

VÁRIA

RECREATING THE STORYTELLING CIRCLE:

N. SCOTT MOMADAY AND MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

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SUMÁRIO

Segundo este artigo, a produção ficcional dos nativos americanos do século vinte é caracterizada pela unidade social e estética que envolve as personagens da história tal como a relação entre o autor e o leitor. O último envolve-se na leitura imaginativa e interactiva, preenchendo os espaços brancos da narrativa do autor. Assim, a imaginação do leitor torna-se crucial para converter a história em uma actividade contínua e criativa. Quando contam as suas histórias, N. Scott Momaday e Mario Vargas Llosa tentam preservar as culturas da sua origem não apenas re-imaginando as histórias antigas, mas também seguindo a prática tradicional de contar histórias. Desta maneira, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* de Momaday e *El hablador* de Llosa oferecem uma alternativa à 'dominação monológica do texto da cultura dominante'. Através do uso da língua e da imaginação, estas obras convidam o leitor a prosseguir na sua procura de 'identidade unificada'.

ABSTRACT

According to this paper, twentieth-century Native American fiction is characterised by social and aesthetic unity both among the characters of the tale and between the author and the reader. The latter is to be engaged in imaginative and interactive reading, filling the gaps left in the narrative by the storyteller. Thus the reader's imagination becomes crucial for turning the story into a creative ongoing activity. When

telling their stories, both N. Scott Momaday and Mario Vargas Llosa try to preserve the cultures of their origin by not only re-imagining the stories of old days but also by following the traditional way of interactive storytelling. By doing so, Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain* and Llosa's *El hablador* offer an alternative to 'the monological one-voice domination of the mainstream-culture text'. Through the use of language and imagination, these works invite the reader to pursue their quest for a 'unified identity'.

What does it mean to write “Native American” literature in the twentieth century? What type of authenticity is it possible to achieve? What makes a particular narrative uniquely Native – is it only the biological ancestry of the author, or are there more literary and less racially deterministic characteristics? I would argue that unity is the primary aesthetic standard for recent Native American narrative; that is, these works seek to create unity and make and validate connections, social as well as aesthetic, not only among their characters, but with the reader as well. This apparent purpose is achieved in two ways: thematically, by featuring narratives of homecoming (including the symbolic journey and return), and structurally, by featuring complex and varied narrative structures which draw the reader into the text. These works, which thus combine a recurrent thematic emphasis with a non-traditional, often self-reflexive narrative, are marked by a variety of narrative voices and viewpoints that requires the reader to constantly interact with the text. This method of imaginative, interactive reading and writing reconstructs the traditional storyteller-listener relationship of the Native American oral tradition, and thereby subtly reinforces the principle of homecoming, unity, and wholeness for the reader as well as the characters. While elements of this principle of unity (structural and thematic) may be present in other literatures and writers, nowhere else in twentieth-century narrative is this experience of unity expressed as thoroughly and consistently as it is in Native American narrative.

The image of the traditional storyteller’s circle is a useful one to demonstrate this point. Imagine a circle of people – different people, young, old, men, women, children, seated, listening to someone tell a story. What are the dynamics of this event? The people are listening to the story, watching the teller gesture with his or her hands, or make faces to illustrate a point. But they are also reacting, laughing, or becoming anxious in empathy with the hero’s situation. As the audience reacts, the teller reacts to them, telling more of these kinds of stories or emphasizing the episodes that generate a particular response from this crowd, perhaps, or prolonging the moments of suspense. But that is not all that goes on here. The listeners interact with one another, catching one another’s eye as the teller relates an incident similar to one they have experienced together, or casting sidelong glances at someone who reminds the group of a particular character, event, or principle touched on in the story. Some people laugh louder than others, some are quiet, and some interrupt, “That’s not the way you told it last time,” or “Cut to the chase – what happens next?” That is, they interact with the story as well as its teller, and they interact with the people around them, their

fellow-listeners, via the story. Unity is created as these connections are made, and this is the effect that these texts seek, and often they achieve it in similar ways – by promoting interaction, which implies multiplicity and diversity.

This symbiotic dynamic between artist and audience is the sort of thing Leslie Marmon Silko describes in her “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Perspective”: “The storytelling always includes the audience and the listeners, and, in fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners’ [...] shared experience...” (Silko, 1981: 57). Silko emphasizes that these stories are told (and retold) for the purpose of passing on family, clan, and tribal memories and the nurturing of cultural identity: “In the storytelling, then, we see this process of bringing people together...” (ibid.: 59). Native American writing often uses a polyvocal text, providing two or more voices, the text and author surrounding the listener/reader with fellow-listeners – other readerly voices interacting with those of the story, which, as Silko points out, is itself unifying.

