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Beyond the Nineteenth Century: Thomas King's
Decolonization of the Literary Image of the Native

Penelope Hamer

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Beyond the Nineteenth Century: Thomas King's Decolonization of the Literary Image of the Native

This study will examine two novels by Thomas King, Medicine River and Green Grass, Running Water, in order to demonstrate King's methods of deconstructing traditional nineteenth century stereotypes of Native peoples and his methods of establishing contemporary images. In Medicine River, King juxtaposes a contemporary fictional Indian community with conventional images of Aboriginal people from non-Native culture. In Green Grass, Running Water, King establishes an alternative cosmology that subverts the centre's cherished axioms and questions mythical, historical and cultural paradigms. King creates a positive cultural environment for contemporary Indians. Through his writing he offers an affirmative vision of a vital post-colonial Native community that is not only at home in the twentieth century and empowered to move forward into the future.

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Introduction

Stories, you see, are not just
entertainment. Stories are power.¹
- Leonore Keeshig Tobias

In The White Man's Indian, Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. argues that traditionally literary images of Native peoples in non-Native writing have been projections of the mainstream imagination. In his introduction to All My Relations, Native Canadian writer Thomas King refers to these images, constructed from the non-Native imagination, as "literary monoliths."²

Feathered warriors on Pinto ponies, laconic chiefs in full regalia, dusky, raven-haired maidens, demonic shamans with eagle-claw rattles and scalping knives are all picturesque and exciting images, but they are, more properly, servants of a non-Native imagination.³

That the majority of these images are situated in the nineteenth century has tended to freeze them in a literary past, further establishing and perpetuating the compelling and enduring images of the First Nations. Berkhofer writes that "as preconception became conception and conception became fact, the Indian was used for the ends of argument, art, and entertainment by White painters, philosophers, poets, novelists, and movie makers among many."⁴

Gordon Johnston, in his essay "An Intolerable Burden of

Meaning," traces the development of a "symbolic code" that "has often itself produced the images by a kind of parthenogenesis: stories about Natives were derived not from experience but from other stories":⁵

For Rousseau and countless others, Indian figures have been interesting, not in themselves, but as symbolic referents in a discourse about European civilization's virtues and vices, triumphs and failures. The nature and force of images of Indians have been derived from the symbolic code or language of this debate rather than from any understanding of the Indians themselves.⁶

The derivative characterizations are developed no further than the code they reflect. Furthermore, they have contributed to the perpetuation of a literary status quo that does not nurture the evolution of the image of the Native in mainstream culture. Instead, this static reservoir of symbolic representations has held the First Nations in a paralysing literary limbo.

In the Introduction to The Native in Literature, King refers to "three visions" or "masks" of the Indian which show up again and again in non-Native culture. These masks, assigned to Aboriginal characters, are "the dissipated savage, the barbarous savage, and the heroic savage." According to King these masks "should be familiar to any contemporary reader, for they represent the full but limited

range of Indian characters in literature."⁷

In mainstream culture, the depiction of uni-dimensional Natives in the Western genre is an example of how stereotypes of Indians can be used opportunistically to further plot lines centred on White characters. The Indian was rarely the protagonist in these creations, but merely served as a foil for White heroes and villains. The choice of Native characters to contrast, enhance and frame storylines featuring White protagonists, resulted in the creation of simplistic, predictable, and static caricatures:

No matter how important the Indian might be to the Western plot and genre, he usually served in the end as the backdrop rather than the centre of attention, for to do otherwise would have discarded simplicity for complexity and violated the premises of popular culture production.⁸

The good Indian was "the typical Noble Savage acting as a friend to the Whites fighting the bad White or Red outlaws." The bad Indian was "the usual bloodthirsty savage, often crazed, seeking vengeance or just malicious fun at the expense of innocent Whites, especially women."⁹

Variations on these themes occurred when mainstream writers used them to criticize their own culture. Non-Native artists did this by reversing standard associations of White as good and non-White as bad. This countercultural movement, to some extent, altered negative stereotyping, but

the idealized characterizations were no less dehumanized and undeveloped:

Even those films of the 1960s and 1970s hailed as realistic and sympathetic to Indians by the White critics of American society still contained stereotypes typical of the motion picture industry in the past, for all they usually did was to reverse the traditional imagery by making the Indian good and the White bad. In the more extreme countercultural films of the 1970s, the Indian hero becomes a mere substitute for the oppressed Black or hippie White youth alienated from mainstream American society.¹⁰

According to Berkhofer, the trend to idealize Native characters was not done out of concern for achieving a true reflection of the values and lifestyles of the First Nations, but represented another example of the way images of Indians could be exploited. In this case, the depictions were designed to express "some Whites' disquietude with their own society":

...sympathetic artists chiefly understand Native Americans according to their own artistic needs and moral values rather than in terms of the outlook and desires of the people they profess to know and depict.¹¹

Contemporary attempts by "sympathetic artists" to develop positive Aboriginal characters are not without merit in

working towards a decolonization of the Native image. Although often misinformed and impressionistic, these characterizations are significant in that "a supposedly Indian way of life [is] presented as a serious alternative to general American values."¹²

But if Natives are often characterized as either "good" or "bad" according to the needs of the non-Native writer, they are even more generally presented as a disappearing people, what D.C.Scott terms "a weird and waning race."¹³ As Clifford Sifton puts it in Green Grass, Running Water, "Who'd of guessed that there would still be Indians kicking around in the twentieth century."¹⁴ The image of a solitary Native and of a disappearing race is a romantic notion, used to put forward romantic ideals that draw readers into narratives:

Most romantic of all was the impression of the Indian as rapidly passing away before the onslaught of civilization. The nostalgia and pity aroused by the dying race produced the best romantic sentiments and gave that sense of fleeting time beloved of romantic sensibilities. The tragedy of the dying Indian, especially as portrayed by the last living member of a tribe, became a staple of American literature...It made its mark on world literature through James Fenimore Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans...¹⁵

The use of solitary Indians to elicit a romantic response is but one of many uses of the Native as sign. Marjery Fee claims that "dead Indians, even whole extinct tribes, work as well as or better than 'live,' contemporary Indians," to conjure a romantic image.¹⁶

Sometimes the Indian is used to symbolize the more natural aspects of the White psyche, aspects which have been alienated by the modern, industrialized world. Berkhofer attributes this idealization of Natives by White culture to a nostalgia for simpler times:

The growing acceptance of White Americans of the Indian novel, with its themes of alienation from industrial society, praise for Indian ways, and quest for identity in the modern world, speak to countercultural trends in White society itself....Beginning in the 1940s, writers began to use the Western novel for probing the human condition and employed the Indian as a symbol for a more humane way of life.¹⁷

Agnes Grant writes that because Natives "have been used by numerous Canadian writers as subject matter, as metaphor, as social commentary," her concern is that "this writing serves only to illuminate the character of non-Native Canadian Society while leaving the character of Natives largely untouched."¹⁸ Gordon Johnston refers to the phenomenon as "an intolerable burden of meaning."¹⁹ Little room exists for the creation of Indian characters

based on actual contact when they are needed as symbols to bolster the ideological position of White writers. Fee echoes this observation in her essay "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature," when she claims that the use of Indian characters as symbols results in Natives being "rarely depicted as individuals, because they must bear the burden of the Other - of representing all that the modern person has lost."²⁰

Berkhofer sums up the history of the Indian in the White imagination "as a part of the recurrent effort of Whites to understand themselves":

... the very attraction of the Indian to the White imagination rests upon the contrast that lies at the core of the idea. Thus the debate over "realism" will always be framed in terms of White values and needs, White ideologies and creative uses.²¹

Terry Goldie corroborates Berkhofer's claims, writing that "the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chessboard under the control of the white signmaker." Furthermore, Goldie extends this theory beyond Canada, arguing that "whether the context is Canada, New Zealand, or Australia becomes a minor issue since the signmaking is all happening within one field of discourse, that of British imperialism."²²

Another opportunistic use of the Native as symbol occurs when an Aboriginal character is used as a catalyst

for a White protagonist's "indigenization."²² Goldie uses this term to denote the process more popularly known as "going Indian." Indigenization is used to try to solve the dilemma of colonizers attempting to come home to the conquered or appropriated land. Terry Goldie describes the experience of the non-Native on the North America continent, specifically in Canada:

To look at the Canadian example, the Indian is Other and Not-self but also must become self. The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?²³

Goldie writes that this dilemma leads to the "need for that impossible process of indigenization."²⁴ Many writers choose to solve the problem by having White protagonists consort with indigenous people. Goldie explains that "through the indigene, the white character gains soul and the potential of becoming rooted in the land."²⁵ Fee writes:

The simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature can be explained to some extent, then, by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land. It also explains the general lack of interest in Native culture or history:

we want to be them, not to understand them. But Romanticism supplies us with a further explanation: the Indian stands for a dispossession larger than his own.²⁶

The larger "dispossession" referred to is resolved in another variation of indigenization wherein a Native character is used to reconnect characters to dispossessed parts of their psyche. This can work itself out in several ways, but Goldie uses the example of "a Native male [who] becomes a symbol of sexual prowess, which a white female might use in her own liberation."²⁷ An example of such a process in Canadian literature can be found in Margaret Laurence's The Diviners. Jules Tonerre provides Morag Gunn with the key to her liberation. Morag asks Jules to allow her to get pregnant, they make love, and Morag leaves. Goldie observes that in the fiction wherein indigenization is utilized, often the consorting is "followed by the death of the indigene."²⁸

The end result of indigenization is that once again non-Native writers have appropriated the image of the Indian for their own purposes. The writer's agenda, not actual contact, determines the presentation of Aboriginal characters. Johnston argues that these images "need to be challenged, deconstructed, not because the symbolic values they stand for are unimportant," but because "the figures themselves have come to be regarded as real." Furthermore,

writes Johnston, "there are still many writers of popular fictions who either exploit or use uncritically those racist images and, so, perpetuate the problem."²⁹

Leonore Keeshig Tobias writes that she is "automatically on guard whenever the White man enters 'Indian' country." She wonders, "What does he want this time? What is he looking for - adventure, danger, material wealth, spiritual wealth (perhaps shamanistic power), a cause, a book, or maybe just a story?"³⁰ Taking into consideration the prolific appropriation of Aboriginal characters as symbols in Non-Native literature, Keeshig Tobias' apprehension appears to be well-founded.

"A Seat in the Garden"

King's short story "A Seat in the Garden" dramatizes his views on representation. Within the narrative there is interaction between Whites and Indians, but this contact is not enough to alter the solid preconceptions held by the non-Native characters, suggesting that the Indian of the White imagination is more "real" than any living Native of actual contact.

According to Joe Hovaugh, the owner of the garden, the large, solitary, Native man who appears while Joe is pulling weeds is a dangerous trespasser who is not wanted in the garden. Joe and his friend Red Matthews are the only ones who can see the solitary, scantily-dressed Native, standing

with arms crossed. The enigmatic Indian repeats the refrain "If you build it, they will come," King's allusion to W.P. Kinsella's Shoeless Joe, later made into the motion picture "Field of Dreams." In Kinsella's work the phrase "If you build it, they will come" is spoken by a deceased baseball player. King's reference to Kinsella in this satire of the White imagination can be attributed to Kinsella's notorious reputation for appropriating the Native voice in his Indian stories.

Three ecologically-minded, old Native men frequently come to the edge of the garden looking for cans to recycle. Although not projections of the White imagination as is the solitary Indian, the three old Indians are immediately stereotyped by Joe and Red. The two White men assume that the Natives are "winos," that they smell, and that they do not speak English, all of which proves to be untrue. The RCMP officers who are called because of the trespassing solitary Indian make similar assumptions about the old Indians. When Joe and Red decide to approach the three Natives in the hope of enlisting their help with the trespasser, the officers warn Red and Joe to be careful, fearing that the Indians could be "drunk or on drugs." In fact, they are drinking lemon-flavoured water.

Red and Joe ask the three Natives about the lone Indian, and, although the Indian men do not see him, they go along with the delusion and even offer some advice. When

the advice does not work, they shrug it off, one saying, "I don't think he's one of ours." Indeed he is not: he is only a figment of the non-Native imagination.

In describing the imaginary Indian to the old men, Joe and Red have to resort to images from movies. The Indians, too, have to refer to the White imagination to understand what Joe and Red are talking about:

"That's our problem," said Red. "We think maybe he's a spirit or something."

"No we don't," said Joe.

"Yes, we do," said Red, who was just getting going. "We figure he wants us to build something to appease him so he'll go away."

"Sort of like...a spirit?" said the first Indian.

"Hey," said the second Indian, "remember that movie we saw about that community that was built..."

"That's the one," said Red.³¹

A non-Native convention is needed to decipher who the Indian might be. The obvious is overlooked as Joe never thinks to ask the Indian himself what he wants. He immediately assumes that he is a problem, a threat of some kind. Even Red, Joe's friend, notices this lack of common sense. Red asks Joe, "Did you ever wonder just what he wants you to build or who 'they' are?" Here, King is commenting on the

perennial tendency of White culture to stereotype members of the First Nations based on assumptions, rather than to create representations based on contact and understanding.

Christian marginalization of Native people comes under scrutiny in this short story. Joe Hovaugh, the owner of the garden, is in fact "Jehovah." His question as to whether the lone Indian is aware that the garden is private property establishes Eden as the preserve of the Judeo-Christian religion, and the small section "that Joe had never bothered to cultivate" as being outside of this jurisdiction. King's description of the part of the garden where the Indians remain as being a section that "the sprinklers didn't reach" suggests the absence of a redemptive baptismal water in their lives.

King, however, proposes that there is more than one way of looking at the world:

"And if you look at it like this, you can see clearly that the winos and the big Indian are there, and the house where you an I are is here."

