while the elders sing and talk. This joy has faded: Tosamah's sermon returns to the present, narrating his return to the silent rooms of his grandmother's house. He sees a dead cricket and reflects on the significance of death and dying. The next morning at dawn, Tosamah visits his grandmother's grave near Rainy Mountain.

Tosamah remembers his grandmother's house as full of joy and love, emphasizing that Native American communities flourish when their members can live freely by their traditions. Aho's generation, the remainders of the Kiowa's "last great moment," is dying, weaking the community's connection to its traditions.

10. THE NIGHT CHANTER, FEBRUARY 20

This chapter, which also takes place in 1952 Los Angeles, is narrated in the first person by Ben Benally. He describes saying goodbye to a man (implied to be Abel) on a rainy train platform. Abel's hands are bandaged, and he is still recovering from the injuries he received in the last section. After Abel gets on the train, Ben worries that people will be afraid of a beat-up stranger and not offer help to Abel if he needs it. The thought makes Ben feel lonely.

The story remains in first person, switching from Tosamah's spoken sermon to Ben Benally's inner monologue. Ben has been mentioned earlier in the story, but this chapter introduces him as a fully-formed character. His interactions with Abel establish Ben as a caregiver; he looks after Abel and worries about him when he leaves. Ben also understands and relates to Abel's feelings of isolation.

Ben walks through Los Angeles in the rain, taking in the city. He goes to a bar popular with Indigenous people in the city. Sometimes a corrupt cop named Martinez visits the bar, and the owner bribes him to be amenable. Ben sees a friend at the bar, but his friend is with a girl, so Ben makes up an excuse to leave. He immediately regrets leaving the bar for the lonely city street.

Like Abel, Ben has trouble connecting with other people and often undermines his own attempts to do so––for instance, leaving the bar instead of spending time with his friend. Ben's perspective also introduces the reality of living in a metropolis as a Native American, which is a vastly different lifestyle than Abel experiences in Walatowa.

Ben gets home and sees that he and Abel left a window open after trying to persuade a pigeon to fly into the apartment. The rain from the open window has soaked through the floor. As Ben dries his shirt on the radiator, he thinks of Abel and Milly. He likes Milly, and he hopes she will continue visiting him even though Abel has left. Ben remembers how Milly eventually stopped trying to structure Abel's treatment around questionnaires and let herself grow friendly with Abel and Ben, which convinced Abel to open up to her. Ben isn't sure whether Milly will visit the next day.

As Abel's social worker, Milly is a representative of the government's continued influence over his life. She only manages to build a connection with him when she lets go of the bureaucratic side of her job and embraces the human element. She has not built that kind of connection with Ben, who has been in her life only as Abel's friend, so Ben can't be sure if Milly will continue to see him.

Ben's thoughts turn to the previous night. In his memory, he, Abel, Tosamah, and Tosamah's disciple Cruz go to a social event on a hill outside the city. They and the other partygoers (who are all Native American) drink, drum, sing, and dance. The drumming and singing drowns out the noise of the city, which looks tiny from up on the hill.

Distanced from their homelands, the Native American population in Los Angeles manufactures their own distinctly Indigenous space outside the city. They physically distance themselves from the city and drown out its noise with their music, temporarily forsaking urban life and drawing from various Native American traditions.

Abel takes Ben aside, and they discuss their plans to return to their respective reservations and eventually reunite with each other. Ben has taught Abel about some Navajo songs and the stories behind them. As people sing at the party, Ben wants to pray. Quietly, so only Abel can hear him, Ben sings a traditional song that begins, "*Tségihi*. House made of dawn." The song is one of beauty, healing, and connecting to nature.

Ben is a more openly religious character than Abel, yet he seems something in Abel that inspires Ben to include Abel in his prayers. Ben connects to his religion through Navajo songs, which convey stories to those familiar with them. His song of the "house made of dawn" honors nature, highlighting that many Native American tribes (not just the Jemez and Kiowa) value connecting to the natural world.