By challenging, or offering an alternative to, the monological one-voice domination of the mainstream-culture text, these writers are opening up possibilities to the reader. That is, if there are three voices, why can’t there be four? The gaps left in the text (In Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, there are even blank spaces on the page itself) are for the reader to fill in. The reader of a Native American text is not to dominate the story-event, any more than the teller/author or any of these other voices do, but to participate in and share in the production of the story. For Native American narrative, the story is not an object, then, but an event, perhaps, a shared activity, more like a ceremony than merely a ceremonial thing. The polyvocal, multilayered structure, then, calls for an imaginative, multiform participation in this story. The fragmented surface appearance calls on the reader to make the connections with and between the voices, and, in doing this, to connect with the story, which itself is generally a unifying one, emphasizing themes of homecoming. It is through the imagination that the reader/listener is able to participate in the story event, to make the necessary connections, to see possibilities, and, by seeing or imagining possibilities, to create them. The event is thus transformed into something larger than “just a story,” becoming a creative, imaginative, unifying, ongoing activity.

In his essay, “The Man Made of Words,” N. Scott Momaday links the verbal and the moral. Both the extraordinary and quotidian are verbal; everyday

experience as well as fantasy are functions of language. Fully realized ideas are those that are expressed in language. This is the link: the idea one has of oneself helps account for one's behavior. The verbal dimension is, in this sense, moral, for it connects and unites the mental, interior, imaginative world with the external, active, "political" world. Thus Momaday says that to be an Indian is to have an idea – more verbal expression – of oneself. To express that idea is to unite the imaginative and the active worlds, which brings us back to our authenticity question – If Mario Vargas Llosa can imagine a Native American novel, he can write a Native American novel. If one can imagine and verbalize something, one can create it; indeed, by doing so, one does.

In the old woman Ko-Sahn, Momaday finds a merging of language, remembrance, and imagination. She doesn't tell the story of the sun dance; she imagines the sun dance (Momaday, 1970: 50). Momaday himself neither remembers meeting her nor tells about it; he, too, imagines it. Of course, each act of imagination encompasses memory and storytelling – it is memory, it is storytelling. Yet imagination combines the two and moves beyond them. It transforms words into events and action. If my reasoning is beginning to sound circular, it is because these things do move around one another and depend upon and influence each other. Imagination is a combination of word and action. Memories are made of words and stories are made of words, but to imagine is to undertake an action made of words. This is precisely what happens to Momaday as he says the old woman's name and she appears to him, at once distinct from the conjuring language and part of it. Called forth by her name, she "steps out of the language and stood before me on the page" (ibid.: 51). They talk, or he imagines that they talk, about talking and imagination. Momaday protests: "All this imagining [...] has taken place – is taking place in my mind" (ibid.). Ko-Sahn teaches him to break down that division, as she explains that imagination is not merely mental. "You see I have existence, whole being, in your imagination. It is but one kind of being, to be sure, but it is perhaps the best of all kinds" (ibid.). He responds that she is old and has seen many things, to which she replies, "Yes, I imagine I have" (ibid.: 52). This is no mere figure of speech, but a statement of literal fact. To imagine having seen the stars falling on the Wichita mountains is to have seen it. Certainly, it is only one way to experience things, but it is to experience them.

Momaday continues, emphasizing that, "We are what we imagine" (ibid.: 53), which can be taken as his "absolute assumption," his foundation. Storytelling,

Momaday says, is "A process in which man invests and preserves himself in the context of ideas. Man tells stories in order to understand his experience" (ibid.: 56). Storytelling is self-preservation – living – in, among, and through ideas. Storytelling, then, becomes somewhat teleological – there is a reason to tell stories; it is not merely a way to understand experience, it is experience. Through storytelling, one knows oneself. As he says: "Only when he is embodied in an idea, and the idea is realized in language, can man take possession of himself" (ibid.: 56). The idea and the expression of the idea are united for Momaday. The idea is its expression, and thus storytelling is an important art, one to be approached cautiously.

Yet it is not just stories about oneself which do this. It is stories, period, as Momaday points out in his description of the falling stars story. This text is not autobiography, nor is it explicitly a story about the Kiowa who were there that night and saw the stars fall. Yet it does connect them to the stars – stories are what draw all the lines, make all the connections between people and things. How? Imagination.

Momaday describes his task in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* as essentially an effort to re-imagine – to enable us to re-imagine – the stories of the old tradition: "With the whole memory, that experience of the mind which is legendary as well as historical, personal as well as cultural" (Momaday, 1969: 59). That is, these stories – or rather the imagined experience of stories – is the point at which connections are made and separations between the individual and the community, the factual and the true are overcome.

Momaday goes on to tell the story of the arrowmaker and to comment upon that story. He stresses that the story is about words and how they mean, and how one has one's existence in language. The arrowmaker certainly does exist in language, not merely in the sense that he exists in the story (and is in that sense "made of words") but in his speaking he is able to imagine the unknown as either Kiowa or enemy, and with his language, shape that unknown even further to the point where he is capable to act as well as to speak. Language, the force of the imagination, and survival, are, for Momaday, all united in this character. Although the story seems meant to sum up and explain the contents of Momaday's talk, it would appear, at first glance, to be more confusing than useful. How is this story a distillation of Momaday's ideas?