"What if you looked at it this way, Joe," said Red and he turned the paper a half turn to the right. "Now the house is there and the old guys and the big Indian are here."

"That's not the way you look at it. That's not the way it works."³²

In Green Grass, Running Water, we will see how King in fact

wants to replace this Christian mythology with an Indigenous world view. In the novel King will refer to the power relations which determine "the way it works," as "Christian rules."

Medicine River

"A Seat in the Garden" presents King's ideas concerning representation, but within his longer fiction, King challenges representations inherited from the non-Native imagination through a subversive humour. His parody of received stereotypes and his inscribing of contemporary Native life eloquently undermine the representations of First Nations people by mainstream culture. In his two novels, Medicine River and Green Grass, Running Water, King attempts to deconstruct stereotypical images and, in doing so, he contributes to the literary decolonization of Native people.

In Medicine River, King presents Indian characters who do not fit into conventional literary stereotypes, and his main purpose seems to be to express a "sense of Otherness in a positive and creative way."³³ He claims that contemporary Native writers like himself tend to set their literature in the present, "a period that is reasonably free of literary monoliths," and which "allows us the opportunity to create for ourselves and our respective cultures both a present and a future."³⁴

King juxtaposes his vision of a contemporary fictional

Indian community with conventional images of Aboriginal communities from non-Native culture. The contrast provides shock after shock of recognition as the reader encounters the numerous stereotypical projections of non-Native writers. Johnston writes of the importance of nurturing "the ability of both writers and readers to recognize these projections."³⁵

In Medicine River, King is particularly successful at exposing the use of the Indian as a sign in non-Native literature. King counteracts this tendency to appropriate Native culture by creating White characters who are fascinated by the idea of the "Indian," and by creating multi-dimensional Native characters who cannot be reduced to symbols that serve the psychological needs of the dominant culture.

King's invocation of the phrase "all my relations" makes explicit a cultural agenda that permeates Medicine River. Characters are situated within a community which is depicted as being, for the most part, strong and supportive. King has constructed an alternative literary reality that substitutes an ethic rooted in community for the conventional image of the solitary Native. His Aboriginal characters form a strong network, and they have little in common with their "dead and dying" counterparts in non-Native literature.

Green Grass, Running Water

King's vision of a contemporary Native community in Medicine River becomes rooted in a comparative cosmology in Green Grass Running Water. As he subverts the centre's cherished axioms, King questions mythical, historical and cultural assumptions of western culture and presents an alternative world view. He is an agent of the type of change referred to in The Empire Writes Back: "Europeans were forced to realize that their culture was only one amongst a plurality of ways of conceiving of reality and organizing its representations in art and social practice."³⁶

In Green Grass, Running Water, King playfully enters into the Judeo-Christian cosmos at strategic times to challenge significant, deep-seated conventions. In his sophisticated attack on the Euro-centric world view, he proposes a universe wherein the trickster and other Native mythological figures are the main movers. Irreverently, King attempts to subvert some basic paradigms of popular western mythology by introducing symbols of Native mythology as being equally relevant, or irrelevant, but certainly not inferior, to those of the mainstream.

Fee writes that what needs to be done is that Native writers have to form a counter-discourse:

More recent works are not so much aimed at educating white audiences as at strengthening Native readers'

sense that there must be a better way to think about themselves than that presented by the dominant discourse.³⁷

King does pro-actively move beyond the deconstruction of literary conventions and subversion of the centre's philosophical paradigms to present to the First Nations "a better way to think about themselves." Through constructing representations of complex Native individuals who are consistently informed by a sense of community, King creates a positive cultural environment for contemporary Indians. Through his writing, he offers an affirmative vision of a vital post-colonial Native community that is not only at home in the twentieth century, but is empowered to move forward into the future.

Chapter One: Medicine River

Authenticity can be a slippery and limiting term when applied to Native literature for it suggests cultural and political boundaries past which we should not let our writing wander. And, if we wish to stay within these boundaries, we must not only write about Indian people and Indian culture, we must also deal with the concept of "Indian-ness," a nebulous term that implies a set of expectations that are used to mark out that which is Indian and that which is not.¹ - Thomas King

In his introduction to All My Relations, King writes that "limitations" based on "non-Native expectations are simply cultural biases that will change only when they are ignored."² In Medicine River, following his own advice, King consistently bypasses "cultural biases" in his construction of a contemporary First Nations community. King's multi-dimensional characters, inhabiting the fictional town of Medicine River, help counteract mainstream tendencies to create limiting stereotypes and/or to appropriate Indian culture. His Native characters are too complex either to be reduced to simplistic stereotypes or to be used as symbols. Furthermore, contrasting the citizens of Medicine River with conventional depictions of Natives subtly and effectively subverts mainstream representations.

In "A Double-Bladed Knife; Subversive Laughter in Two Stories by Thomas King," Margaret Atwood claims that King's stories "ambush a reader." She argues that "they get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny."³ In Medicine

River, King demonstrates this remarkable ability to resist didacticism and moralizing, and his subversive strategies are all the more effective because they are so understated.

Snapshots of Natives accumulate throughout Medicine River to form a collage of images that contradicts many projections of the White imagination in non-Native literature. King exploits the conventional representations fairly equally, relentlessly loosening not only negative stereotypes, but even benign or positive images of the First Nations. For example, King deconstructs a common image, based on the proficiency of some Natives to work on bridges or tall buildings. Compare the image of Mohawk braves on gleaming narrow bands of steel high above ground to the comical image King gives us:

We never went back to the bridge. At least I never did. I was satisfied with the first adventure -- the river miles below me, the wind whipping around the girder, Joe letting go of everything and plunging into the green water, and Harlen and me, perched on that narrow piece of steel like a pair of barn owls, hanging on for dear life.⁴

A White writer would probably not describe two Indians on a bridge as "a pair of barn owls, hanging on for dear life," but Native writers do not take themselves quite so seriously. Margaret Atwood noted this lack of humour in

White stories about Indians:

...on the whole Natives were treated by almost everyone with the utmost gravity, as if they were either too awe-inspiring as blood-curdling savages or too sacrosanct in their status of holy victim to allow of any comic reactions either to them or by them. Furthermore, nobody seems to have asked them what if anything they found funny. The Native as presented in non-Native writing was singularly lacking in a sense of humour; sort of like the "good" woman of Victorian fiction, who acquired at the hands of male writers the same kind of tragic-eyed, long-suffering solemnity.⁵

There are no "tragic-eyed, long-suffering" Natives in King's fiction. Amusing deconstructions of mainstream assumptions through self-effacing humour abound. Typical is the hilarious narration by Harlen's brother of the hunt scene in Australia as Joe decides to show two Aussies how Joe Big Bear, Indian hunter, "brings home the bacon." Joe's heroic deed is to tackle a little piglet who gets tangled in a bush. Quickly the hunter becomes the hunted as a furious mother pig tackles Joe and then chases him up a tree:

"So there I was, about four feet off the ground in this skinny damn tree, thanking Napi that pigs can't climb, when this pig starts chewing on the trunk. I'd have been pig food, if those two

Aussies hadn't stopped laughing and chased her off."⁶

A similar comic demise of a popular romantic image occurs when Will and Harlen acquire a second-hand canoe. Before the canoe adventure, Will and Harlen have a conversation that reflects the confusion influencing many representations of Native people. Attributes of one tribe are often assigned to another tribe, until the mismatching forms a colourful, if imaginary, composite 'Indian.' This fanciful exercise can become problematic for members of the First Nations themselves, as fiction and fact become blurred:

"Sure. Hey, I've been wanting to go canoeing. It would be fun. You know, you and me out on the river. Just like our grandparents used to do."

"The Blackfoot didn't use canoes."

"Sure they did. Some of the world's greatest canoeists."⁷

Authentically "in their blood" or not, Will and Harlen decide to take the garage-sale canoe out for a run. Against the common image of the Indian guide, who uses second nature to navigate, the contemporary "braves" use a tourist handbook of local rivers to find white water. Then, the not-so-hawk-eyed guides proceed to get lost while looking for the recommended rapids. When they finally locate the river and get the canoe into the water, Will and Harlen do

nothing to substantiate the image of an elegant brave, smoothly and soundlessly moving through the water like Hiawatha. Losing control of their canoe almost immediately, they tumble down the river, along with their damaged craft:

"You know, Will," Harlen said. "We should have stayed to the right. Next time we stay to the right."

We dragged the canoe back up the river, stumbling and splashing and cursing and laughing. Harlen still had that book. It was soaking wet, the pages stuck together. "The first four miles," Harlen roared, "are relatively easy with gentle and easily negotiated rapids...."⁸

An ironic example of King's 'ambushing' technique is developed in conjunction with the sustained imagery related to photographs used throughout Medicine River. Photographs are sent in letters, found in trunks, posted on refrigerators, displayed on storefronts, restored from damaged prints, and sent to dating services. Important scenes centre around taking photographs, and the Native narrator, Will, is a photographer by profession. When Will is introduced to a party guest in Toronto, the exchange that follows is rooted in yet another cultural stereotype:

"Jane, Alice, this is Will, the photographer I told you about..."

"Susan tells us you're Native, too," said Alice.

"Kind of ironic, isn't it? I mean being a photographer."

"What?"

"You know...the way Indians feel about photographs."⁹

Until this exchange, King has attached significance to the photographs chronicling the lives of the fictional residents of Medicine River while making no allowance for, or reference to, the mainstream conception that Natives are afraid of having their picture taken. Here, the question, followed by Will's silence, is eloquent. King does not give access to Will's thoughts, and the reader is left to react to the irony of the comment.

Another mainstream conception that King exposes in Medicine River is the image of the "bad" Indian. The dangerous savage, in ominous war paint, popular in the Western genre, contrasts dramatically with the modern basketball-playing "warriors," Will and Harlen. On the way home from a tournament, the two middle-aged Indian men decide to visit Custer's monument. They arrive at closing time and the guard will not let them go through the gates. Will uncharacteristically appropriates the warlike images associated with the "bad" Indian to have some fun at the expense of the monument guard:

"Did you tell him," I said, rolling down the windows and shouting into the night, "did you tell

him we're Indians!"

"I told him that, too, Will. He said he was sorry."

I got out and stood by the car and imagined I could see that kid hiding in the dark, hunkered down behind the fender of the Bronco, his hands shaking around his rifle, waiting for us to come screaming and whooping and crashing through the gate.¹⁰

Will and Harlen's visit to Custer's monument subtly subverts another White convention. From the White perspective the monument commemorates Custer and his soldiers. However, from the Native perspective, the monument could be seen as a celebration of a resounding Indian victory, and the death of Custer, a hated enemy of the First Nations. By visiting the monument, Will and Harlen are emphasizing that the Battle of Little Big Horn was an Indian victory, one often portrayed negatively in traditional history.

Even though, as Will points out, it was not specifically Will's and Harlen's tribe, the Blackfoot, who fought Custer, Harlen blames depression for Will's initial reluctance to embrace a Lakota and Cheyenne victory as his own:

"History, Will. It's part of our history."

"The Blackfoot didn't fight Custer."

Harlen shook his head and patted me on the shoulder. "Pretty hard to see the bigger picture,

when you're depressed."¹¹

Perhaps King is alluding to a more extensive, general depression among Indian people. Through his stories, King nurtures a positive, forward-looking attitude for the Native community that does not add to the negativity that results from documenting oppression, victimization, and defeat. This positive message resounds throughout King's prose as he consistently separates his Native characters from any aura of defeat, and from accepting anything less than status of equal and deserving partners in the contemporary world.

Harlen's insistence that Will "see the bigger picture" at the Custer monument illustrates King's vision that "all my relations" includes members of different tribes throughout North America. When the two men stop for the night at the "Big Chief Motel," it is because Harlen suspects that the motel belongs to Indians from the nearby Crow Reservation. Harlen explains his choice of lodging by reiterating the need for a solidarity that transcends individual tribes, saying, "got to help each other out when we can."¹² King injects the idea of a pan-American Indian solidarity into his writing on several occasions while simultaneously dismantling mainstream notions of a composite Indian. What may be ambivalence on this issue demonstrates King's desire to be able to celebrate the uniqueness of Native individuals and tribes, and, at the same time, to strengthen the ties between the various

Nations. This invocation of the extended relationships contributes to King's deconstruction of a common White image of Native people. Of all traditional stereotypes unmasked in Medicine River, perhaps none is so soundly discredited as the image of the solitary Native as a member of a disappearing race.

King writes that the "idea of community and family is not an idea that is often pursued by non-Native writers who prefer to imagine their Indians as solitary figures poised on the brink of extinction."¹³ In King's writing, his invocation of the Native phrase "all my relations" makes clear his position:

..."all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations).¹⁴

The solitary Indians in Medicine River, the ones depicted as being most isolated, are not romanticized; if anything they are pitied. Clyde Whiteman, singled out as a gifted basketball player (an echo of the basketball-playing lone chief in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest), is uncommunicative, insecure and apologetic because he feels he lets his team and community down. He says of himself, "Just can't seem to change things, no matter how hard I try. Keep

disappointing everybody."¹⁵ Clyde's father died of cancer and his mother never remarried. Will suggests that Harlen is trying to fill in for the dead father. When he is unsuccessful Harlen asks Will to assume this role with Clyde:

Harlen caught me after the game. "Play offs are coming up, Will. Maybe you could have a talk with Clyde. He respects you, Will. Maybe help keep him out of trouble. You know, like a father."

"Don't know him very well," I said.

"Bet your father had some great stories about staying out of trouble, the kind that made you laugh, but then when you looked underneath them, you could see they were serious, and you knew he was trying to help."