Ben believes that Abel is unlucky and could never fit in in Los Angeles. He notes that Tosamah has called Abel a "longhair," which prompts Ben to remember another conversation with Tosamah. The priest once told Ben that although non-Indigenous society tried to "civilize" Abel, after they left him alone, he proved to be "a real primitive sonuvabitch." Tosamah marveled that Abel's defense at the trial centered around accusing the albino man of being a shapeshifter. Tosamah believe Abel was influenced by Catholicism, which Tosamah condemns as a colonialist scheme. Ben dismissed Tosamah's speech, since the priest was formally educated and didn't grow up on a reservation, and he thus thinks he's above superstition and magic.

Though Tosamah himself is Native American, he considers himself more sophisticated and "civilized" than Abel because Tosamah is better able to navigate white America. Tosamah hates colonialist systems and the oppression they impose on Native Americans, but he perpetuates colonialist and racist stereotypes by repeatedly calling Abel "uncivilized" and "primitive." He reduces Abel to the stereotype of the "noble savage," a primitive man untainted by the corrupting forces of civilization. Despite this perception of Abel, Tosamah also believes that Abel is negatively influenced by Catholicism, which he describes as a project of colonialism, though Ben dismisses that black-and-white worldview.

Ben recalls meeting Abel at work, where they are stationed opposite each other at a factory assembly line. Ben worries about how Abel will react to the racist comments he endures from the other men in the factory, so he invites Abel to have lunch with him away from the others. When Ben learns that Abel's Relocation officer has yet to find him a place to live, Ben invites Abel to stay with him, and Abel accepts. Abel doesn't talk much about himself, but Ben feels connected to him because they both come from reservations.

As soon as Ben meets Abel, he takes Abel under his wing. He recognizes what he has in common with Abel––they are both Native American men from reservations who have been relocated into a city with no connection to the lands of their ancestors. Abel's Relocation officer works to carry out a federal policy of relocating Native Americans from their reservations following a withdrawal of government support for those reservations.

In a long, italicized paragraph, Ben describes his childhood, briefly narrating in the second person. He focuses on the beauty of the land, recalling the rare occasions when the area sees snow. Young Ben's grandfather is firm but understanding, and they share warm coffee to ward off the cold before Ben goes out to herd the sheep. He enjoys being alone with the sheep because he can sing to himself. His grandfather brings him to the trading post, and when they return home Ben appreciates living surrounded by natural beauty and wonder.

The novel continues to play with narrative conventions, switching briefly into the second person before moving back to first person. Ben's childhood is as traditional and rural as Abel's was, which speaks to how much he had to adjust to become competent at navigating Los Angeles. Even in childhood, Ben displays a love of singing and an appreciation for the natural world's beauty.

Ben reflects on Abel's difficulty getting used to life in Los Angeles. Abel's troubles worsen as government workers repeatedly intrude on his life and warn him to stay out of trouble. Ben believes the heart of the issue is that the government workers have completely different frames of reference than men like him and Abel. He believes that people from reservations want to adjust to life outside of them, since they appreciate modern amenities, but it takes effort. A similar problem arises at work as Abel's supervisor becomes controlling.

The government officials play an active role in Abel's worsening mental health. This highlights how United States policies and the agents who enact them undermine Indigenous communities and individual people. Ben doesn't fully grasp this, however, and he maintains a naïve trust in the relocation process—perhaps because it seems like he had a more successful experience than Abel.

Abel's life begins a downward spiral. Fed up with Tosamah's comments about "longhairs," Abel attacks the priest. He gets so drunk afterward that he misses work for the next two days, and when he returns the supervisor is more aggressive than usual. Abel walks out of the factory, effectively quitting his job, and his alcoholism becomes worse when he is unemployed. He asks Ben for money, and when Ben eventually refuses to give him any, Abel starts asking Milly. Milly and the Relocation officers try to find Abel new jobs, but he is always too drunk to care about them. Despite this, Ben remembers good times in this period, always involving Milly.