By speaking, the arrowmaker in the story is expressing the idea he has of himself, that he is Kiowa. This is one sense in which he is "made of words,"

for his identity and his words, the expression of that identity, are one and the same. Yet the identity the arrowmaker expresses is also that of a group, for by identifying his enemy on the basis of language, he is expressing his identity as part of a group – “I am identified with all who speak the Kiowa language.” Another important sense in which the arrowmaker is the “man made of words” is that he exists within the bounds of the story. He has his existence in words rather than in physical reality.

Language, then, does (at least) two things: it expresses a person’s identity (thereby enabling one to have an ‘idea of oneself’) and it stimulates the imagination. To go further, one might say that language, stirring the imagination, expresses an idea of oneself. Language thus has immense creative power, for, with it, one can imagine (and thereby create) an identity for oneself, as Momaday suggests elsewhere in his talk, thus becoming another person, one made of words.

This notion of literature as an imaginative expression and creation of identity functions on the authorial as well as the textual and readerly levels. That is, not only does the story offer its author the opportunity to imagine, explore, express, and create his or her idea of self, it affords this opportunity to the reader as well. In addition, since the text itself has its existence in language, it also participates in this imaginative, creative process and so creates an evolving identity for itself, just as the characters do.

This idea that language creates a constantly new self is connected to the Native American ceremonial tradition, where ceremonies are considered effective. They are vital and they effect change; they are not merely perfunctory and commemorative, as they seem to be in the non-Native Western tradition. Indeed, ceremonies themselves are narratives, stories.

Both Mario Vargas Llosa and N. Scott Momaday prompt their reader by including an implied reader, functioning as an audience, in their works. In *El hablador*, the chapters alternate between those of the narrator and the Storyteller, the *hablador*. Similarly, in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday alternates between traditional stories, anthropological/historical information, and his own personal reflections on these stories. Both works create an open system of storytelling and response which invites the reader to join the circle and become involved, by reading, and “listening,” in the process of storytelling, in the imaginative, creative

process itself. This produces a text which is the combined product of several parties – the author, the reader, and the narrators – and is shared among them. Both *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *El hablador* go beyond simple dyadic interlocution, providing us with a multiplicity of narrators (and thus a multiplicity of listeners), as the different narrative voices interact with each other through the medium of the reader’s interpretive imagination.

The narrator of Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador* discovers an exhibition of photographs of Peru at a gallery in Florence, and returns to them again and again, thinking of his old friend, Saul Zuratas. As the novel develops, we learn that Saul was always very much interested in Peruvian Indians, particularly the Machiguenga tribe. He went further than anthropological curiosity, however, and finally joined the Machiguengas, committing himself to their beliefs and way of life, taking up a role among them as a *hablador*, a storyteller. As such, he would travel from group to group telling and retelling the tribe’s mythology and folktales, along with news of friends and relatives traveling in other groups, even adding the story of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and the Biblical story of Jesus. The larger plot of *El hablador* remains a mystery story, however, as the narrator tries to find out what has become of an old school friend. It culminates when he discovers Saul’s identity as a Machiguenga *hablador*. Interspersed are chapters in the voice of the storyteller, endlessly retelling the old myths.

But how do the stories in the *hablador*’s voice function within the larger narrative context? We know where they come from, but how do they get here? That is, they are clearly told by the *hablador*, but how does the narrator know them? Or does he? One wonders whether the narrator, another possible listener, can “hear” those other chapters. Additionally, what knowledge does the *hablador* have of the narrator’s quest? The narrator never comments on, or explains, the traditional stories (this being a situation quite different from that of Momaday); they are merely presented alongside the narrator’s text. Perhaps this is a metafictional game on the part of the author, a sort of Native American *Rayuela*, while calling the narrator of the modern plot the narrator betrays a certain critical bias as well. Yet is there any reason not to suspect that the modern story is not simply another story of the *hablador*? After all, Saul is well-aware of the modern world, so it would make more sense for him, as a *hablador*, to tell about the modern, Western world than it would for the narrator to tell about Machiguenga life, which he does not know and does not live.

The role of the narrator in providing the reader access to *El hablador* has been emphasized by scholars:

We can say that the boundaries of the narrative world are marked [...] by the narrator of a novel. Indeed, it is the narrating function that provides the reader with a psychological orientation toward the events recounted therein. However, in fiction the narrator is also the nexus between interior and exterior, between the demands of the created reality and the expectations that the reader brings with him to the act of reading. (Baker, 1978: 5)

In these two works, however, we have a variety of narrators framing the readers' experience, thus forcing the reader to take over the narrator's traditional function. That is, with a variety of created realities, the reader must co-ordinate them, and becomes the point at which the various realities converge. The reader participates in the construction of the texts as in a conversation: "The narrator of *Rainy Mountain* does not explicitly discuss this necessary condition of silence but rather shows it to us, primarily in the 'other' Momaday we encounter, the character the narrator creates as he recollects significant moments in his own life" (Jaskoski, 1988: 69). Textual polyvocality not only requires the reader's involvement, it demonstrates to the reader the nature of that involvement.