"Never knew my father."

"I've done all I can do, Will. Maybe tell him how much the team needs him. You know, like a father."¹⁶

Will's mother, Rose, is isolated from her community after she marries a non-Native and moves to Calgary. The family matriarch, Granny Pete, visits Rose to ensure that family links are kept intact. Granny Pete talks to Will and to his brother, James, telling them stories about their family so that they "knew" that they "had relations."¹⁷ Will's mother spent most of her time alone, especially after her closest girlfriend moved away. Will describes his life in Calgary and remembers the evenings spent with his

community at the Native Centre:

We never knew many people when we lived in Calgary. Mostly my mother stayed to herself. But during the summer months, the Calgary Friendship Centre would hold potlucks and social dances in the basement of the Catholic church across from the Shell station on sixteenth street.¹⁸

Will and his family stopped going to the socials when his mother lost her day job and had to work nights. But for Will the memory of the socials lingers:

...the memory of those evenings was like a series of photographs - the women leaning against the stage, calling into the dark, the dancers moving in the light, the children hidden and invisible, waiting back from the edge, listening and watching.¹⁹

Another isolated character is David Plume, a Native man involved in the American Indian Movement (AIM). His most cherished possessions are his AIM jacket and an old faded photograph taken of him and some political friends at Wounded Knee. David's life revolves around his political involvement and he creates some enemies with his air of superiority. Harlen explains to Will, "Some of the boys don't like him. Ray figures David likes to show off."²⁰ Ray and David do eventually get into a verbal battle: Ray calls David an "asshole," a reference to the irreverent

nickname for AIM, "Assholes in Moccasins."²¹ David responds by saying he'd rather be "an asshole than an apple or a coward."²² However, it is when Ray takes David's treasured jacket, which Harlen says "must have been real important to David; you know, like a woman or children,"²³ that the argument escalates dangerously. David tries to shoot a drunken Ray, who falls on a bottle and cuts himself badly. Choosing his political identity over his identity as community member, David not only ends up alienating his "relations," but he contributes to the injury of a fellow Indian. Harlen says of David and his treasured AIM jacket:

"A jacket," said Harlen, "is a poor substitute for friends and family. I told David that."

"What'd he say?"

Harlen turned his head and looked at the pictures on the wall. "He said he didn't have any friends."²⁴

Several characters in Medicine River, most of them men, behave irresponsibly, or "as though they had no relations." Through the community's rehabilitation of several of these men, King demonstrates, once again, his tendency to emphasize the positive even in the face of obvious problems. His motives are far-sighted, and focus on the importance of family to future generations. The rehabilitated characters are abusive husbands and drunken or missing fathers. We end up with a "how to be a man" guide book.

Through Jake Pretty Weasel, King acknowledges a

widespread problem within Native relationships, but he softens its damaging power by pointing out that spousal abuse is endemic in all strata of society. Jake's abuse of his wife January is juxtaposed with the abusive treatment of a White woman, Mrs. Oswald, at the hands of her White husband. Jake's abuse is forgiven and forgotten after Jake kills himself. On behalf of her dead husband, January writes a suicide note painting him as a good father and loving husband. She puts aside her personal pain and looks ahead, realizing that her children would be better served by good memories of their father. Victimization may be perceived as romantic by some people but it does not help future generations the way pride in one's heritage does. King's choice of the name January is appropriate, considering the mother's decision to improve her children's heritage and offer them a new beginning:

"Last few years, he stopped apologizing and just beat me. I had to wear these glasses at work. Then...he's dead. He should have apologized before he died. It must have been an accident.

"So I did it for him. Wrote that letter. Pretty silly, huh? He says some real sweet things. You think the RCMP will give it back? I want it for the kids...when they're older."²⁵

January is able to glean a few positive stories from a

difficult past. Through her example, King is de-emphasizing victimization and affirming a forward-looking optimism. January's success is an encouragement to the Native community. King is offering the First Nations a new way to look at their past, one which frees them to live in the present and look forward to the future:

We all had Jake stories, and even January was anxious to tell about the times Jake had taken the kids shopping or made a special dinner or brought her home an unexpected and thoughtful present. I wasn't sure how, but she seemed to have forgotten the beatings and the pain, and in the end, all of us began talking about the letter as if Jake had written it.

"Jake really had a way with words."

"You can see he cared for his family."

"Hard for a man to say those things."

You could see that January wanted it that way, and when you thought about it long enough, I guess it wasn't such a bad thing.²⁶

Will's mother, Rose, does not specifically rehabilitate the memory of Bob, the husband who left her; however, she does not malign him either. And, through anecdotes from the time Bob was still with the family, Rose, even though she never says his name, provides positive images of her sons' absent father:

My mother never talked much about my father, and James and me knew it wasn't a good idea to ask. But every so often, she would get in a story-telling mood. Most of the stories were about when we were little....

"And Will, you liked to drive. Any time someone would come by with a car, you'd beg to sit behind the wheel. You could hardly see over the dash, but that didn't bother you none. Off we'd go down the road with you sitting on someone's lap, holding onto that wheel like you were in the races."

I knew the someone in the stories was my father.²⁷

Rose narrates other anecdotes about Bob, some from before and some from after she married him. The stories are all upbeat and happy, but she never admits that he is the boys' father, either referring to him as "someone" or giving him a fictitious name:

Each time my mother told her stories, they got larger and better. Sometimes, it was Howard. Sometimes, it was Martin. Sometimes, it was Eldon. But she never used my father's name.²⁸

In one of her favourite stories, "Howard" was thrown off a horse at a rodeo and fell in some "horse poop." As he did not have another shirt with him, "Howard" drove Rose and her

sons home, "smelling like a horse." But the young Will did not mind the smell; in fact, he "begged" to be allowed to drive. Rose says, "There you were, with your head against Howard's shirt, horse poop and all, pretending you were bringing us home."²⁹

Rose tells many positive stories that indicate that her sons had some good times with their absentee father. Rose depicts Bob, who left his family to be a drifter on the rodeo circuit, as charming, and, at one time, loving and nurturing to his children. King's men, not unlike tragic heroes, have fatal flaws, but the flaws are framed within good qualities. Through Rose, King once again emphasizes that it is important not to dwell on the past and on victimization. Her actions echo the visit Will and Harlen wanted to make to Custer's monument, and underlines the need to reinterpret history in a way that will promote pride in future generations.

Eventually, after Will has been living away from home for some time, his mother sends him a photograph of his father. In the note accompanying Bob's photograph Rose writes, "That's him," as if, thinks Will, she knew it "was an important thing for me to have."³⁰ Will's mother and another Native woman, Floyd's grandmother, are depicted as having foresight concerning the importance of photographs to store memories. King describes snapshots of both women with similar expressions on their faces. It is an expression

that acknowledges the importance of the picture to serve as a reminder of one's relations, in the present, but also in the future:

Floyd's granny was sitting in her lawn chair next to me looking right at the camera with the same flat expression that my mother had, as though she could see something farther on and out of sight.³¹

Rose kept all the letters she received from Bob after he left the family. For years, the letters are safeguarded in community storage by Granny Pete. Granny Pete serves as a unifying element for the community, and literally preserves memories by keeping people's belongings safe. Granny Pete stays in one place and stores memories of the community, while the younger generations are in constant movement. It is in this capacity that she acquires the letters from Will's father. After her death, the letters end up with Harlen, who gives them to Will. Will, through this community ethos, is thus given back memories of his father.

Through the relationship of Will's mother and father, King looks at the phenomenon of mixed marriages. Through these inter-racial unions, King explores another attempt to appropriate the Native as symbol. These relationships reflect on the process that Terry Goldie refers to as indigenization. An example of this process occurs between Will's mother and father. The father is a rodeo rider, a

cowboy in effect, a character from a standard western plot. The wild west cowboy becomes more intimately tied to the land when he consorts with an Aboriginal woman. The pattern that usually follows is that the Native dies or is left and the non-Native attains the indigenization he is seeking. In this case, the cowboy leaves Will's mother, and rather than coming home to the land, he continues to drift, rootless, on the rodeo circuit, until he hurts his leg. He writes that he is working in a real estate company. The father impotently and transparently makes promises to send gifts or to visit his children in letters he writes home to Rose, his wife:

Dear Rose,

Merry Christmas. I would have sent a cheque, but real estate sort of drops off round Christmas. The leg is one hundred percent. Soon as the season comes around, I may do a little rodeo on the weekends just to keep in shape.³²

King does not allow the cowboy the glorious life of traditionally indigenized literary characters. Will hears that his father died, not romantically, perhaps thrown from a rodeo horse, but drunk, in an automobile accident.

Rose, true to the conventional indigenization formula, does experience a kind of death through her marriage to a White man. She and her children are no longer legally considered status Indians, a kind of indigenization in

reverse. The family moves to Calgary and keeps ties with "home" through Granny Pete, who extends her mandate to Calgary to make sure her grandchildren know about their relations even though they are growing up away from them. After his father dies, Will, his brother and his mother soon move back "home" to Medicine River from Calgary. Rose is released, if not legally, then spiritually, when her husband dies. This is the opposite of the conventional situation: this time it is the White who has to die in order to free the Native character.

A contemporary relationship that explores the indigenization process occurs between Susan and Will. Susan uses Will to obtain first her sexual detachment and later a separation from her husband. She then leaves Will as well:

"I'm sorry about the way I left, Will, but I needed to get away. It wasn't just Ralph. It was me. I kept giving my life away to people. To Ralph. To you. There was nothing left for me."³³

Susan's methods are exposed as being cold, calculated and superficial. After she lures Will to her house to be a token guest at her dinner party, Will's attraction to her seems to be broken. Will suspects that Susan needs him, but he is not "at all sure [he] wanted Susan to need [him]".³⁴ King is expressing through Will's character that Native people have to be freed from White appropriation in order to come home to whom they really are. Susan expresses her

ability to be autonomous, not needing Will or any other man to help her, saying:

"You know what I've discovered? I don't really have to have someone. I can do everything myself. Men are used to that, but I never knew I could do it all by myself. Life, I mean."³⁵

Susan's independence leads to Will's ability to claim his home. No longer being needed by Susan leads to reverse indigenization for Will, and he is able to go home, first psychologically, and then literally. When Alice, a party guest who offers to drive him home, asks Will where he lives, he does not say Toronto, although that is where his apartment is. He says, "Medicine River...Just west of Toronto."³⁶

Susan is one of many women in Medicine River working to achieve or maintain their autonomy. King's Native women characters are not stereotypes of squaws or Indian princesses; they are modern women with modern problems. Louise is described by Harlen as being "formidable," because of her independence. Bertha takes her fate into her own hands and goes to Will for help in finding a suitable companion through a dating agency. She finally decides she is better off alone:

The truth of the matter, she told me, was that marriage was always more of a burden on women than on men, that women always had to take on extra weight, while men

just fell in to marriage as if they were falling into bed.

I tried to stay away from talk like that.³⁷

King does stay away from "talk like that" and although there is a fair amount of light-hearted "male-bashing" in his work, there is also a consistent attempt to portray the Native men as concerned with relationships and community. Although there are many missing fathers in the novel, the two masculine protagonists are portrayed as responsible, caring human beings, to the point that Will, father of no one, claims Louise's child as his own:

The nurse at the desk smiled at me and came over to where I was standing. "This must be your first," she said. "Which one is yours?"

Harlen and the boys were at basketball practice, and Mr. and Mrs. Heavyman had probably gone back to the reserve. Louise was in her room. South Wing lay in her bassinet wrapped in a pink blanket.

I looked down the corridor. It was clear.

"That one," I said.³⁸

Will especially is nurturing with South Wing. There are several scenes wherein he takes on traditionally feminine tasks while caring for the baby. The night of South Wing's first birthday is but one example of this:

South Wing woke up in the middle of the night and started to cry. She was standing in her crib. One of

the rattles was on the floor. I picked it up and shook it, and South Wing smiled and reached out. I took her out of her crib. Her diaper was wet, so I changed it. She didn't make a sound. She lay there playing with the rattle, watching, and it reminded me of the morning she was born. Later, I put her back in the crib, but I stayed in the room until it got light and tried to remember the song.³⁹

Old Martha, who tells Will about "the song" when she gives him the rattle for South Wing, admonishes him, saying, "Don't need a friend. Needs a father, that one."⁴⁰ This sentiment is echoed by other characters, notably the old storyteller, Lionel, who emphasizes the importance of both mothers and fathers:

"Granny says you remind her of him. She says maybe she should adopt you. That boy of hers always had a good story."

"I'm sorry about her boy."

"Old women get like that, you know."

"Sure."

"Always worrying about the kids who don't have mothers."

"Sure."

"Fathers are important too," said Lionel, and he put his hands in his pockets and gestured with his chin towards Louise and South Wing.⁴¹

It is also a sensitive male character who embodies the figure of the trickster. Harlen Bigbear is the proverbial mother hen, busy-body and match maker. His powers range from his unromantic meddling in the affairs of the community to his almost magical recuperation of Will as a Native man. Harlen epitomizes the ability to recognize the importance of tradition and community and takes the concept of "all my relations" extremely seriously. A pivotal character, Harlen holds the Medicine River community together:

Harlen went to everything. He went to all the powwows. He went to all the funerals. He went to all the weddings, the births, and most of the court cases. Any time there was a gathering of two or more Indians in a hundred-mile radius of Medicine River, chances were one of them was Harlen.⁴²

The whole community is Harlen's extended family and he consistently tries to nurture this perception in other characters. When Eddie Weaselhead and Big John Yellow Rabbit, who are remote blood relations according to Harlen, are having a feud, it is Harlen who tries to help them patch it up, believing that "being related was more important than some small difference of opinion or a little name-calling."⁴³

When Will visits Medicine River after his mother's death, Harlen encourages Will to come home to stay. He has the ability to touch Will profoundly when he talks about

Chief Mountain, Nanastiko:

"Can't see Nanastiko from Toronto," he said. "So, when you think you'll be moving back home?"