Abel is unequipped for city life, and he tries to manage his problems with the violence that helped him in World War II. In civilian life, however, that violence damages his friendships and worsens his isolation. His outburst at Tosamah's repeated jabs about "longhairs" also makes clear that Abel is aware of and impacted by racism; he just does his best to remain stoic in the face of it. Ben continues trying to look out for Abel, refusing to give him funds to enable his alcoholism, but Abel is not in a state to appreciate that gesture.

Ben knows that Milly likes Abel more than him, and he worries that Abel will hurt the overly-trusting Milly. He knows that Milly has endured pain in her life, and he fears that she is easy to hurt. His memories of Milly are interspersed with italicized stream-of-consciousness paragraphs about a laughing girl from "Cornfields." When Abel, Ben, and Milly are at the beach once, Abel tells a joke that makes Milly laugh. Her laughter pulls Ben deeper into his thoughts about the girl from Cornfields.

Ben's role as Abel's protector and caregiver means their friendship is not an equal one, leaving Ben feeling isolated even when among friends. He expresses his care for people with a desire to protect them, and he feels that protectiveness for Milly. Yearning for a deeper connection with Milly triggers Ben's memories of the girl from Cornfields.

In his memory, Ben meets the girl at Cornfields (a place on the reservation) after returning home from school. He rides on horseback there to watch a ceremonial dance, and on the long ride Ben reconnects with the land. The horse is strong and powerful, and riding it inspires Ben to pray. He sings a song about the son of the Turquoise Woman, a figure in the Navajo religion, and about the love the son feels for his horse. When Ben arrives at Cornfields, he sees the girl among the dancers and is entranced by her beauty. The two dance together, and Ben remembers that night in vivid detail. He never sees the girl again.

Ceremony and religion play a significant role in Ben's upbringing. That religion informs his appreciation for nature and specifically his love and connection to his horse. Ben's reverence for beauty is also an aspect of his religion, so his infatuation with the girl in Cornfields borders on worship.

Ben's memory shifts to a night when he and Abel are returning from their usual bar. Martinez, the police officer, holds Ben and Abel up in an alley, taunting the two men with the power he has over them. He demands the men give him their money; Ben hands over his, but he explains that Abel is unemployed and has nothing to give Martinez. Martinez responds by striking Abel's hands with his flashlight, leaving Abel's hands swollen and his pride wounded. Ben compares Abel's silent fixation on the incident with his inability to forget his fight with Tosamah. After this night, Abel becomes even more withdrawn and distant.

Even when they are both in danger, Ben tries to protect Abel. However, Ben doesn't have the power to defend his friend from Martinez. Abel's relocation officers and manager at the factory degrade Abel by treating him as incapable of managing his own life. Martinez, on the other hand, is outwardly malicious and violent, undermining Abel's pride by asserting his own dominance. This instance of violent indignity worsens Abel's deteriorating self-esteem and mental health.

Ben remembers taking Abel with him to Westwood on a delivery for the factory. While Ben unloads the truck, Abel points out a white woman (Angela) to Ben and explains that he used to work for her and that they had a romance. He repeats several times that she was going to help him get out of the reservation, but he "got himself in trouble." Ben doesn't believe Abel, but he realizes Abel is telling the truth when Angela later comes to visit him in the hospital.

Abel's insistence that Angela intended to help Abel leave Walatowa is the first time the book introduces this notion. During the "Longhair" chapter, Abel never articulated a desire to leave his pueblo, and Angela never asked him about it. The fact that this element of their relationship remained hidden from the reader emphasizes the limited scope of the narration and indicates that Abel's inner life is richer than his terse perspective might suggest.

Back in the present, Ben's thoughts return to the rain and his wet floor, which makes him think of his elderly downstairs neighbor. His only encounter with his neighbor was when her beloved pet guinea pig died and she stood on the stairs, hugging her pet and talking about it to Ben and Abel. She wouldn't let the men take the guinea pig out into the alley, and Ben wonders if she still has its body, since it was her friend.

The old woman is just one lonely character in a novel full of them. Her loneliness, as well as the lack of interaction between her and Ben, speaks to the isolation of city life and suggests that this sense of urban alienation is not exclusively felt by Native Americans.