Michael Moody, in discussing *La Casa Verde*, discovers some helpful things regarding Vargas Llosa's sense of novelistic structure:

The principle of discontinuity, [...] when applied to the novel's structure, brings about the general impression of formlessness rather than integration [...] yet, on a thematic level, this negation of omniscience on the part of the author, demonstrating an unwillingness to give a total interpretation of a world seen as multiple and diverse, is itself a statement underscoring the relative nature of reality. (Moody, 1978: 16)

This view is helpful up to a point. What these chaotic texts do is call on the reader's sense of order; as the author refrains from interpreting the world, the reader is prompted to do so via the text. The "apparent formlessness" of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *El hablador* calls on the reader to integrate the disparate elements of the text into a story.

Moody, to sum up, believes this fragmented style reflects a fragmented world view. His discussion of simultaneity is more relevant to our aesthetics of unity, as this fragmented style reflects not a fragmented world, but certainly a multiple and diverse one. The Florentine narrator, the *hablador*, Mario Vargas Llosa, all begin to collapse into one another. That one can find the jungles of Peru in Florence is not fragmentation, as the rational and individualized western mind might find it, but astonishing unity. And how is it found? Through storytelling, through language used communally by people seeking to preserve themselves.

Indeed, Vargas Llosa's critics seem to have a hard time dealing with his polyvocal text, and many insist that the *hablador* is only a sort of ventriloquist's dummy for Vargas Llosa (both the persona and the author). Many scholars on this quest of authenticity even seek to deny Saul his conversion.

Indeed, the structure of the novel strengthens, rather than diminishes, the credibility of Saul's conversion. Tzvetan Todorov emphasizes the importance of dialogue in learning to understand the other:

It is only by speaking to the other (not giving orders but engaging in a dialogue) that I can acknowledge *him* as subject, comparable to what I am myself. [...] Unless grasping is accompanied by a full acknowledgement of the other as subject, it risks being used for purposes of exploitation, of "taking"; knowledge will be subordinated to power. (Todorov, 1984: 132)

Saul is involved in exactly this sort of dialogue with the Machiguengas. His joining their ranks as a *hablador* is thus neither exploitation or manipulation, but a recognition of the validity of their tradition.

Helen Jaskoski, a Momaday scholar, reaches for a variety of metaphors through which to describe this sort of demanding, multifaceted text. She very aptly describes *The Way to Rainy Mountain* as "a new kind of medicine bundle, made for a world in which writing turns words into physical objects" (Jaskoski, 1988: 72). Medicine bundles, she explains, are made up of sacred objects wrapped, mummylike, in cloth, with layers of herbs. She speaks also of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* as a collage:

(T)he method of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* resembles that of collage. In collage [...] . There is no attempt to hide or disguise the nature or

origin of each contributing piece; on the contrary, it is essential that each piece retain its original identity as newspaper or cloth or dress pattern or nail or wood, so that the viewer sees the materials in their essential materiality, as well as participates in the picture by “putting them together” with sight and imagination into a single image. (ibid.: 73)

Momaday’s collage, however, is not altogether like the experimental collage writing of William S. Burroughs, whose texts often consisted of bits of writing (found or otherwise) strung together consecutively. What is jarring about that kind of work is that it breaks up the conventions of plot and time; indeed, they were engaged in this sort of narrative disruption for the shocking effect it produced. Momaday’s collage, by way of contrast, emphasizes simultaneity. Rather than breaking up the time and plotline, he essentially abandons them. Moreover, it is not his object to flout conventions, for his efforts demand a different sort of imaginative experience from his reader. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, he works in space rather than in time, and his collage exists for some purpose other than shock value.

In *El hablador*, the parallels that may be drawn between the two narrators – the European and the Amazonian – are emphasized by the novel’s structure, which gives the reader the impression of two simultaneous storytelling sessions. Jaime Raimond sees an analogy between how the Spanish American intellectual (the first-person narrator of the novel, living in exile) relates to his nation and how the *hablador* relates to his people, “qui lui sert de conscience et de guide à la fois” (Raimond, 1990: 118):

Cette deux espaces sont analogues dans leur fonction: ils permettent la fuite [...] . Tous deux vont vers un monde en mouvement, en agitation, dans un cadre fixé par d’autres lois sociologiques que celles de Lima, celles de la peur et de la répression pour les intellectuels, celles de la peur et de l’invasion pour les machiguengas. Chacun va s’enfermer dans un monde préexistant, pour y faire retraite ou y renaitre... (ibid.)

This argument strikes one as something akin to wishful thinking, since the Vargas Llosa persona would very much like to have that sort of influence and power over his nation, but most likely does not. While he may not necessarily have the same sort of political or social power that a storyteller in a traditional community has, they do both have the same power of storytelling, which is, it appears, where any other sort of power must have its roots.

This point is also observed by Mary E. Davis, who points out how the power of his own storytelling imagination transforms even the narrator, just as it ought to transform the reader: “The Florentine narrator is transformed from the *reader* (of Dante) he intended to be into an inspired *storyteller*, the one who has braided together the intricate counterpoint of the novel” (Davis, 1989: 141).