"Here?"

"Sure. Most of us figured that, with your mother and all, you'd be coming home soon."

There was no logic to it, but my stomach tightened when Harlen said *home*.⁴⁴

Although Will tells no one that he has decided to return to Medicine River, somehow Harlen knows and is waiting for him at the airport. This is an example of the almost magical qualities that are assigned to Harlen and that relate him to the trickster. Harlen immediately begins to assist Will in finding work and in feeling like an integrated and appreciated member of an extended family. In a sense the community, through Harlen, adopts Will and re-establishes him as a Native man.

Like the trickster, Harlen is unpredictable as shown when he unexpectedly stops the car and has the basketball team ponder Nanastiko, or, when he drives the wrong way and, while apparently lost, ends up at Custer's monument. Harlen is compared to the "prairie wind."⁴⁵ Will says, "You never knew when he was coming or when he was going to leave."⁴⁶ As embodiment of the trickster, Harlen is not the romantic, mythical character of the White imagination.

Through the character Lionel James, an old Indian story

teller, King reveals another reason why his characters bear little resemblance to the unrealistic projections of the White imagination. Lionel has travelled the world, telling stories about "what it's like to be an Indian." He is amazed and says:

"Crazy world. Lots of white people seem real interested in knowing about Indians. Crazy world.

"So, I go all over the world now, and talk about Indian ways and how my grandparents lived, and sometimes I sing a little. I used to dance, too, but my leg hurts too bad now. Most of the time I tell stories."⁴⁷

Lionel remarks that although he "saw a Mohawk fellow in France" who was also telling stories, he never saw "any white storytellers..."⁴⁸ King depicts the non-Indian characters who listen to Indian stories as childlike. Lionel is incredulous at the way they are mesmerized by simple stories, second nature to him as a part of his culture. He says, "They all got up and clapped, Will. Just stood there and clapped. Like they never heard that story before."⁴⁹

Although he is prepared to learn how to use a charge card so that he can become a "modern Indian," Lionel observes that it is not just stories people want from Indians, it is specifically stories from the past. When Lionel tries to tell contemporary stories, the crowds are

unreceptive. "I got some real good stories, funny ones, about how things are now, but those people say, no, tell us about the olden days."⁵⁰

"It's a crazy world," Lionel said, as he walked me out to my truck, "them people living in the past like that." He looked back at the kids, who were playing on the porch.⁵¹

Through the observations of the storyteller, Lionel, King exposes the tendency of non-Native culture to appropriate Indians as symbols complementing its own reality rather than respecting indigenous people as contemporary human beings in their own right. But it is King's creation of representations that challenge conventional literary portrayals that provides Native people with an aggressively hopeful and positive vision of their future.

Perhaps one of the most hopeful images is that of the strength of the Medicine River community, most eloquently realized through the group photograph Will takes down by the river. The "home" Harlen refers to when you can see Chief Mountain, the home symbolized by Granny Pete who kept contact with Will's mother in Calgary, this is all symbolized by the family portrait special:

After every picture, the kids wandered off among their parents and relatives and friends, and the adults floated back and forth, no one holding their positions. I had to keep moving the camera as the group swayed

from one side to the other. Only the grandparents remained in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them.⁵²

Probably one of King's most notable achievements with Medicine River is the evolution of the image of the Native in literature. Without appearing to have confronted many issues straight on at all, King subtly but surely breaks down many barriers of prejudice and preconception. King opens minds to new possibilities, to new ways of thinking about Native peoples. Assuming he will lure some readers to his second novel, King has prepared them well for a much more confrontational deconstruction and an even more profound decolonization of the image of the Indian in Green Grass, Running Water.

Chapter Two: Green Grass, Running Water

"There are no truths, Coyote," I says.
"Only stories."¹

In Medicine River, King gently and effectively demystifies some mainstream preconceptions about Indians through his down-to-earth depiction of a contemporary Native community. King puts aside this understated approach in Green Grass, Running Water, creating a fantastical, timeless universe wherein sub-plots involving mythical, historical and literary characters weave in and out of a realistic storyline. Through these sub-plots, King calls attention to some basic paradigms of Western and Native culture which, like a collective unconscious, influence the conscious lives of the protagonists, the earthbound inhabitants of the fictional town of Blossom, Alberta.

One of the most obvious structural techniques King uses in Green Grass, Running Water is the overall framework of the novel. The four sections are titled in Cherokee, and the translations of the four titles are "East-Red," "South-White," "West-Black," and "North-Blue" respectively. When put together these combinations signify "the four directions of the Cherokee: War, Peace, Death, and Defeat."² However, in non-Native culture the novel's four-part format has a different resonance. The structure is a significant allusion to the four parts of the Bible's New Testament. The division of the novel parodies the four Gospels

according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The four parts of this "new testament" are told "according to" the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye, who, in spite of their names, are four ancient Indian women.

The mutability of stories and the subjective influence of story-tellers are clear in the four parts of Green Grass, Running Water. By comparing these stories to the gospels, King is looking at the relationship between imagination and reality. Although biblical stories and other mainstream myths and assumptions have had wide-reaching and significant effects on Western culture, they are stories, not documentaries. The term "gospel truth" is an oxymoron that has become synonymous with indisputable fact in popular culture. The importance of distinguishing between myth and truth and of understanding their relationship is an essential theme throughout the novel.

Within each of the four sections, episodes based on the Native oral tradition, Christian mythology, history, and popular culture are alternated with episodes involving realistic contemporary characters. To hold the various subplots together, King plays various linguistic games. One device King employs to assist transitions is that many chapters involving one subplot end with the same wording that begins the next chapter. For example, King ends one chapter with a character reading "Chapter Twenty-six"³ of a western romance novel and begins the next with someone else

watching a western movie on "Channel Twenty-six."⁴ A patron at the Dead Dog Café is advised to watch the toilet because it backs up and she replies, "Don't they all,"⁵ referring to toilets. The next chapter takes the reader to the site of the dam that Eli Stands Alone describes as looking like a "toilet."⁶ One episode ends with Lionel "running out of options,"⁷ and the next begins with Alberta anxiously worrying about her "options."⁸

A notable theme that is underlined through recurring diction is that of "mistakes." King shows how misinformation can attain the status of "truth" through erroneous assumptions. King introduces the theme with a relatively inconsequential, potential "mistake" when Norma has to choose between carpet samples. Norma asks her nephew, Lionel Running Bear, to help her select a colour for a carpet, saying, "You make a mistake with carpet, and you got to live with it for a long time." Lionel assures her that "everybody makes mistakes, auntie." But Norma is not convinced and replies, "Best not to make one with a carpet."⁹

A few pages later, in one of the mythical subplots, King connects this dialogue about carpets with another choice, one that may have weightier consequences. The four old Indians are discussing the creation of the world and arguing as to whether or not they have the "right" story. There is a hint in Ishmael's admonition that a bad choice

has had serious consequences in the past. Repeating the diction used in the conversation between Lionel and Norma, Ishmael says:

"Remember what happened last time?"

"Everybody makes mistakes," said the Lone Ranger.

"Best not to make them with stories."¹⁰

The implication is that mistakes have been made with stories and the errors have had noteworthy effects. King's description of Lionel's mistakes confirms this suspicion. Linguistic connections set up a comparison between mistakes made in the mythological realm and in the daily life of earthbound characters. King uses Lionel's bad judgement to provide a humorous analogy of the far-reaching effects of making poor choices - "mistakes that seem small enough at the time, but somehow get out of hand."¹¹ Through Lionel's relatively benign modern errors, King explores the anatomy of a mistake and what it can do.

One mistake was Lionel's bad judgement as a young boy when he faked tonsillitis so that he could miss school and ended up with a permanent medical record of a heart disease he never had. Another mistake was Lionel's bad choice as a government employee when he accepted an assignment that resulted in his being mistaken for an AIM activist. Lionel spent time in jail and ended up with a prison record for a crime he never committed. Lionel continues to experience

repercussions years after the original mistakes. Buffalo Bill Bursam, who hires Lionel, says that he hired him in spite of his "heart condition" and "prison record."¹²

Lionel's misadventures are amusing examples of how stories do not have to be true to attain a life of their own, to have the power to affect and change lives.

Recurring imagery also serves to weave the novel's subplots together. Water is one such ubiquitous image. The water is a reference, as is the novel's title, to the phrase used in treaties negotiated with Indians regarding their land. They were promised that the land would be theirs as long as the "rivers flow."¹³ To emphasize that the rivers are indeed still "flowing," water imagery runs in and out of all the subplots.

Metaphors linking the overflowing toilet to the dam are a foreshadowing that the dam will also overflow. In fact, the narration culminates in an earthquake at the Blossom reserve that destroys the dam. The water spills over the reclaimed Indian land, emphasizing that the rivers are still running, and that White progress cannot dry them up. By extension, the Indian treaties must still be respected.

Another significant image is a leather jacket that passes through the hands of several characters. The jacket, a symbol of power, is introduced in Part One as the ancient Indians set out for their adventure. They remind each other not to forget the "jacket." Lionel, who wears a tacky gold

jacket as a uniform at Buffalo Bill Bursam's entertainment store, is in need of a new jacket according to Alberta Frank. Alberta, Lionel's sometimes lady-friend, thinks a jacket would be a good birthday gift. When the old Indians decide to help Lionel, his Aunt Norma suggests they do so by giving him a jacket.

The jacket appears again as a family heirloom, worn by General George Armstrong Custer look-alike and kindred spirit, George Morningstar. The Crow named Custer "Son of the Morning Star," further making the link between the two. George is the White husband of the Native woman, Latisha:

George Morningstar. Latisha had even liked his name. It sounded slightly Indian, though George was American, from a small town in Michigan. He had come out west to see, as he put it, what all the fuss was about. Tall, with soft light brown hair that just touched his shoulders.¹⁴

Elsewhere, George is described as having a "weedy mustache", similar to Custer's. To strengthen the connection, George names Custer as one of several "great military men" he admires,¹⁵ and finally at the Sun Dance he sarcastically refers to himself as Custer:

George looked at Lionel, and he looked at the old Indians. "Who are you?"

"I'm the Lone Ranger," said the Lone Ranger.

"And this is Ishmael and Robinson Crusoe and

Hawkeye."

"Right," said George. "And I'm General Custer."¹⁶

When George wears the jacket he claims it is a "family heirloom." In fact, the "family heirloom" signifies White history:

"There's a hat and gloves that go with it," he said. "They belonged to one of my relatives. Now they belong to me."

....

"Thought you just liked new things," said Latisha, wiping down a table.

"It's history," said George, rolling his shoulders in the jacket. "Most old things are worthless. This is history."¹⁷

The jacket, symbolizing historical power, is carried through the century by popular culture's icon, John Wayne, the perennial hero in Cowboy and Indian movies. Alberta Frank, who is a history professor, does not like to watch Westerns:

The last thing in the world she needed to do was to watch some stupid Western. Teaching Western history was trial enough without having to watch what the movie makers had made of it.¹⁸

John Wayne, who previously is Lionel's role model of a hero, hangs the jacket on a tree in the movie "The Sandcreek Massacre." The four Indians magically obtain the powerful

jacket for Lionel, and, while wearing it, Lionel is involved in a significant victory over George at the Sun Dance.

George attempts to appropriate the experiences of the Native Community by taking pictures at the Sun Dance for a magazine. Although this intrusion is contemporary, King does not miss an opportunity to link it with past transgressions. George, like his namesake George Custer, shows a callousness and disrespect for the Native people and their alternative world view:

"You can't believe in this shit!" George shouted after Eli. "This is ice age crap!"

Lionel moved forward, and George fell back several steps.

"Probably time to go," said Lionel.

"Come on," said George. "Come on! It's the twentieth century. Nobody cares about your little powwow. A bunch of old people and drunks sitting around in tents in the middle of nowhere. Nobody cares about any of this."¹⁹

The episode ends in victory for the Natives. Fooled the first time around at another Sun Dance, when a tourist did make off with photographs of the ceremonies,²⁰ this time Lionel, helped by the old Indians, emulates John Wayne: he wins. According to the four Indians, Lionel's part in this victory over George is enough to put his life "back on track," and the jacket is given back to George because it

has served its purpose. Lionel does not need it anymore.

Other images which recur and connect are the metaphors comparing three cars, a Pinto, a Nissan, and a Kharman Ghia, with the three ships Columbus sailed to America, the Pinta, the Nina and the Santa Maria. As puddles form around the tires, the cars mysteriously float away until they crash against the dam during an earthquake. The violence of contact, which ensued with the arrival of Columbus' three ships to North America, is played out in reverse as the cars destroy the symbolic dam. The same ships which led to the Natives' land being taken away lead to a return of the reserve land to the way it was.

Linguistic echoes and repetitive images are only two of the techniques King employs to keep all the elements connected in Green Grass, Running Water. The cohesion of the novel is dependent on the four ancient Indians, who are an important link between the many conceptual levels, plot-lines and themes. The four ancients are First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, archetypal figures from the Native oral tradition. These four archetypes take on the guise of four psychiatric patients, four prisoners, and four imaginary characters from literature and popular culture, simultaneously to loosen stereotypes in the mythological, historical, literary, and realistic dimensions.

In the mythological realm, the archetypal Indians

challenge the Christian world view and propose another version of the creation story. In the historical realm, they break out of the nineteenth century prison at Fort Marion. In the cultural realm, they refuse to play their expected roles in conventional White plots.

