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НАЦІОНАЛЬНА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ В МОВІ І КУЛЬТУРІ

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**SPEAKING UPON THE EARTH: THE THUNDERING VOICE
OF N. SCOTT MOMADAY**

From 2016-2018 Momaday has been prolific in unusual ways. From publishing a new book of poetry, to being featured in two significant films, to being a speaker on stage in dialogues about the global environment, Momaday has expressed his spiritual insights and convictions about the necessity of living close to the earth.

In 2016, *Meditations After the Bear Feast: The Poetic Dialogues of N. Scott Momaday and Yuri Vaella* was published. The cover of *Meditations After the Bear Feast* features an abstract watercolor painting by Momaday of a pensive brown bear surrounded by a yellow dawn. Momaday provided seven visual images of Bear.

Meditations After the Bear Feast is a story of reflection on kinship, indigeneity and immortality, filtered through the lens of loss. Yet there is still hope for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge through oral tradition, art and writing. *Meditations After the Bear Feast* is a notable transcontinental poetic conversation only possible in the last two decades, since indigenous encounters such as this were previously prohibited by the politics of nation-states.

One of N. Scott Momaday's four daughters – Jill Momaday – is an actress and filmmaker. In 2017 she directed the film *Return to rainy*

Mountain which chronicles her relationship with her father N. Scott Momaday, and the origins of the tribe. *Return to Rainy Mountain* is an imaginative documentary that takes viewers on a journey from the headwaters of the Yellowstone River to the present homeland of the tribe in southwest Oklahoma. In an interview Jill Momaday has said that she once heard the voice of her grandmother telling her to make the film, that she was “the magic link” (Gomez).

Jill Momaday consciously believes that she and family are “following in the footsteps of our ancestors who made this journey, thousands of years ago”.

A feature-length film on the lifetime contribution of N. Scott Momaday will be released in 2019. *N. Scott Momaday: Words From a Bear* examines the life, art, and literature of N. Scott Momaday as reflected in his own words and those of others impacted by his work.

Whereas *Return to Rainy Mountain* focuses primarily on Scott and Jill’s family-roots journey on their ancestral grounds, *N. Scott Momaday: Words From a Bear* broadens its lens to encompass not only Scott’s memorable childhood experiences, but also his developing career among other Native American writers such as Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz, Letitia Chambers, and Gus Palmer, Jr., who are interviewed in the film. In the film special places in Momaday’s life are presented visually with Scott’s voice-over narration, giving the effect of a rich, layered living memoir.

In this region of the American Southwest that that Momaday set his first novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968), the story of a World War II veteran Abel who returned home to Walatowa (Jemez) Pueblo shell-shocked and distraught. *House Made of Dawn* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969, thus becoming the watershed novel that created a model of oral tradition in a fictional matrix that generations of Native writers would emulate. Several episodes from *House Made of Dawn* take place in *Words From a Bear*.

In 1946, Scott’s artist father, Al, and writer mother, Natachee, gave him his first horse, Pecos. Momaday has remarked that “It is in my own ethnic experience to be a horseman”. Momaday’s poem “Fort Sill” lyrically touches the story of the 19th Century Kiowa warrior Set-angia (Sitting Bear) who bravely sang his death song in a horse-drawn wagon as the enemy closed in. Given this tribal and personal history, it is no wonder that horses have become a major symbol and theme in Momaday’s writing and paintings. Attended by nearly 500 people, this

discussion about the state of the environment, viewed through the lens of history, featured the actor/director Robert Redford, a friend of Momaday's. One of the pervasive themes of the event was earth's relation to the stars. Momaday has written in *The Man Made of Words* about the necessity of knowing where we stand in relation to the stars. As a "friend of the earth", Redford is concerned that people find a "sacred way to look at earth". For Momaday, "nature is full of mystery" and we have the obligation to "safeguard our grandchildren's existence", so that they too may experience a sense of awe in a healthy environment.