Ben reflects on his life in Los Angeles. He enjoys life in the city, which is full of commodities that "you'd be crazy not to want," and he prefers it to living off the "empty and dead" land. He believes that the policies of Relocation and Termination are designed to help Indigenous people. Tosamah has derided these policies to Ben, but Ben no longer trusts the priest's judgment. As Ben thinks about this, he tries to work out how much money he spent over the course of the night, revealing that he has been drinking throughout the chapter.

Ben's memories of the Navajo reservation where he grew up paint the land as rich, and they indicate that he was deeply connected to it. However, he has been convinced by the claims of the federal government that their withdrawal of support for reservations is in the best interest of Native Americans. Ben's blind faith in colonialist institutions and the conveniences of city life contrast with Tosamah's hatred of all elements of colonialism. While Tosamah refuses to acknowledge how some Native Americans have reclaimed and repurposed ideas created by colonizers, Ben refuses to acknowledge the harm that colonialism causes.

Ben thinks about how his relationship with Abel degraded as Abel grew more withdrawn and more dependent on alcohol. He remembers Abel growing perpetually angry at himself, the world, and people around him. Ben and Abel have a fight, and Abel declares that he is going to get even with the "*culebra*"––a word for snake that he also applies to the albino man. Abel doesn't return for 3 days, and an increasingly worried Ben cannot find him. Finally, Abel returns, badly injured and covered in blood. His hands are completely broken. Ben calls an ambulance.

Abel is unable to find a place for himself in a world that doesn't adhere to his traditional sense of right and wrong. He views both the albino man and Martinez as "snakes" that are inherently evil and therefore are his enemies. Since he believes fighting and killing one's enemies to be justified, he doesn't consider the possible consequences of doing so––or, if he does consider them, they do not deter him from pursuing a fight. This worldview clashes with reality, and the implication is that here, Martinez nearly kills Abel. Ben's loyalty to Abel and willingness to call for help save Abel's life.

At the hospital, a nurse asks Ben for information about Abel. Ben doesn't know how to answer her questions, and he waits all day to be allowed to see Abel. When the doctors let him in, Abel is still unconscious, and that night Ben calls Angela. She visits 2 days later, when Abel has woken up, and talks to him. She tells Abel about her son Peter, and she recites a story she tells Peter about a Native American hero born of a bear and maiden. She tells Abel that the story makes her think of him.

Ben's inability to answer the nurse's question speaks to the divide between Native Americans and the bureaucratic systems of colonialist white America. Angela's reappearance shows that she has grown as a person since her romance with Abel. She has come to terms with motherhood and genuinely cares for Abel, enough to model a fairy tale hero after him.

Ben is startled that Angela has made up a story that closely resembles a Navajo legend. He relates the story his grandfather told him about *Esdzá shash nadle*, or the Changing Bear Maiden. Two sisters marry two old men, Bear and Snake. After the women have sex with their husbands, they realize who they have married and flee. The older sister, who married the Bear, runs to a mountain temple, where holy people help her. The woman, Bear Maiden, gives birth to a son who becomes a strong man. He then has sex with his wife's sister, and they have a child. The woman abandons the child in shame, but the Bear finds the child. The story ends with the last lines of the House of Dawn prayer, which praise the beauty of the world.

Once again, the narrative pauses for a character to recount a traditional legend, continuing to position all stories as equally important. Unlike many European fairy tales, the story of the Changing Bear Maiden does not include an obvious moral, which recalls Tosamah's sermon about how Native Americans use fewer words in their stories than white people do as a way to show respect for the power of words. The repetition of the Navajo House of Dawn prayer emphasizes the importance of appreciating nature.

Ben thinks again of the party he and Abel attended the previous night. Abel's return home makes him want to pray. In his memory, Ben looks forward to reuniting with Abel and singing "about the way it always was."

Though Ben believes city life to be superior to life on a reservation, Abel's return to Walatowa pushes Ben back towards his faith. On some level, he wants to return home and live "the way it always was," the way his ancestors lived, but Ben has settled for life in Los Angeles and can only imagine reuniting with Abel on the reservation.