In the guise of four psychiatric patients, the women escape a psychiatric hospital run by Dr. Joseph Hovaugh. The aging physician looks out over a garden, which "pleases" him, and worries about the Indians who have "escaped again." Dr. Hovaugh's worry is that the Indians will unsettle his orderly sanatorium, symbolizing the threat that the Indians pose to the orderly Christian universe. As head of the hospital, Dr. Hovaugh is indeed, as his name suggests, Jehovah, God, master of the world he controls. King implies that the image of the omnipotent Jehovah, trying to hold on to the balance of power, may be a tired image. He describes Dr. Hovaugh as taking more time to "collect his thoughts" as a "way to get ready for the week. Every day he sat a little longer....He was tired, getting older, becoming reflective."²¹ King often employs repetition when he wants to emphasize an idea. Dr. Hovaugh, both at the beginning and the end of the novel, is described in exactly the same way. In both passages he is portrayed as follows:

Dr. Hovaugh seemed to shrink behind the desk as though it were growing, slowly and imperceptibly enveloping the man....

Perhaps he should move the desk out and get another that didn't seem so rooted and permanent.²²

King may be implying that the Judeo-Christian world view is itself becoming a rather tired and ineffectual.

Thus, the four archetypes, in the guise of psychiatric patients, flee from Jehovah's orderly universe.

Masquerading as cultural heroes, they also escape from Fort Marion, the Florida prison where many Indians were sent in the 1870s. First Woman claims she is the "Lone Ranger," Changing Woman calls herself "Ishmael," Thought Woman says she is "Robinson Crusoe" and Old Woman names herself "Hawkeye." One by one, at the end of each of the four parts of the novel, they are all taken to Fort Marion.

In Part One, First Woman is arrested with Ahdamn by rangers. When First Woman asks what the charge is, she is told that she is under arrest for "being Indian."²³ At the end of Part One, First Woman tells Ahdamn that they must leave Fort Marion because "the world is getting bent," and they have to "fix it." Ahdamn prefers to stay in Fort Marion, where he has become famous "drawing pictures" (an allusion to a pastime of the Fort Marion Indians). Consequently, First Woman sets out from the fort without him:

Okay, says First Woman, and she puts on her black mask and walks to the front gate.

It's the Lone Ranger, the guards shout. It's the Lone Ranger, they shout again, and they open the gate. So the Lone Ranger walks out of the prison, and the Lone Ranger and Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye head west.

Have a nice day, the soldiers say. Say hello to Tonto for us. And all the soldiers wave.²⁴

Part Two ends with another archetypal character being thrown into jail. This time, Changing Woman is arrested on the shores of Florida:

Call me Ishmael, says Changing Woman.

Ishmael! says a short soldier with a greasy mustache. This isn't an Ishmael. This is an Indian.

All right, says the short soldier. We know just what to do with unruly Indians here in Florida. And the soldiers drag Changing Woman down a dirt road.²⁵

In Part Three, after her encounter with Robinson Crusoe, Thought Woman "floats around" until she "winds up on a beach in Florida." As usual, the soldiers come around, this time with "flowers in their hair":

Are you the person responsible for these flowers in our hair? say those soldiers.

I'm Robinson Crusoe, says Thought Woman. I'm in charge.

Good grief, says one of those soldiers with flowers in his hair, another Indian. And those soldiers with flowers in their hair take Thought Woman to Fort Marion.²⁶

In the final section, it is Old Woman who is arrested and taken to Fort Marion. This time she is apprehended and told she will be "going to prison for a long time" for impersonating a White man because she claims to be "Hawkeye." She is sent by train to the Florida prison.

In Part Four as in Part One, the four women escape from Fort Marion. King employs repetitive diction to emphasize that the Natives have escaped before and will continue to escape from the limitations of conventional history. The four Indians decide that Fort Marion is getting too "crowded" and "uncomfortable" and so decide to leave:

Sounds like a good idea to me, says the Lone Ranger. So that Lone Ranger puts on the Lone Ranger mask and walks to the front gate.

It's the Lone Ranger, the guards shout. It's the Lone Ranger, they shout again. And they open the gate. So the Lone Ranger walks out of the prison, and the Lone Ranger and Ishmael and Hawkeye and Robinson Crusoe head west.

Have a nice day, the soldiers say. Say hello to Tonto for us. And all those soldiers wave.²⁷ Through the four magical figures, King leads Native

people out of another prison, - the prison of a colonizing culture. The four ancient women, First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, take on the identity of four romanticized White male characters. In their original stories, these characters, the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye, are aligned with their Native sidekicks Tonto, Friday, Queequeg and Chingachgook, through whom by association they are legitimized, or indigenized. By placing the Indian in the "starring role" as the protagonist rather than as the sidekick, King is redefining the dynamics of power in western literature and popular culture. The implication is that the choice of White heroes is the subjective choice of the White story tellers who privileged their race when they chose their heroes. This foreshadows what will happen to cultural icon John Wayne in King's revisionist version of a western movie, "The Sandcreek Massacre," when the Indians no longer act their traditional part.

In a Globe and Mail article reviewing his complex and clever construction of Green Grass, Running Water, King is referred to as "one tricky coyote." In the same article King responds to this description, saying, "No one should feel tricked. The allusions aren't to get at the reader, but to blur the line between imagination and reality."²⁸ Not only does King blur the line between imagination and reality, he also dissolves the line between past and

present, creating a timeless, borderless fictional environment:

I don't make any designation between the past and the present. I'm always very happy to bring what appears to be older materials forward and present them in a contemporary context...I feel comfortable talking about when the world was created and throw in a couple of television sets along with everything else that gets created at that period of time.²⁹

The comprehensive space that King constructs depicts the past and present, and reality and imagination as overlapping and indivisible parts of a whole. Stories from the imagination help make sense of the totality of experience, and, as explained in Our Bit of Truth, myths are a way of "coping with reality":

Like present-day Jungian psychology [myths] are based on the belief that there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the conscious, external world of everyday life and a knowledge of the subconscious workings of the human mind. It is the subconscious knowledge that mythology tries to explore and explain.³⁰

Often sub-conscious assumptions, preconceptions and projections of the imagination, and the myths they create become as widely acknowledged as perceivable physical

reality. In fact, preconceived ideas are sometimes preferred over actual experience.

In Green Grass, Running Water, King explores the relationship of myth and truth and challenges both destructive and romantic stereotypes. A conversation between the mythical Old Woman and the imaginary Nasty Bumppo (an allusion to James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo or Hawkeye) presents several of these racial stereotypes:

Indians can run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes. Indians don't talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies. These are all Indian gifts, says Nasty Bumppo.

Interesting, says Old Woman.

Whites are patient. Whites are spiritual. Whites are cognitive. Whites are philosophical. Whites are sophisticated. Whites are sensitive. These are all white gifts, says Nasty Bumppo.

So, says Old Woman. Whites are superior, and Indians are inferior.

Exactly right, says Nasty Bumppo.³¹

In order to contribute to the dismantling of this racist code, King exposes the arbitrary and subjective nature of mythical, historical and cultural axioms and shows how assumptions made in the archetypal or mythical realm are transformed into historical record and, from there, into

literature and popular culture. Finally, King shows how the preconceptions cross the imaginary line between myth and reality to affect the lives of realistic characters.

In claiming that "stories are power," Leonore Keeshig Tobias corroborates King's vision of the interdependence of imagination and reality. King suggests that some fundamental and influential stories are so powerful and have such far-reaching and significant consequences that they should be told with utmost care and caution. One such powerful story is the creation myth that is encoded with prejudicial axioms. How the initial story is told is of utmost importance because further stories based on this first myth may have long-lasting and powerful effects. To this end, each section of the four-part Green Grass, Running Water begins with a tentative retelling of creation, or the beginning of the world. First King stresses the need for the inclusion of all parties and advocates telling this first myth by committee so there can be feedback and consultation. The phrase "in the beginning" is repeated with dizzying frequency by many different characters. King uses this repetition to emphasize that truth has to include multiple points of view. He says that it is important that everyone tell the story: "you can't tell it alone."³² Green Grass, Running Water ends with yet another "beginning," another telling of the creation myth.

Although King says that everyone should tell the story,

in fact that is an admonition concerning previous exclusive narrations and a suggestion for the future. King himself, through the four archetypal women of Indian mythology, retells the "beginning" from the Native perspective, using traditional oral creation stories. From this rewritten base, King is able to take a new look at several mythological, historical and literary characters and events. Aware that his alternative version of the creation of the human world may offend some readers, especially Christians, apologies are given in case anyone's feelings have been hurt. Indeed, apologies may be necessary as King irreverently retells some especially powerful mainstream stories that, for some people, may be synonymous with truth. In his apology, King makes an allusion to Salman Rushdie's failure to predict the trouble that can ensue from criticism of contemporary religious systems. In an interview with King on CBC's "Morningside," Peter Gzowski comments on Green Grass, Running Water's similarity to Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses, in that both novels criticize religious systems. King responds that he is aware of the correspondence, and that he had invoked Rushdie when he chose the phrase "rushing in"³³:

"Apologize for what?" says Coyote.

"In case we hurt anyone's feelings," said Hawkeye.

"Oh, okay," says Coyote. "I'm sorry."

"That didn't sound very sorry, Coyote," said the Lone Ranger. "Remember what happened the last time you rushed through a story and didn't apologize?"

"Yes," said Ishmael. "Remember how far you had to run?"

"Yes," said Robinson Crusoe. "Remember how long you had to hide?"³⁴

This allusion to Rushdie is one of many such references to well-known personalities in Green Grass, Running Water. Although recognizing them is not essential to understanding the novel, they are often ironically amusing and they contribute to the blurring of the line between imagination and reality. Each of the references is to a person who played a central role in the development of modern views of Native people.

Polly Johnson, Sue Moodie, John Richardson and Archie Belaney are four tourists, with familiar names, who stop to eat at Latisha's restaurant, The Dead Dog Cafe:

"With the exception of Archie," said Sue, "we're all Canadians. Most of us are from Toronto. Archie is from England, but he's been here for so long, he thinks he's Canadian, too."

"It's nice to meet you."

"None of us," said Polly, looking pleased, "is American."

"We're on an adventure," said Sue.

"We're roughing it," said Archie.

....

"What we really want to see," said Archie,

"are the Indians."³⁵

Polly Johnson is Emily Pauline Johnson, a part-Native Canadian who performed her poetry while touring in colourful Indian costumes. The fictional "Polly" leaves the book she has written, along with a twenty dollar tip, on the table for Latisha when she leaves. The name of the book is The Shagganappi, a book that was actually written by Pauline Johnson. Sue Moodie is Canadian writer Susanna Moodie, and the reference Archie makes to "roughing it" is an allusion to Moodie's nineteenth century autobiography, Roughing It in the Bush. Archie Belany, who is looking for Indians, is the legendary "Grey Owl" who immersed himself in Native culture. Major John Richardson is the author of Wacousta, a romantic tale about the Pontiac rebellion, written partly in response to Cooper's Last of the Mohicans.

Buffalo Bill Bursum, owner of the home entertainment barn, is based on another man who made his living through entertainment, William Frederick Cody, better known as "Buffalo Bill." Clifford Sifton, head of the dam project on Indian land, in reality was a colonizer of the Canadian West who encouraged Westward expansion. He is pitted against Eli Stands Alone, a character inspired by Elijah Harper, the

Native Canadian parliamentarian who stopped the Meech Lake Accord, much as Eli Stands Alone stops the dam project.

Charlie's struggling friends and rival actors, all vying for Indian roles in movies, share names with historical personalities. Sir Francis Drake, an English sailor, appears as want-to-be actor Frankie Drake. Indian princess Pocahontas becomes starlet Polly Hantos. New World explorers Samuel Hearne, John Cabot and Hernando Cortez become actors Sammy Hearne, Johnny Cabot, and Henry Cortez. C.B. Cologne and his wife Isabella are modeled after Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella.³⁶

King's fun with names is but one of many linguistic and structural techniques through which he brings the representatives of the different dimensions together. He brings them together not only to expose the way the mainstream imagination continues to encourage ignorance and prejudice, but to do a little "fixing" while all these mistakes are visible at once. King acknowledges this agenda:

[King] admits there is a deeper and more subversive method to his wide-ranging, culture-spanning madness. What he's doing is boldly claiming (reclaiming might be a better word) the territories for himself.³⁷

King's reclaiming is done through the four ancients. These Indians move through time and space unimpeded and have

the ability to change reality. In fact, through these Natives, King is bringing balance into a North American World View driven by Judeo-Christian interpretations. King retells some important stories that have emerged from and gone on to perpetuate basic paradigms. In the retelling, he calls into question mythical, historical and cultural assumptions of Western culture and presents an alternative Native cosmology.

King presents Indian cosmology primarily through the trickster, who provides a focus for the alternative Native world view. In Green Grass, Running Water, the trickster appears as Coyote:

The trickster is an important figure for Native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony.³⁸

Coyote and the archetypal women are traditional figures from Native oral literature. They are concerned with harmony in the world. Through them, King looks again at some cultural and historical points of contact and shows how the stories might have been different if they had been told from another perspective. Some of the most powerful and most believed stories in Western culture derive from the Bible. These gospel truths are retold by King as he re-enters some "fundamental points of origination to deconstruct those

notions and processes which rationalized the imposition of the imperial word on the rest of the world."³⁹

Where better to begin than with Genesis? According to King's version of "the beginning," Coyote, the Native trickster figure, was present at the moment of creation. His presence unsettles, as it is meant to, an otherwise orderly presentation of the human universe. In the revised version of creation, Coyote is dreaming and one of his dreams gets loose, achieves a life of its own, and develops delusions of grandeur:

"I don't want to be a little god, says that god. I want to be a big god!