If this is a game, it is played by the reader, and that is perhaps the only certain thing about the way this novel is structured – it draws the reader into the novel. The narrative “frame [...] organizes more than meaning; it also organizes involvement” (Baker, 1975: 5). The reader, like the narrator, is pulled into the *hablador’s* circle, hearing these stories and assembling the evidence, until, because the reader has the stories, he or she realizes the identity of the *hablador* before the narrator does. The narrator of the modern story tells of his experience, looking for something to parallel the experience of hearing a Machiguenga *hablador*. A propos of this point, Davis speaks of “mythic narration” and mythic figures who, “Though [they don’t] exist, must inhabit the mind before changes can occur, and who, by inhabiting the mind, changes not only the future but the present and past as well” (Davis, 1989: 136). This is the experience of the reader of *El hablador*, whose mind is inhabited by the “mythic figure” of the *hablador*, and who is thus able to discern the identification between Zuratas and the *hablador* before the narrator’s exposition elucidates it.

The narrator of *El hablador*, the European-based Vargas Llosa persona, is similarly haunted by the “mythical figure” of the *hablador*. This figure gives shape to his experience, and as he listens to other storytellers, the narrator shows us how to listen, not only to the *hablador*, whom he emulates, but how to listen to him as he himself tells us stories:

... fue el *seanchí* irlandés quien me había evocado, y con qué fuerza, a los *habladores* machiguengas. *Seanchí*: «decidor de viejas historias», “aquel que sabe cosas”, tradujo al inglés, distraídamente, alguien, en un bar de Dublín [...]. Siempre supe que aquella emoción intensa con que viví ese viaje a Irlanda gracias al *seanchí*, fue metafórica, una manera de escuchar, a través de él, al *hablador* y de vivir la ilusión de formar parte, apretado entre sus oyentes, de un auditorio machiguenga. (Llosa, 1987: 159-160)

It was the Irish *Seanchí* who had reminded me, so forcefully, of the Machiguenga storyteller. *Seanchí*. “Teller of ancient stories,”

“the one who knows things,” as someone in a Dublin bar had off-handedly translated the word into English, [...] . I always knew that the intense emotion I felt on that trip to Ireland, thanks to the *Seanchaí*, was metaphorical, a way of hearing, through him, the storyteller, and of living the illusion that, sitting there squeezed in among his listeners, I was part of a Machiguenga audience. (Llosa, 1989: 164-165)

In part because the narrator has had this imaginative experience of listening to a Machiguenga *hablador*, he is able to recreate that *hablador's* stories for the reader, who, in an ever-widening interpretative circle, is able to experience the role of Machiguenga listener.

Perhaps this is one reason for including the stories of Gregorio-Tasurinchi and Jehovah-Tasurinchi. The western reader can more closely approximate and understand the Machiguenga listening experience, as he or she experiences the pleasure of recognizing a fundamental story, a story heard many times, retold and reapplied to the world.

Yet the question remains: what is the function of the *hablador*? What does such a person do? They tell stories, certainly, but why? What does that activity contribute to the community? Clearly, this is a pertinent question for Vargas Llosa (the Vargas Llosas?), for he casts himself in the storyteller's role for his own society. The narrator is thoroughly enamored of the idea of the *hablador*, and ascribes to the *hablador* the power of making the people into the Machiguengas, of creating a community where there would otherwise be lost and scattered individuals:

La idea de ese ser, de esos seres, en los bosques insalubres del Oriente cusqueño y de Madre de Dios, que hacían larguísimas travesías de días y semanas llevando y trayendo historias de unos machiguengas a otros, recordando a cada miembro de la tribu y que los demás vivían, que, a pesar de las grandes distancias que los separaban, formaban una comunidad y compartían una tradición, unas creencias, unos ancestros, unos infortunios y algunas alegrías, la silueta furtiva, tal vez legendaria, de esos *habladores* que con el simple y antiquísimo expediente – que hacer, necesidad, manía humana – de contar historias, eran la savia circulante que hacía de los machiguengas una sociedad, un pueblo de seres solidarios y comunicados, me conmovió extraordinariamente. (Llosa, 1987: 91-92)

I was deeply moved by the thought of that being, those beings, in the unhealthy forests of eastern Cuco and Madre de Dios, making long journeys of days or weeks, bringing stories from one group of Machiguengas to another and taking away others, reminding each member of the tribe that the others were alive, that despite the great distances that separated them, they still formed a community, shared a tradition and beliefs, ancestors, misfortunes, and joys: the fleeting, perhaps legendary figures of those *habladores* who – by occupation, out of necessity, to satisfy a human whim – using the simplest, most time-hallowed of expedients, the telling of stories, were the living sap that circulated and made the Machiguengas into a society, a people of interconnected and interdependent beings. (Llosa, 1989: 93)

This is, essentially, what the narrator himself is doing as he writes this story, in Florence, about his country. He writes almost as though Peru has followed him, and he is driven to tell this most Peruvian story. He wants to experience this connection with his old friend, Saul, with the Machiguengas, with Peru, and the best way he knows to do that is to tell a story. Telling several stories is a means to talk about storytelling itself, and emphasizes the importance of language in shaping the world.