11. THE DAWN RUNNER, FEBRUARY 27

The story picks up in Walatowa a week after Abel left Los Angeles. The valley is gray and cold, and the river is partly frozen over. Father Olguin sits alone in the rectory, having found peace in his exclusion from the townspeople. He takes his separation from them as a sign of his piety. On occasion, he rereads Fray Nicolás's journal, which strengthens his faith.

As the story returns to Walatowa, the narration once again turns its attention to the landscape, describing winter in the village with great detail. The narrative also returns to Father Olguin, who has rationalized his alienation from the people of Walatowa as a sign of his religious superiority to them.

Since returning home, Abel has spent every day at the dying Francisco's bedside. On his first two days back from Los Angeles, he also went out and got drunk, but a combination of the cold, his lack of funds, and the lingering pain from Martinez's beating dissuaded Abel from continuing this habit. In between periods of unconsciousness, Francisco speaks and sings in a fractured mix of Spanish and the native Jemez language. His disjointed speech recalls the **race** he won as a young man and calls to Abel, Vidal, and Porcingula. Abel wants to help his grandfather, but Abel is in mental pain as well as physical pain: the small room where Francisco lies is where Abel was born and where his mother and brother died. The most Abel can do is keep the fire lit.

Francisco's combined use of Spanish and Jemez highlights his blended identity. Francisco is one of the few characters in the novel who has come to terms with the conflicting forces of colonialism and Indigenous tradition, and he accepts that elements of both make him the man he is. As Francisco dies, Abel is forced to step into the role of caretaker after spending the novel being cared for by Francisco, Ben, and Milly. He assumes this role with difficulty, pushing through his own pain to do what he can for Francisco.

For the past six days, Francisco has spoken at dawn. The rest of the chapter relays what Francisco has said in italicized, stream-of-consciousness narration. He recalls bringing Abel and Vidal to the old cemetery by the Middle and teaches them how to measure time by the sun's position against the nearby black mesa. He imparts that they must live according to the sunrise over the mesa, which will tell them when to carry out important traditions. He emphasizes the importance of traditions, which can easily be lost, and though the boys don't know the specific rituals Francisco is teaching them, they understand the importance of "the great organic calendar."

The novel shifts narrative modes once again, transitioning into Francisco's point of view. His memory of teaching Abel and Vidal to measure the seasons with the sun indicates how strong Francisco's connection with nature is and how intimately he understands his people's traditions. He teaches these traditions to his grandsons in an effort to sustain the Jemez way of life, which they have started to understand organically simply by living in Walatowa.

In another memory, young Francisco rides his horse great distances around Walatowa. He climbs a sheer cliff face that his horse cannot scale, and along the way he discovers a cave filled with the remnants of ancient inhabitants. Throughout the afternoon, he continues riding, observing the animals around him and internalizing their instincts and identifying features. In pursuit of a bear, Francisco makes camp, only to wake surrounded by wolves. He raises his gun at the animals but doesn't shoot, and they keep their distance as they watch him. He continues tracking the bear, until he finds it and kills it with a single clean shot. He quickly but carefully prepares the bear's body for transport, then rides back to Walatowa with the bear, aware that both he and his horse have come of age.

The young Francisco's desire to explore the desert and plains beyond Walatowa speaks to a curiosity the older Francisco does not display so obviously, while continuing to reiterate his appreciation for the land. This appreciation for nature also comes through in his interest in the wildlife. His discovery of remnants of ancient people emphasizes the history of Indigenous people in North America. Francisco is attuned to the land, remaining distant from the wolves and killing the bear with respect and efficiency. When he successfully proves himself a mature hunter, Francisco thinks that both he and his horse have come of age, demonstrating the deep bond he feels for his horse.

Francisco remembers a beautiful young woman named Porcingula, who is the daughter of a Pecos woman whom Walatowa's residents believe is a witch. He and Porcingula have wild, passionate sex, and she teases him about the rumor that he is Fray Nicolás's son. Porcingula becomes pregnant, but the child is stillborn, and Francisco yields to his community's dislike of his lover and leaves her.