"What a noise," says Coyote. "This dog has no manners."

Big One!

"Okay, okay," says Coyote. "Just stop shouting." There, says that GOD. That's better.⁴⁰

No narration of Genesis would be complete without the eventful story of the garden of Eden. According to the Lone Ranger, "First Woman" fell from the sky and was living happily with Ahdamn until that GOD comes along, "acting like he has no relations":

And just so we keep things straight, says that GOD, this is my world and this is my garden.

Your garden, says First Woman. You must be dreaming. And that one takes a big bite of one of

those nice red apples.

Don't eat my nice red apples, says that GOD.

....

What bad manners, says First Woman. You are acting as if you had no relations. Here, have some pizza.

....

That God fellow doesn't eat anything. He stands in the garden with his hands on his hips, so everybody can see he is angry.⁴¹

First Woman's mistreatment in the garden is the first of several indignities performed by Christian mythological figures who demonstrate the difficulty the Judeo-Christian system has with "encountering different cultures by means other than the shock of domination and conquest."⁴² When Changing Woman encounters Noah, he tries to seduce her and she has to fight off his advances. King's depiction of Noah as tyrannical and close-minded is reminiscent of Timothy Findley's Noah in Not Wanted on the Voyage, and King plays with words to make clear the connection to contemporary fiction is deliberate:

This is a Christian ship, he shouts. I am a Christian man. This is a Christian journey. And if you can't follow our Christian rules, then you're not wanted on the voyage.⁴³

Thought Woman meets another staple character from Western culture on her travels, the representative of the

missionary mentality, Robinson Crusoe. King uses Crusoe as one example of how biblical myths evolved into literary images. The insidious application of the limited world view begun in the biblical genesis is picking up momentum. Like Lionel's "mistakes," the initial prejudicial code is having more and more consequences. Robinson Crusoe, unlike the character of Noah, does not want to ravage Thought Woman: he decides to convert her. He is obsessed, as are many Christians, with good and evil, unlike Native people who are, according to King, more concerned with balance and harmony, and he makes lists of good and bad points. He chooses to call Thought Woman "Friday" and says she can help him with his lists:

Under the bad points, says Robinson Crusoe, as a civilized white man, it has been difficult not having someone of colour around whom I could educate and protect.

What's the good point? says Thought Woman.

Now, you're here, says Robinson Crusoe.

....

All things considered, says Thought Woman, I'd rather be floating. And she dives into the ocean and floats away.⁴⁴

Thought Woman's rejection of Robinson Crusoe's proposal is a small victory, but one of many as the four female archetypal figures refuse to be contained by mainstream myths, history,

literature or popular culture.

Thought Woman declines to participate in another mainstream myth, the myth of the Virgin Mary. "A.A. Gabriel," who is a satiric mixture of church and state, wears two hats, "Canadian Security and Intelligence Service" and "Heavenly Host." He has a "virgin verification form" that he wants Thought Woman to sign:

I'm not pregnant, says Thought Woman.

No problem, says A.A. Gabriel. Sign this paper.

As long as the grass is green and the waters run, says the White Paper in a nice, deep voice.

Oops, says A.A. Gabriel, and he shoves that White Paper back into the briefcase. Wrong paper, he says. That one is for later.⁴⁵

Here, King is showing that Christian myths and historical and governmental policies spring from the same source, the same "briefcase." The White Paper and the phrase "as long as the grass is green and the waters run" are references to the treaties between the Canadian government and the Indians when they were formally given reserve lands.

A.A. Gabriel asks Thought Woman to stand beside a snake so he can take some pictures. (A common Christian icon is of Mary standing on the head of a snake.) But when he says it is time to get on with the "procreating," she refuses to co-operate:

Ready? Hail Mary/Full of grace.

....

Hosanna di, sings that Card, Hosanna da.

I don't think so, says Thought Woman.

Wait, says A.A. Gabriel. There's more.

Blessed art thou among women/And blessed be the
fruit...

No, says Thought Woman. Absolutely not.⁴⁶

Thought Woman's resistance to furthering the Christian agenda is significant. King is reclaiming spiritual power for Native people by not allowing this archetypal figure from Native mythology to be altered to fit Christian mythology.

Old Woman encounters another representative of the Christian pantheon on her travels, "Young Man Walking On Water," a character symbolizing Christ. The two meet in an episode that alludes to the biblical story of Christ calming a stormy sea. According to King's retelling, the "Young Man" is not successful and Thought Woman has to calm the waves instead. "Young Man Walking on Water" is not pleased with her obvious ignorance of "Christian rules." King writes:

And the first rule is that no one can help me. The second rule is that no one can tell me anything. Third, no one is allowed to be in two places at once. Except me.⁴⁷

King demonstrates here the arbitrariness of "Christian rules" that claim such absolute and exclusive authority. The power dynamics, set in place through Christian presumptions of superiority, are shown as being established in myths, realized in historical events, and then transferred to literature and popular culture.

Stories from the mainstream imagination consistently reflect the basic power dynamics they perpetuate. The "rules" of this medium require that Natives be portrayed according to simplistic stereotypes that relate them to a secondary role in the mainstream world view, so that they cannot be mistaken for representing a viable alternative. The dynamics of the mythological realm are easily transposed to inform stories in popular culture, most often through the genre of the "western."

The descriptions of Wild West romances and Western movies demonstrate how prevalent this genre is in mainstream culture. King's parody of inherited stereotypes educates the reader to recognize the extent to which simplistic literary images have become part of the mainstream's symbolic code. Hollywood movies run throughout the novel as a major source of cultural dislocation. Portland Big Bear is a Native man who is objectified and humiliated because he does not live up to the White image of what a Native should look like. Portland ends up wearing a rubber nose in order to get more movie roles as an "Indian." He is competing for

roles against such superior "noses" as Sal Mineo and Jeff Chandler, non-Native men who "look like" Indians. This is an excellent example of how the image of the Native in White culture has become more vivid and influential than any actual Native reality.

The power of these cultural images is dramatized by the way King forces us to "watch" the same western movie over and over again. Through repetition, King provides the reader with an opportunity to see clearly how the formula plot perpetuates the code that Whites are "winners" and Indians are "losers."

Simultaneously, however, King injects unsettling images into the mounting climax, and through these revised scenes he is setting up an effective deconstruction. As the movie builds to the final battle with the usual demise of the Indians, King lets us know something different is going to happen through the presence of the four archetypal women, the old Indians on their quest "to fix the world." Another hint that the story may end differently comes when John Wayne takes off his jacket, that symbol of power that alters the life of Lionel.

Eli Stands Alone is the only character who is reading a novel instead of watching the movie, but, in fact, it does not matter because the plot line is the same:

Iron Eyes attacked the soldiers.

The cavalry came riding over the hill.

Etc., etc., etc.

Flip, flip, flip.

Eli tossed the book on the table, rolled up on his side against the cushions, and went to sleep.⁴⁸

Lionel, too, falls asleep watching the movie build towards its climax and usual outcome. He misses the unexpected appearance of the four Indians in the film. The shirt that one archetypal Indian is wearing is "red," and red signifies "war" in Cherokee⁴⁹:

On the screen, an Indian danced his horse in the shallows of a river. On the bank, four old Indians waved their lances. One of them was wearing a red Hawaiian shirt.

But Lionel saw none of this. He lay in the chair, his head on his chest, the tumbling light pouring over him like water.⁵⁰

Alberta, Charlie, Dr. Hovaugh and Babo are all watching the same movie in their respective hotel rooms at the Blossom Inn:

Alberta turned back to the movie. The soldiers were trapped on one side of the river against a cliff face, and the Indians sat on their ponies on the other side. The chief whirled his horse around several times, held his rifle over his head, and all of the Indians began yelling and

screaming, whipping their horses into the river. On the riverbank, four old Indians waited, their lances raised in the air.

Alberta hit the off button.⁵¹

Charlie sees his father, Portland, playing the part of the chief in the movie:

The Chief spun his horse around in a circle, all the time grimacing and snarling into the camera, his long black hair flowing around his head, his wild eyes looking right at Charlie. But it was the voice that brought Charlie off the bed. He stood in the middle of the hotel room and watched as the chief rallied his men for the attack.

There on the screen, beneath the makeup, buried under a large rubber nose, was his father.⁵²

Dr. Hovaugh sees the escaped psychiatric patients and is worried:

As Dr. Hovaugh watched, the chief raised his rifle over his head and charged across the river, the rest of the Indians right behind him, while on the riverbank four old Indians raised their lances, encouraging their comrades, cheering them on.

It didn't reach Dr. Hovaugh all at once.

When it did, he sat up in the chair.

"Oh my God," he said, and he put down the remote control and reached for the phone.⁵³

Babo Jones sees the four women, her friends, and is delighted:

But it wasn't the chief that caught Babo's eye. In a small knot of Indians standing off to one side was an Indian in what looked to be a red shirt, and as Babo looked closer, she saw Hawkeye, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and the Lone Ranger smiling and laughing and waving their lances as the rest of the Indians flashed across the river to where the soldiers lay cowering behind some logs.⁵⁴

Latisha's son is also watching the movie. The predictable demise of the Indians as seen through the eyes of a young Indian boy demonstrates the effect of the perennial exposure to the not-so-subtle White propaganda. Being portrayed as a victim, a loser, over and over again is demoralizing and results in negative expectations and hopelessness on the part of Latisha's son:

"Mom, is this the one where the cavalry comes over the hill and kills the Indians?"

"Probably."

"How come the Indians always get killed?"

"It's just a movie."

"But what if they won?"

"Well," Latisha said, watching her son rub his dirty socks up and down the wall, "if the Indians won, it probably wouldn't be a Western."

....

"Not much point in watching then."⁵⁵

King explores the little boy's question "What if they won?" Through the magical Indians, King "fixes" the movie so that the Natives do win.

Watching from his entertainment barn, Bursam is initially the most enthusiastic fan of the western movie:

On the screen, John Wayne pulled his pistol out of his holster and raised it over his head and was shouting, "Hooray!" We got 'em now, boys," as the cavalry came galloping into the valley.

Bursam stood in front of The Map and watched the spectacle of men and horses and weapons.

"Hooray," he shouted, waving the remote control over his head and turning the sound up.

"Hooray!"⁵⁶

The "Map" that Bursam refers to is a display of television sets in the entertainment barn. It consists of dozens of television sets piled on top of each other in a configuration resembling a map. According to Bursam, the map is "more than advertising": it is "a concept that lay at the heart of business and Western civilization."⁵⁷ From the

television display, multiple images of the westerns Bursam loves substantiate "Western civilization" as Bursam sees it. However, the very tools that Bursam uses to perpetuate his world view will be used to deconstruct that perspective.

At the entertainment barn, King assembles Bursam, Charlie, Lionel, Eli and the four old Indians to watch a video tape of "The Sandcreek Massacre." The movie begins in black and white, and Bursam explains that "the director wanted the brooding effect that you get with grainy black and white."⁵⁸ In Cherokee symbology, black and white signify "peace" and "death," whereas red signifies "war" and blue "defeat." The four colours become significant as the movie suddenly becomes colourized just as the cavalry comes over the hill. The "blue-eyed" soldiers wearing "bright blue uniforms" suddenly disappear.⁵⁹ The Indians, led by Portland, "rose out of the river, a great swirl of motion and colours-red, white, black and blue."⁶⁰

The altered plot causes considerable distress to Buffalo Bill Bursam who thinks his equipment must be defective. Like John Wayne, Bursam does not know what to do when the predictable does not happen:

John Wayne looked down and stared stupidly at the arrow in his thigh, shaking his head in amazement and disbelief as two bullets ripped through his chest and out the back of his jacket. Richard Widmark collapsed facedown in the sand, his hands clutching at an arrow

buried in his throat.

"Jesus!" said Bursam, and he stabbed the remote even harder.⁶¹

This is an echo of the problems encountered when mythological characters did not obey "Christian rules." The orderly predictability of Western movies is destroyed for Bursam, just as the predictability of biblical stories is unsettled by various mythological characters, and Dr. Hovaugh's sense of order is unsettled by the old Indians.

Although Bursam and John Wayne are distraught, Charlie is ecstatic over the surprising turn of events. Through the reaction of Charlie, King demonstrates the exhilaration of reclaiming cultural power:

Charlie had his hands out of his pockets, his fists clenched, keeping time to the singing. His lips were pulled back from his teeth, and his eyes flashed as he watched his father flow through the soldiers like a flood.

"Get 'em, Dad," he hissed.⁶²

Charlie's father, Native actor Portland Looking Bear, plays the Chief who defeats John Wayne in the "fixed" version of "The Sand Creek Massacre." Before this revisionist triumph at "Sand Creek," Portland received little respect. As his career waned, the only job he could get was in a nightclub where he stripped an actress called Pocahontas, first with a tomahawk then with his teeth.⁶³ After the four Indians

"fix" the western, Portland's son, Charlie, experiences a strong desire to contact his estranged father. Charlie's change of heart demonstrates the power of stereotyping. If there had been more victories for sons and daughters to celebrate, perhaps the history of North American Indians would have unfolded differently.

King's fiction is just one example of the contemporary resurgence of positive images of Natives, the apologies and the new-found respect from the White mainstream. The combination of these may help some younger Indians rediscover a sense of pride in their community, just as Lionel had his sense of pride restored when he defended his community against George at the Sun Dance.

Eli Stands Alone, who Norma insists is "just like Lionel," finds his self-respect when he refuses to allow a dam project to destroy his family home, his heritage. However, before he takes this position, he is depicted as a contemporary man who, like Portland, is affected by stereotypes in popular culture. He is a victim of typecasting and his experience with his White wife, Karen, illustrates how cultural images infiltrate the lives of realistic characters.