This idea – that a nation exists in its stories, and becomes a whole, connected nation only when it expresses itself in language – is also central to Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain*, as Momaday famously writes in his prologue:

The way to Rainy Mountain is preeminently the history of an idea, man's idea of himself, and it has old and essential being in language. The verbal tradition by which it has been preserved has suffered a deterioration in time. What remains is fragmentary: mythology, legend, lore, and hearsay – and of course the idea itself, as crucial and complete as it ever was. That is the miracle. The journey herein recalled continues to be made anew each time the miracle comes to mind, for that is peculiarly the right and responsibility of the imagination. (Momaday, 1969: 4)

Momaday emphasizes the validity of imagined experience, and then creates a work in which experience can be imagined by the reader. Like Vargas Llosa, he emphasizes the efficacy of storytelling, of language itself, in creating and affecting reality: “A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms” (ibid.: 33).

Both Momaday and Vargas Llosa seek, in telling these stories, to somehow preserve the cultures that they spring from: "In the course of his successful integration into mainstream American society, Momaday realized that the link to his aboriginal background had become tenuous and that the continuity of tribal cultures is threatened" (Schubnell, 1988: 27). The resulting text is not to be regarded merely as a tribute to a distant past, however. The stories that Momaday tells are seen not only as a testimony to the power and beauty of these cultures but as an instance of the wonderful power of storytelling. Similarly, in *el hablador*, "So long as the speaker narrates the mythological framework for his tribe's existence, the world will continue. For Vargas Llosa, the speakers perform a necessary, rather than a gratuitous role" (Davis, 1989: 137). Both texts are built on the assumption that the storyteller's role is vital to the cultural survival.

It is important, however, to go beyond the mere preservation of culture, for that would imply a static culture, which surely is not the case here. Just as Momaday is simply one more step in a line of Kiowa storytellers, adding on more, "modern" stories, Vargas Llosa's *hablador* is not above innovation himself, adding the fabulous stories of Gregor-Tasurinchi and Jehovah-Tasurinchi to the ongoing, growing, tradition of Machiguenga oral literature.

Indeed, both works seek a transformation of one sort or another. As one critic has pointed out, "In *El hablador*, metamorphosis functions as a *leitmotif*, as a structural device, and as a potential *desideratum*" (ibid.: 136). This desired metamorphosis is not simply the conversion of Saul Zuratas into a Machiguenga; it is the transformation of the narrator into a *hablador*, and the education of the reader into, at the very least, a listener, if not a fellow-narrator with Zuratas and Vargas Llosa. It is, in effect, by transforming his reader that Vargas Llosa can hope to attain the political and social power he seems to admire so much in his *hablador*.

Momaday also assumes this vital relationship between the narrative and external world, to which end Lawanna Trout quotes Momaday's "To Save a Great Vision":

The mythic storyteller speaks in a formal manner and is careful not to intrude on the narrative. He creates himself and his listeners, through the power of "his imagination, his expression, his devotion to important details [...]. He is a holy man, his function is sacred." The storyteller will survive as long as his words survive: "the storyteller and the story are one". (Trout, 1988: 37)

Storytelling, then, is a means not only of preserving but of extending the tribe and tribal identity. Telling the stories does indeed help Zuratas, Vargas Llosa, Momaday, and the reader come to a heightened sense of their own identities – but this realization comes about through the reader's act of identification with a group of people. Without that group identity, the individual is lost, and without the individuals, there can be no group. As Momaday himself has said, "If I don't understand my Kiowa background, I forsake a lot of my human potential. By understanding it as far as I can I fulfill my capacity for being alive as a human being" (Schubnell, 1986: 140).

Like Vargas Llosa, Momaday alternates between different types of storytelling. On every double-page spread, Momaday presents a traditional, legendary story, a historical section, and a section of personal, reflective writing. It is almost as though he wants to surround his central idea – what it is to be Kiowa – from all angles so as to get a complete grasp on it. Telling the story the way he does, or the way Vargas Llosa does, draws attention to the telling, to the process of storytelling, as much as to the story itself. That is because an important part of what these books are about is storytelling, an act-cum-subject thoroughly demonstrated via their texts. Momaday emphasizes this in his prologue:

It is a whole journey, intricate with motion and meaning; and it is made with the whole memory, that experience of the mind which is legendary as well as historical, personal as well as cultural [...]. The imaginative experience and the historical express equally the traditions of man's reality. Finally, then, the journey recalled is among other things the revelation of one way in which these traditions are conceived, developed, and interfused in the human mind. (Momaday, 1969: 4)

The cultural, historical, and personal elements of Momaday's central story dance around one another, storytelling itself, and the reader, in whose mind all these parts unite into a harmonious, complete unity.