Porcingula shares her name with the Feast of Porcingula, the festival that Francisco knows well but stepped away from for the first time earlier in the story. In his youth, Francisco is willing to flout the opinion of the townspeople, but his and Porcingula's stillborn child convinces Francisco to adhere to the community opinion. That decision allows him to achieve the status in the community that he has as an old man.

In the fourth memory, Francisco brings Vidal and Abel to a rise in the plain at dawn, where they listen to the sound of hundreds of men **running** the race of the dead. The fifth memory takes place during a ceremony for the squash clan, during which Francisco carries the drum for the first time. Despite his anxiety, drumming comes naturally to him, and he becomes attuned to the rhythm of the dancers. When the ceremony concludes, the townspeople celebrate its success, and Francisco feels proud of his "perfect act." After this, he has a voice in the community and takes on a role as a healer.

Francisco's memory of the race of the dead is short, establishing only that this race is a tradition that Vidal and Abel must understand. In his next memory, Francisco cements his role as a community leader by proving himself as a drummer. The narration describes the squash clan with as much care and detail as it has paid to other ceremonies and festivals throughout the story, continuing to emphasize the importance of these ceremonies and their specific components.

The last memory is of a **race**. Francisco runs too quickly, trying to match the other men's pace rather than reserving his stamina. He struggles to breathe, but he pushes past his pain and runs after the "motionless shadow" of his competitor.

Francisco loves to recall the story of winning a race as a young man, which serves as a reminder of his youthful glory and his success in his community. The race he thinks of now, though, is not one of youthful energy but one of pain and difficulty. His memory of losing his breath mirrors his difficulty breathing as he dies. The description of Francisco's competitor as a "motionless shadow" also parallels him with death itself, and Francisco's labored push past the competitor suggests Francisco running towards death with his dignity and inner strength intact.

12. THE DAWN RUNNER, FEBRUARY 28

Abel wakes suddenly to a silent room and knows at once that Francisco is dead. He dresses his grandfather in bright ceremonial clothes and winds his hair with yarn. He sprinkles meal in the four directions, and then he lays ears of colored corn, sacred feathers, pouches of pollen and meal, and a ledger book around Francisco's body. He wraps his grandfather in a blanket.

Having returned to Walatowa, Abel is once again able to participate in his people's rituals and traditions. He honors Francisco as the traditional old man would have wanted, in a final act of duty and care for the man who cared for Abel all his life.

Before dawn, Abel travels to Father Olguin's rectory and informs him, seemingly without emotion, that Francisco is dead. Father Olguin is annoyed that Abel woke him up. He tells Abel that he understands how he feels, and when Abel leaves, Father Olguin continues shouting into the darkness, "I understand!"

Despite his personal growth, Abel continues to present himself as stoic and reserved to other people. His interaction triggers something in Father Olguin that the story never fully explains, in another instance of the narration itself proving Tosamah's point about the Native American tradition of using few words.

Instead of returning to Francisco's house, Abel walks to the edge of town, removes his shirt, and rubs his arm and chest with ashes. As the sun rises, he sees a group of **runners** in the distance. Behind them, a cloud stands over the black mesa. Abel approaches the group, and they abruptly begin to run. He joins them, running for the sake of running and for the land and the dawn. He continues running even as it begins to rain, stopping only when his legs buckle, and he falls in the snow. He looks at his broken hands, gets up, and runs on. He sees the landscape around him, and he begins to sing of the house made of dawn. The story concludes with the word "Qtsedaba," the Jemez equivalent of "the end."

The end of the book returns to the prologue, finally explaining Abel's run across the plains. The race of the dead is a tradition that Francisco taught Abel about, and Francisco held an unyielding pride in his past as a runner. When Abel joins the race of the dead, he connects with his late grandfather. That connection then deepens, allowing Abel to form a connection to the land of Walatowa, just as Francisco did. Abel honors Ben by singing of the house made of dawn, which also establishes this moment as a religious one. Finally, the story finishes by acknowledging that it is, in fact, a story, just as it began with that same acknowledgement.

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