Karen calls Eli her "Mystic Warrior,"⁶⁴ and when she finally persuades Eli to take her to see his relatives, she exclaims when she sees the Sun Dance location:

"My God," she said. "That's beautiful. It's like it's

right out of a movie."

....

"It's like going back in time, Eli. It's incredible."⁶⁵

Karen exposes Eli to countless books and movies about Natives. "Most of the books that Karen brought by were about Indians...What amazed Eli was that there were so many."⁶⁶ Karen is genuinely sympathetic, fascinated, and looking to be indigenized through Eli.

Eli, a quiet but determined hero, rediscovers himself as a Native man when he refuses to be forced, enticed or manipulated off his family's land. His action causes the dam project to come to a halt. Eli's namesake and contemporary counterpart is Elijah Harper, who quietly but resolutely stood his ground in Parliament and stopped a whole country from proceeding to form a constitutional agreement without sufficient Native consultation. The Canadian government had not counted on Native opposition any more than the dam project officials had expected opposition from Eli.

These important victories accumulate to inform King's vision of a contemporary, empowered Native community and to transform stereotypes. At the beginning of the novel, before his life is "put back on track," Norma says to Lionel:

"Lionel, if you weren't my sister's boy, and if I

didn't see you born with my own eyes, I would sometimes think you were white. You sound just like those politicians in Edmonton. Always telling us what we can't do."⁶⁷

By contrast, one of the most optimistic images in Green Grass, Running Water is of Latisha's little girl, Elizabeth, who cannot stop saying "yes I can":

Elizabeth was silent and determined. The first time she tried to get out of her crib, she had fallen and hurt herself. Latisha had thought that the experience might make her more cautious. It hadn't. The next morning, Elizabeth fell again, and the next morning, and the next. She cried only the first two times, and by the end of the week, she had stopped falling.⁶⁸

This is the attitude that King suggests will rebuild the Native Community, not a victim mentality, but a winning mentality. Quiet, symbolic victories nurture a positive attitude. King implies that the Native Nation will build its future with successive small but eloquent victories that will nurture an assertiveness epitomized by Elizabeth's "yes I can."

Conclusion: Beyond the Nineteenth Century

"a place neither romantic nor altogether tragic." - Kate Vangen¹

One of the most notable accomplishments of King's presentation of literary Indians is his avoidance of extremes. Readers are neither encouraged to feel pity for injustices committed against indigenous people, nor are they encouraged to be in awe of mystical braves, princesses and Shamans. King avoids all such manipulation, not wanting his Native protagonists to be objects of pity or of reverence. In fact, he does not want them to be objectified at all. A journalist attributes King's successful avoidance of extremes to his humour:

The quality that prevents Green Grass, Running Water, from being an exercise in breast-beating or masochism, on the part of the non-Native reader, is King's kindly humour. It makes his satiric comments (on Western religion, for example, and its irritable, egotistical god) not only palatable, but persuasive.² King uses humour as a vehicle through which he dissolves barriers of prejudice and habitual ways of viewing the First Nations. His light and often hilarious prose masks the thoroughness of his sweeping challenge to the Euro-centric world view. An excellent example of King's use of humour to subvert mainstream conventions and create new attitudes is found in the children's book, A Coyote Columbus Story. With

authority, conviction and lighthearted but perceptive humour King establishes a Native cosmology:

It was Coyote who fixed up this world, you know. She is the one who did it. She made rainbows and flowers and clouds and rivers. And she made prune juice and afternoon naps and toe-nail polish and television commercials. Some of these things were pretty good, and some of these things were foolish. But what she loved to do best was to play ball.³

The female, fallible and whimsical trickster offers a striking alternative to the male, perfect and stern Judeo-Christian counterpart. But this profound subversion is softened with King's gentle humour.

King renders the narration more palatable for Native readers as well through the philosophy on suffering Harlen expresses in Medicine River. Harlen says that the best way to survive grief is to "pass misery around and get everyone to take a piece." King does not deny the suffering that Natives have experienced, but, by spreading it thinner rather than by emphasizing it, he, like Harlen, believes "you won't throw up from the taste of too much grief."⁴

King has other motives for avoiding images of the victimized Indian. He does not want to perpetuate the idea of the dissipated Indian, worn down by centuries of oppression. In an interview with Hartmut Lutz, King says:

There was a guy in Victoria who got up after I gave a paper and wanted to know why I didn't picture Indians realistically as drunks, and down-and-outers, suicides, and what not. He had really bought the stereotype. Alcoholism and drugs and suicides are problems, but it doesn't mean all Indians are like that. Hell, most of us aren't.

The other thing that I like to point out in my talks is that if things were that bad, if things were really as bad as non-Native writers picture them, ...we'd be dead as a people. We wouldn't have lasted 500 years. So there is something that keeps us going. Now as soon as you say that, people say, "well, don't you have alcoholism? Don't you have suicide?" And the answer is, "sure, yes, we have that," we also have a certain cultural tenacity that keeps us going.' Maria Campbell echoes King's sentiments. She claims that the Metis are "not poor...My people are rich. Anybody that can come through what we've come through and still be able to laugh and smile is rich."⁶

King emphasizes this richness through his many understated and unromanticized characters. The citizens of King's fictional towns of Medicine River and Blossom are mundane, contemporary people, who drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games, teach university, run restaurants, and sell televisions. One White character,

Clifford Sifton, challenges the lifestyles of these modern Natives, saying, "Not exactly traditionalists, are they?" Eli Stands Alone replies, "It's not exactly the nineteenth century, either."⁷

In the interview with Lutz, King speaks favourably of other Native writers whom he perceives as having similar motives for their creative endeavours:

I'm more taken with Ruby Slipperjack's description of an Indian community than I am with some other writers who really bang away at oppression. Probably because much of Slipperjack is positive. I'm tired of negative descriptions of Indians, whether Indians develop them or whether non-Indians develop them, and I'm tired of romantic images too! So, I would like to see some very calm, very ordinary images, Indians doing ordinary things.⁸

Most important, King's heroes are not derived from conventional images of solitary Indian braves prevalent in non-Native literature. Eli Stands Alone, Green Grass, Running Water's understated hero who stops the dam project, is based on the contemporary political hero Elijah Harper, not on romanticized images from the nineteenth century White imagination. Through his Indian characters, King relentlessly loosens conventional prejudices and frees literary images of Natives from stagnating in a kind of nineteenth century paralysis imposed on them through

mainstream writers.

A symbolic focal point of this community in Medicine River is the impromptu photo shoot at a picnic by the river, which depicts "only the grandparents remain[ing] in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them."⁹ The pivotal image in Green Grass, Running Water is of the inhabitants of Blossom and the nearby reserve at the Sun Dance. Both images depict the elders as the anchor for the younger generations:

The circle was tightly formed now, the older people sitting in lawn chairs along the front edge, the younger people standing at the back, the children constantly in motion.¹⁰

These powerful and cohesive images are among King's contributions to the deconstruction of limiting stereotypes of a fractured Native community. King not only breaks down conventional stereotypes through these cohesive representations, but he provides aboriginal people with holistic literary reflections through his representations of the First Nations in their community. King frees Native people to complete the process of healing. Healing is necessary because the repetition of negative images has caused what is described in The Empire Writes Back as a "cultural denigration" that can lead to a "crisis in self-image":

A valid and active sense of self may have...been

destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model."¹¹

King illustrates the process of cultural denigration poignantly through Latisha's son in Green Grass, Running Water. The boy wants to know if the Indians ever "win" in Western movies. Similarly, as a little boy, Lionel wants to be like John Wayne:

When Lionel told his father he wanted to be John Wayne, his father said it might be a good idea, but that he should keep his options open.

"We got a lot of famous men and women, too. Warriors, chiefs, councillors, diplomats, spiritual leaders, healers. I ever tell you about your great-grandmother?"

"John Wayne."

"Maybe you want to be like her?"

"John Wayne."

"No law against it, I guess."¹²

Nurturing pride in community and in the "heroes" of Indian culture is a prevalent theme in King's writing. To this end he rehabilitates would-be role models, particularly fathers. Without being apologetic, in Green Grass, Running Water, King probes some of the reasons why Indian fathers may be less-than-perfect role models for their sons and daughters.

Several snapshots of Amos Frank trace the disintegration of this character's sense of self-determination. The picture of an impotent drunk smashing his truck into an outhouse contrasts sharply with the principled, sensitive man shown in other situations. Amos suffers cumulative humiliations, and, through this father, King illustrates the evolution of a more generalized frustration within the Native community.

Amos is depicted as being ultimately impotent, powerless against the dominant culture. One example is the desecration of the family dancing costumes that are seized at the American border. The confiscation of the traditional outfits recalls the outlawing of the Native right to dance when ceremonial dancing was an important expression of Native spirituality. Amos is put in jail for refusing to cooperate with American border officials:

When her father got out of jail, he was still angry. Not the flashing anger Alberta had seen the day the border guards unwrapped the family's dance outfits and spread them out on the ground, but a deeper, quieter rage that Amos buried with smiles and laughter as he recounted the story.

"So here's this asshole with eyes like an owl. He looks at the outfits like he's checking prime fur and says, 'Oh, yes, these are eagle feathers, all right,'"

"What'd you tell him, Amos?"

"I told him you can't treat people like that."

"What'd he say?"

"What the hell do they ever say?"¹³

The Canadian government helps Amos retrieve the costumes, but they are damaged and have been stepped on.

As a member of the Native police force, Amos experiences more blatant disrespect for his people. He recognizes his inability to solve an obvious infraction through legal means when a Native man's truck is stolen by a White used car dealer. He is quietly victorious when he sets fire to the truck that he was unable to retrieve legally and rightfully for Milford, his brother-in-law. But he and Milford both know that the victory is temporary. "'It won't stop them you know,' said Milford."¹⁴ Amos knows he has only won a battle. In fact the last time Alberta Frank sees her father, he is overcome by his frustration and is described as a fallen warrior in his last battle:

"They're right behind me, Ada." And he sat down in the snow. His jacket fell further off his shoulders, trapping his arms at his sides. "I can't stop them." He tried to stand but pitched forward onto his face, lay there not moving, as if he had been shot.¹⁵

King's portrayal of Amos is hardly redeeming, for he

wants us to understand why such an honourable man degenerates into a dissipated drunk. Amos's disempowerment is a symptom of a larger disinheritance. The lack of respect and simple courtesy for Indians is made possible by non-Natives because of the basic premises inherent in the power relation:

The explanation for these denials of status and identity lies, no doubt, in the ethos of imperialism: it is psychologically difficult to colonize and settle lands inhabited by equals, by people with names, by cultures that have their own integrity.¹⁶

King optimistically traces a shift in this power relation through the character of Eli Stands Alone. Although Amos is bullied by government officials, Eli quietly uses the judicial system to stop the dam project: he refuses to abandon his family home to the flood that the dam brings with it. Through Eli, the desecration of Amos's feathered costumes is neutralized by allusion to Elijah Harper's powerful eagle feather.

Although the creation of Amos offers some explanation for the generalized discouragement felt by the Native community in the face of an oppressive White mainstream, King does not emphasize the tension that may exist between the two cultures. King and other writers have tried to create another option which is not merely a function of the

White man's concern with the Indian problem. King praises the work of authors Ruby Slipperjack and Basil Johnston in this excerpt from his interview with Lutz:

One thing I like about Indian School Days and Honour the Sun is that both of those books deal with Native community. They don't involve themselves to any great extent with the clash between Native and non-Native cultures...I think once you get involved in "whose culture is better?," and into the politics of Native/non-Native relationships, I think you get suckered into beginning to look at the world through non-Native eyes. I think you run the risk of having to redefine yourself and justify yourself as a Native, and as a Native writer.¹⁷

King provides other motivations for focusing on the Native community. He wants to be sure that readers do not "lose track of some really powerful elements of contemporary Native life." He does not want to give the impression that "Native people spend their entire existence fighting against non-Native whatever." According to King, "That just isn't true."¹⁸

Consequently, when he depicts contemporary Natives, King does more than merely avoid White projections or confrontations with non-Natives; he creates a revisionist alternative to the mythical, historical, and cultural assumptions perpetuated in the mainstream. King moves

beyond deconstruction to reconstruction. This is specifically shown at the end of Green Grass, Running Water, after the dam breaks and floods the Stands-Alone homestead.

The family, with the help of several community members, decides to rebuild the ancestral home. They retrieve one of the original logs out of the mud to begin what is clearly a reconstruction. Norma suggests to her nephew, Lionel, that he can be a part of the rebuilding of the home, or he can sell Bill Bursam's televisions. In other words, Lionel can be a part of the old image, perpetuated in popular culture, or he can take part in a process of renewal that encompasses a new vision of the future. This is an opportunity for Lionel's reconstruction as a Native man.

The rebuilding of the Stands Alone homestead symbolizes a new beginning and provides an opportunity for Natives to look forward and create for themselves "a present and a future." Through the phrase "it is beginning,"¹⁹ King privileges the Native world view that does not acknowledge "the idea of creation in the biblical sense." The Native belief is "much more evolutionary."²⁰ King's novels promote a view of time and space that generously allows humankind to recreate itself over and over until maybe it "will get it right":²¹

Native myths and legends have more down-to-earth starting points like "One day Nanabush went walking." In addition, a fairy tale has an abrupt

and conclusive ending: "And they were married and lived happily ever after," whereas the ending of a myth or legend may be almost a non-ending; indeed, the ending of one story may well be the beginning of the next, joined by an extension of images and experiences.²²

In the spirit of this philosophy, Medicine River does not end conclusively, and Green Grass, Running Water ends with the words: "And here's how it happened." King's writing, both in content and in structure, is clearly establishing a world view that draws the reader into the eternal present: the acknowledgement of the creative principle that allows human beings to recreate themselves constantly in a better image. King's renewed images are challenging to White readers and to Native readers alike. His decolonization of the image of the Native provides the First Nations and the non-Native world with a new and more balanced beginning, untainted by previous mistakes, disharmony, and oppression.