Similarly, Jaime Raimond attempts to analyze exactly how it is that Vargas Llosa's two narrators work together to create one novel:

Le narrateur du récit second a une influence directe sur le déroulement de l'histoire du récit premier. On peut parler ici de structure d'enchâssement [...]. Mascarita est le donateur, l'initiateur, celui qui ouvre une porte, pose une question au narrateur du récit premier [...].

Dans les deux cas il y a cheminement entre la norme et la nonconformité aux normes... (Raimond, 1990: 115)

Clearly, the two narratives are integrally interlaced; each influences the other, and neither can achieve the complete effect of the novel alone. As much as the *hablador's* stories are created by the Vargas Llosa persona, his sections would not exist without the *hablador*. In a sense, the question of whether the *hablador* is an invention of the Florentine narrator, or another actual storyteller working contemporaneously in Amazonia, is thus irrelevant. The novel is created by the reader's experience of both of them together, and they are both ultimately creations of the author, Mario Vargas Llosa.

Momaday's work functions, similarly, as a plethora of narrative voices giving rise to varied readings and interrelations. In a very real sense, these books are intertextual in and of themselves. They provide a variety of texts, and the larger work can only be read by connecting it with these other narratives. In *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, as in a poem, even the arrangement of the words on the page becomes important. Momaday arranges the different tellings of the story of the Kiowa loosely on the page, with plenty of blank space for the mind to wander in, and to add in other voices. Indeed, one of the primary questions scholars seem to concern themselves with regarding *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is, where is the fourth voice? Knowing that four is a sacred number in many tribes, and that things are often repeated in fours, scholars have many opinions regarding the fourth voice in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*: It has been suggested that the "fourth movement [...] is the work of art itself, Momaday's book" (Berner, 1988: 57). Perhaps "the Kiowa oral tradition ... is the fourth, unseen part of the three-part design of each section of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*" (Oandasan, 1988: 66). Matthias Schubnell proposes that, "This 'Coming Away,' [from Rainy Mountain] [...] is the fourth stage of Kiowa evolution," which he explains as "a coming away from a glorious past, the spirit of which continues to have a powerful presence in the life of modern Kiowa people" (Schubnell, 1986: 157).

My own students have suggested that Al Momaday's illustrations are the fourth voice in the text, or that the blank spaces appearing on the pages are themselves the fourth voice, either as silence or as the thoughtful pauses of the reader. The whole point of this survey of potential voices is not to answer definitively what that fourth voice is but to show that Momaday has set up a multi-voiced novel which is, in many ways, about itself. *The Way to Rainy*

Mountain requires its readers to interact with it in order to complete the work, for it is incomplete without the coordinating efforts of its readers.

Both *El hablador* and *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are about a man who finds his identity, individually and collectively, in storytelling. Momaday himself learns who he is by working through these stories, to become like those Kiowas who "had conceived a good idea of themselves; they had dared to imagine and determine who they were" (Momaday, 1969: 4). This is a very common approach to the text. Momaday, after all, describes it as a quest, and Schubnell "suggests that the work be read as Momaday's imaginative and artistic creation of his Kiowa identity" (Schubnell, 1988: 24).

Momaday's text develops from "The Setting Out," which describes the golden age of the Kiowa and is full of mythical stories, to "The Going On," which brings the Kiowas into the historical period, to the final section, "The Closing In," which describes events since the conquest of the tribe, events on the verge of passing from living memory. In this latter section, mythical stories of Tai-me give way to stories about Momaday's grandfather Mammedaty, who had previously figured primarily in Momaday's personal reflections. Just as his grandfather becomes historical, then legendary, then, perhaps, one day, mythical, so will Momaday, it is implied. For example, in this third section, Momaday tells a story about Mammedaty becoming frustrated with and shooting a horse. As a historical counterpart to that, he tells of the winter of 1852-53, when a Pawnee captive stole an excellent horse; as his personal contribution, Momaday himself tells how, as a child, he found a box of horse's bones in the barn. Mammedaty had preserved them, and another man later stole them. "There have been times when I thought I understood how it was that a man might be moved to preserve the bones of a horse - and another to steal them away" (Momaday, 1969: 77). Momaday comes to that understanding through the combined effect of these stories, which, like the horse's bones, are worth keeping.

For Mario Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* is not only about the self-reinvention and realization of Saul Zuratas as a Machiguenga, it is also about Vargas Llosa (the character) realizing something about himself as a Peruvian and a novelist. Davis speaks of Vargas Llosa's aims in writing: "Vargas Llosa reiterates [that identity is a fabrication of words, and words are as subject to metamorphosis as any other aspect of the universe [...] . Ultimately, [...] [he] [...] would metamorphose the reader, changing his appreciation of the power of words as they become ideas" (Davis, 1989: 142).

Indeed, both writers appear to be very much concerned with the effect of their writing upon their readers. They seek to effect responsible change and self-discovery, as their readers become, like themselves, connected with their world and their identities in new ways. On this point, Schubnell quotes Momaday, saying, "Man lives and changes; but man has a memory, personal, historical, and racial, so that his changing is not absolute and should not be irresponsible. His changing may be growth, diminution, or disintegration, and the choice among these possibilities is his own" (Schubnell, 1988: 26-7).