The rebuilding of the cabin relates to a contemporary rebuilding that can happen subsequent to Elijah Harper's demand that Native people be heard. After years of being ignored, perhaps Aboriginal people may be included in any redefining process in contemporary Canada.

...[there is] a desire of many people today to come to grips with distortions in our cultural heritage and to

rebuild upon a more enlightened foundation. Within our Canadian historical context, it entails re-evaluating European and Native contributions to that heritage, redressing injustices, and developing a new consciousness based on integration instead of alienation.²³

Through *Eli Stands Alone*, as through Harper, there is a necessity to be included and to be oppressed and marginalized no longer.

To a certain extent, King equates the oppression and marginalization of Native people to that of women. Through Bursam's difficulty adjusting to contemporary political correctness, King connects the disempowerment of indigenous people and women:

Mrs., Miss, Ms. Bursum locked the door behind her. He just couldn't keep everything straight. At first it had been fun. Ms.. For God's sake, it sounded like a buzz saw warming up. He had tried to keep up, but after a while it became annoying.

Indians were the same way... And you couldn't call them Indians. You had to remember their tribe, as if that made any difference, and when some smart college professor came up with a really good name like Amerindian, the Indians didn't like it.²⁴

King is intent on promoting a more balanced world view in his novels. As editor of The Native in Literature, King includes an essay by Angelika Maeser-Lemieux, who expresses the idea that society as a whole has been impoverished by the silencing of women, Natives, and many other voices. Like King, she implies that everyone must participate if there is to be harmony in society:

We have, in recent decades, become more aware of the unfortunate fact that patriarchal religious and secular structures reflect a one-sided consciousness and an unbalanced adaptation to life, resulting in unjust social, racial, and gender relationships. The spirit of our age calls for a change of a deep personal and collective nature, a change that will bring about the integration of the repressed Feminine principle in self and society, and a concomitant realignment of power relations between the elite and the dispossessed.²⁵

King, like Maeser-Lemieux, suggests that if psychological oppression were lifted, there would be no need to oppress certain groups:

The negative values projected upon woman, Nature, and aboriginal peoples would be removed in a newly transformed consciousness that has come to terms with its psychological repressions. In such a state of affairs, it would not be necessary for some group to carry the burden of the shadow. The

psychic polarization symbolized in socio-political realities would be overcome and the old projections withdrawn.²⁶

King uses the analogy of male/female relationships to investigate the dynamics of the centre/margin. King does this to demonstrate a positive spirit of compromise, if not of resolution. This spirit of compromise is epitomized in the relationship of Louise and Will. Louise says that Will "understands her." This understanding and respect for differences is a prerequisite to equality. In Medicine River, the relationship of Will and Louise is cautious. The tension between men and women in King's work is perhaps indicative of the tentative approaching of Native people to mainstream culture. As margin and centre grow closer together, perhaps a harmonious co-existence can be achieved as long as both sides are respected as equal partners. King optimistically depicts Louise and Will as not ready to live together, but as able at least to understand each other.

The children of mixed marriages constitute another symbol of the spirit of compromise. Will and James, although legally not considered blood Indians, are welcomed by all their relations. South Wing, fathered by a White man, is all but adopted by Will, a Native man, and is loved unconditionally by relatives on both sides of the family.

South Wing is the focus of compromise and optimism in Medicine River, just as Elizabeth is an embodiment of

forward-looking assertiveness in Green Grass, Running Water. These children are perhaps chosen by King to provide a vision of the future because they will have the opportunity to break away from oppression and, just as important, from the memory of oppression imposed on them by colonial powers. In a sense, these children are symbols of the present and the future that King envisions and helps construct, by his dismantling of archaic imagery that has held Aboriginal people in literary limbo. By successfully deconstructing "literary monoliths" paralysing the imaginary Indian, King frees Native characters to step out from the prison of White literature and into the pages of their own stories.

Notes

Introduction

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³ King, Relations xi-xii.

⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., The White Man's Indian (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 71.

⁵ Gordon Johnston, "An Intolerable Burden of Meaning: Native Peoples in White Fiction," The Native in Literature (Oakville, Ontario: ECW Press, 1987) 50.

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⁷ Thomas King, Cheryl Calvier, & Helen Hoy, eds., The Native in Literature (Oakville, Ontario: ECW Press, 1987) 8.

⁸ Berkhofer 98.

⁹ Berkhofer 98.

¹⁰ Berkhofer 103.

¹¹ Berkhofer 103.

¹² Berkhofer 98.

¹³ Duncan Campbell Scott, "The Onondaga Madonna," Canadian Anthology (Toronto, Ontario: W.J. Gage Limited, 1966) 151.

¹⁴ Thomas King, Green Grass, Running Water (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993) 119.

¹⁵ Berkhofer 88.

¹⁶ Margery Fee, "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of the Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature," The Native in Literature (Oakville, Ontario: ECW Press, 1987) 16.

¹⁷ Berkhofer 107.

¹⁸ Agnes Grant, "Contemporary Native Women's Voices in Literature," Native Writers and Canadian Writing (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990) 125.

¹⁹ Johnston 50.

²⁰ Fee, "Romantic Nationalism" 29.

²¹ Berkhofer 111.

²² Terry Goldie, "Fear and Temptation: Images of Indigenous Peoples in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand Literature," The Native in Literature (Oakville, Ontario: ECW Press, 1987) 70.

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²³ Goldie 73.

²⁴ Goldie 78.

²⁵ Goldie 76.

²⁶ Fee, "Romantic Nationalism" 24.

²⁷ Goldie 71.

²⁸ Goldie 77.

²⁹ Johnston 51.

³⁰ Leonore Keeshig Tobias, "White Lies", Review of Larry Krotz, Indian Country: Inside Another Country, Saturday

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³¹ Thomas King, "A Seat in the Garden," One Good Story That One (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1993) 90.

³² King, "A Seat in the Garden" 92.

³³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, The Empire Strikes Back (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

³⁴ King, Relations xii.

³⁵ Johnston 52.

³⁶ Ashcroft et al 156.

³⁷ Marjery Fee, "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's Slash and Beatrice Culleton's April Raintree," Native Writers and Canadian Writing (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990) 169.

Chapter One

¹ King, Relations xv-xvi.

² King, Relations xvi.

³ Margaret Atwood, "A Double-Bladed Knife: Subversive Laughter in Two Stories by Thomas King," Native Writers and Canadian Writing (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990) 244.

⁴ King, MedRiver (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1993) 164.

⁵ Atwood 244.

⁶ King, MedRiver 148.

⁷ King, MedRiver 241.

⁸ King, MedRiver 247.

⁹ King, MedRiver 229.

¹⁰ King, MedRiver 112.

- ¹¹ King, MedRiver 107.
- ¹² King, MedRiver 115.
- ¹³ King, Relations xiv.
- ¹⁴ King, Relations ix.
- ¹⁵ King, MedRiver 125.
- ¹⁶ King, MedRiver 123.
- ¹⁷ King, MedRiver 8.
- ¹⁸ King, MedRiver 209.
- ¹⁹ King, MedRiver 210.
- ²⁰ King, MedRiver 198.
- ²¹ King, Medicine 252.
- ²² King, MedRiver, 253.
- ²³ King, MedRiver 253.
- ²⁴ King, MedRiver 255.
- ²⁵ King, MedRiver 49.
- ²⁶ King, MedRiver 51.
- ²⁷ King, MedRiver 123, 124.
- ²⁸ King, MedRiver 128.
- ²⁹ King, MedRiver 131.
- ³⁰ King, MedRiver 87.
- ³¹ King, MedRiver 216.
- ³² King, MedRiver 7.
- ³³ King, MedRiver 230.
- ³⁴ King, MedRiver 222
- ³⁵ King, MedRiver 230.
- ³⁶ King, MedRiver 234.

- ³⁷ King, MedRiver 188
- ³⁸ King, MedRiver 42.
- ³⁹ King, MedRiver 143.
- ⁴⁰ King, MedRiver 139.
- ⁴¹ King, MedRiver 211.
- ⁴² King, MedRiver 89.
- ⁴³ King, MedRiver 71.
- ⁴⁴ King, MedRiver 93.
- ⁴⁵ King, MedRiver 1
- ⁴⁶ King, MedRiver 1.
- ⁴⁷ King, MedRiver 170.
- ⁴⁸ King, MedRiver 174.
- ⁴⁹ King, MedRiver 175.
- ⁵⁰ King, MedRiver 173.
- ⁵¹ King, MedRiver 175.
- ⁵² King, MedRiver 214-215.

Chapter Two

- ¹ King, Green 326.

² This information was received in a telephone conversation with Luc Simard, an employee at the National Library in Ottawa. The reference to war and peace was corroborated in Grace Steele Woodward's The Cherokees, on page 43. King makes a reference to "Mr. Red, Mr. White, Mr. Black, and Mr. Blue" on page 44 of Green Grass, Running Water. Several other references to these colours are

discussed in Chapter Two and further substantiate the information received by telephone from M. Simard.

³ King, Green 171.

⁴ King, Green 172.

⁵ King, Green 114.

⁶ King, Green 115.

⁷ King, Green 53.

⁸ King, Green 54.

⁹ King, Green 5.

¹⁰ King, Green 10.

¹¹ King, Green 25.

¹² King, Green 224.

¹³ Alexander Morris, The Treaties of Canada With the Indians of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (Toronto, Ontario: Oxford University Press) 202.

¹⁴ King, Green 111.

¹⁵ King, Green 133.

¹⁶ King, Green 319.

¹⁷ King, Green 160.

¹⁸ King, Green 178.

¹⁹ King, Green 321.

²⁰ King, Green 120.

²¹ King, Green 12.

²² King, Green 13, 355-356.

²³ King, Green 59.

²⁴ King, Green 83.

- ²⁵ King, Green 188.
- ²⁶ King, Green 270.
- ²⁷ King, Green 349.
- ²⁸ Val Ross, "One Tricky Coyote," The Globe and Mail (Thursday, March 11, 1993).
- ²⁹ Raymond Beauchemin, "Thomas King: Writing with Respect" (Concordia Creative Writing, Winter 1992).
- ³⁰ Agnes Grant, "Introduction" Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature (Winnipeg, Manitoba: 1990) 1.
- ³¹ King, Green 327-328.
- ³² King, Green 10.
- ³³ Thomas King, Interview with Peter Gzowski, Morningside (Toronto: CBC Radio, April 5, 1993).
- ³⁴ King, Green 359.
- ³⁵ King, Green 133.
- ³⁶ King, Green 153.
- ³⁷ Val Ross, "Tricky Coyote".
- ³⁸ King, Relations xiii.
- ³⁹ Ashcroft et al 104.
- ⁴⁰ King, Green 1-2.
- ⁴¹ King, Green 56-57.
- ⁴² Ashcroft et al 162.
- ⁴³ King, Green 125.
- ⁴⁴ King, Green 245-46.
- ⁴⁵ King, Green 226.

- ⁴⁶ King, Green 227.
- ⁴⁷ King, Green 291.
- ⁴⁸ King, Green 182.
- ⁴⁹ See endnote 2, Chapter 2.
- ⁵⁰ King, Green 180.
- ⁵¹ King, Green 178.
- ⁵² King, Green 181.
- ⁵³ King, Green 185.
- ⁵⁴ King, Green 184.
- ⁵⁵ King, Green 161.
- ⁵⁶ King, Green 183.
- ⁵⁷ King, Green 249.
- ⁵⁸ King, Green 263.
- ⁵⁹ King, Green 267.
- ⁶⁰ King, Green 267.
- ⁶¹ King, Green 267.
- ⁶² King, Green 267.
- ⁶³ King, Green 176.
- ⁶⁴ King, Green 138.
- ⁶⁵ King, Green 169.
- ⁶⁶ King, Green 136-137.
- ⁶⁷ King, Green 5.
- ⁶⁸ King, Green 205.

Conclusion

¹ Kate Vangen, "Making Faces: Defiance and Humour in Campbell's Halfbreed and Welch's Winter in the Blood," The

Native in Literature (Oakville, Ontario: ECW Press, 1987)

189.

² Eric McCormack, "Coyote Goes Slapstick," Books in Canada (April 1993) 41.

³ Thomas King, A Coyote Columbus Story, 1.

⁴ King, MedRiver 2.

⁵ Hartmut Lutz, Contemporary Challenges (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Fifth House Publishers, 1991) 111-112.

⁶ Lutz 60.

⁷ King, Green 119.

⁸ Lutz 114.

⁹ King, MedRiver 214-215.

¹⁰ King, MedRiver 322-23.

¹¹ Ashcroft et al 9.

¹² King, Green 202-203.

¹³ King, Green 234.

¹⁴ King, Green 258.

¹⁵ King, Green 73.

¹⁶ D.M. Bentley, "Savage, Degenerate, and Dispossessed," Native Writers, Canadian Writing (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990) 88.

¹⁷ Lutz 110-11.

¹⁸ Lutz 111.

¹⁹ King, Green 11.

²⁰ Grant, Our Bit of Truth 4.

²¹ King, Green 194.

²² Grant 2.

²³ Angelika Maeser-Lemieux, "The Metis in The Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort," The Native in Literature (Oakville, Ontario: ECW Press, 1987) 115.

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²⁵ Maeser Lemieux 115.

²⁶ Maeser Lemieux 129.

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