We spoke earlier of Momaday's work as a quest novel, and certainly that motif is a prominent feature of *El hablador* as well. Not only is it the Florentine narrator's quest for the identity of the *hablador* (or, perhaps, for his old friend Saul Zuratas), it is also the story of Saul's quest for himself (Raimond, 1990: 113). Raimond also speculates, regarding Saul: "Marqué par sa judiaté et par un angionne, il est en quête de pureté" (ibid.: 116). If that is the case, why would Saul "pollute" Machiguenga minds with Kafka? If it is, as Saul himself argues, wrong for the Machiguengas to assimilate into mainstream society, how can it be right for Saul to integrate into their society? It is certain that he changes it, and not only by literary innovations – he introduces more humane practices regarding the treatment of people with physical defects, for example. Vargas Llosa manages thus to avoid advocating a sort of tribal purity that is to be left untainted. Even the most strident advocate of tribal purity, Saul Zuratas, crosses from one tribe to another, changing both communities. If things must change – and they must – let them change for the better. To reiterate, *El hablador* is not about a quest for a romanitized Native American authenticity or purity, and the wise reader should not seek this, a point Castro Klarén puts well: "This search for wisdom, a search embarked on by means of storytelling, a search that is given at once in the story told as well as in the telling of the story, is in fact the quest of the entire novel" (Castro Klarén, 1990: 218).

How is this quest carried out and fulfilled? Vargas Llosa, Momaday, and Zuratas go about it the same way: through the imagination and through storytelling, which is to say, through language. They force the reader to do it along with them, building complicated works that require an active response from the reader if a story is to be made from them. As the narrator meditates at the end of *El hablador*:

Porque convertirse en un hablador era añadir lo imposible a lo que era sólo inverosímil. Retroceder en el tiempo [...] es difícil de tragar pero

aún posible, con cierto esfuerzo de imaginación [...] . Porque hablar como habla un hablador es haber llegado a sentir y vivir lo más íntimo de esa cultura, haber calado en sus entresijos, llegado al tuétano de su historia y su mitología, somatizado sus tabúes, reflejos, apetitos y terrores ancestrales. Es ser, de la manera más esencial que cabe, un machiguenga raigal... (Llosa, 1987: 233-234)

Becoming a storyteller was adding what appeared impossible to what was merely improbable. Going back in time [...] is a feat hard to swallow, though still possible, with a certain effort of imagination [...]. Talking the way a storyteller talks means being able to feel and live in the very heart of that culture, means having penetrated its essence, reached the marrow of its history and mythology, given body to its taboos, images, ancestral desires, and terrors, It means being, in the most profound way possible, a rooted Machiguenga... (Llosa, 1989: 244)

And how does one achieve this total conversion, this complete cultural rootedness? The narrator is astonished by Saul's achievement, but he does have one suggestion: imagination. The only way for him to understand this event is to imagine it, which is, after all, the way it happened – Saul imagined himself into a Machiguenga. Certainly, he read and studied, but the narrator has done that as well. Saul, however, heard the stories, imagined them as his own, and then quite simply, lived them, became them. This is Momaday's experience in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, as well, and it is the reader's (Schubnell, 1988: 30).

Not only do these books share a theme of linguistically driven metamorphosis and transfiguration, they are structures that demand something similar from their readers. As one Momaday critic remarks, "Literary analysis [...] is not something we do to a text but something we do to ourselves. As a result of reading, minds may change; texts remain themselves. The book creates its reader" (Jaskoski, 1988: 69).

Indeed, these books create their readers the same way they create their narrators and authors: by requiring them to sort through the words, assimilate them, and make their own stories, to join their voices with the other narrators of the works. Schubnell emphasizes that "The overall structure of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* rests on the interplay among its numerous parts, which are interconnected by a multitude of cross references and

associations. Behind its seemingly fragmentary construction lies a unified whole" (Schubnell, 1986: 146). That "unified whole" is, in fact, created by the reader's involvement with the apparent fragmentation of the work's structure.

This same activity of creating unity through fragmentation is described by Rilda Baker, in her discussion of *La Ciudad y los Perros*, as she explains what she believes is a trademark of Vargas Llosa's narrative technique, a "contrapuntal rhythm (through which) the stress is placed on simultaneity, on the shifting center of the fictive present and the confounding effects of such movement. The ultimate result is the blurring of temporal and spatial categories, the inter-penetration of time and space" (Baker, 1978: 7). Baker's rhythmic blurring of categories and of time and of space leads us back to Schubnell's apparently fragmented text, and to the necessary involvement of the reader in creating the simultaneous, unified experience that these texts provide.

To conclude, Mario Vargas Llosa's *El hablador* and N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are both works which call on the reader to work with an apparently fragmented surface to create the deeper unities that are paramount to these works. The reader is not alone in this task, as even the characters of both works – Momaday himself, Saul Zaratas, the Florentine narrator – carry out the same quest, which is a quest for a unified identity, achieved through imagination and language.

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