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The Flood Myth, the Lone Ranger, and the Re-Centering of Marginal Masculinity in *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King

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Abstract

Green Grass, Running Water (1993) is a recent novel by Native North American writer Thomas King. The novel challenges the assumptions of Western culture and civilization through humour, irony, inversion, and the inclusion of Native cosmology. This challenge operates at two levels of narrative: the linear, present-day, formal narrative, and the timeless, mythological layer of narrative influenced by the Native oral tradition. After playing with accepted Western beliefs at the mythological level, King reinserts the revised elements into a present-day context at the level of the linear narrative. He thus addresses the way in which cultural mythologies function in the formation of subjectivity and community.

Both in form and in content, *Green Grass, Running Water* defies the conventions of traditional narrative structure. The purpose of this structural play is to dismantle the founding value systems and assumptions of colonialism and imperialism, liberating the subjectivities inhibited by these assumptions by making pointed use of an irreverent oral tradition based in First Nations culture. This tradition, due to its irreverence and fluidity, serves to bind the community and aid in individual and communal healing. By constantly shifting the frames of reference, King brings history, theory, literature, and cultural practices into an immediate and active present which engages the reader as both participant and performer. He creates a liminal space, a space of play, in which the reader is able to witness first-hand--live, in a sense--the effects of the assumptions imposed and accepted by Western culture. The novel reveals the imperialist agenda of canonical literature and the subjugating mechanism of dominant mythologies present in language, text, and image--the social scripts perpetuated in the dominant culture.

Keywords: crisis of masculinity, hybridity, irony, liminality, mythology, narrative, oral tradition, performance, storytelling, subjectivity.

Résumé de synthèse

Le roman de l'écrivain autochtone nord-américain Thomas King, intitulé *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), remet en question plusieurs caractères acquis de la culture et de la civilisation occidentales, et ce, par le recours à l'humour, l'ironie, l'inversion et par l'adoption de la cosmogonie autochtone. Cette remise en question agit à travers deux degrés de narration: la narration linéaire, contemporaine et formelle et la narration intemporelle et mythologique. Au niveau de la narration mythologique, King joue avec les croyances occidentales établies, puis il en réinsère les éléments modifiés dans un contexte contemporain sous le mode de la narration linéaire. Il montre donc comment les mythologies culturelles permettent la formation du sujet et de la communauté.

À la fois dans la forme et dans le contenu, *Green Grass, Running Water* remet en question les conventions structurales de la narration traditionelle. Cette manipulation de la structure vise le démantèlement des fondations du système de valeurs, et des préjugés du colonialisme et de l'impérialisme. King s'emploie à liberer les sujets, jusque-là inhibés par ces préjugés, en usant délibérément d'une tradition orale irrévérencieuse issue de la culture des Premières Nations. Cette tradition, grâce à son impertinence et sa fluidité, conduit à la guérison individuelle et communautaire. Par un déplacement constant des cadres de référence, King ramène l'histoire, la théorie, la littérature et les pratiques culturelles vers un présent immédiat et actif dans lequel le lecteur s'engage à la fois comme auditeur et comme interprète. King crée un espace liminal, espace de jeu d'où le lecteur peut assister, aux premières loges, *en direct*, en quelque sorte, aux effets engendrés par les préjugés imposés et acceptés par la culture occidentale. Ce roman dénonce le mandat impérialiste de la littérature canonique et le mécanisme assujettissant des mythologies dominantes présentes dans le langage, le texte et l'image, qui ne sont autres que des fables sociales perpétuées par la culture dominante.

Mots clés: la crise de la masculinité, l'hybridité, l'ironie, la liminalité, la mise en scène, la mythologie, la narration, la performance, la subjectivité, la tradition orale.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

For my four elders

Sue and Alec Arbess
Jean and Nathan Diamond

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Introduction

Green Grass, Running Water (1993), a recent novel by Thomas King, a North American writer of mixed descent, challenges borders and boundaries imposed on the Native culture by Western civilization. By side-stepping the multiple facets of accepted Western culture/civilization through irony, inversion, and the inclusion of Native values, beliefs, culture, and civilization, King manipulates forms as vehicles for his concerns. The narrative is a hybrid of two approaches to narrative: the linear, present-day, formal narrative, and the cyclical, mythological layer of narrative influenced by the Native oral tradition. As well as playing with accepted Western beliefs at the mythological level in *Green Grass*, King inserts revised elements containing Native values in the present-day context of the linear narrative. In doing so, King reveals the multifaceted ways in which cultural mythologies function in the formation of subjectivity and community.

Born in California to a Cherokee father and Greek mother, King has confessed to identifying with his father even though he was brought up by his mother (Reading; Peters 66; Rooke 63). In fact, he was engaged in Native politics and activism in the 1960's and 1970's (Reading; Homel J4). King is no stranger to the concept that identity is fluid; his writing reflects this refusal to be classified in any one category. In his youth, he worked as a photojournalist in Australia and New Zealand and has continued to sell photographs to magazines (Homel J4). He has a PhD. in Native Literature from the University of Utah, but he has spent much of his teaching career in Canada ("Author Profile"). While most of his writing has been done in Canada, both Americans and Canadians claim his poetry, short stories, novels, children's books, screenplays, television and radio dramas, and non-fiction as a unique expression of their own essence.[1] This embrace of North America as a whole is

[1] For examples of academic claims of possession, see Gray and Lavalley.

founded on his belief that the border between Canada and the United States is a fiction created by imperialist interests and imposed on First Nations' views of the land mass that is North America (Introduction 10), illustrated repeatedly in his oeuvre.[2] This preoccupation is reflected in his choice of marginal characters, for as he himself admits, he likes "characters who live on the edge of things . . . on the borderlands" (Reading). It also explains his experimentation in *Green Grass* with the limits and conventions of the various genres which have formed and informed him.

Although *Green Grass, Running Water*, King's second novel, was shortlisted for the 1993 Governor General's Award, and was published by a mainstream publisher, Harper Collins, it defies conventional narrative structure on many levels. His first novel, *Medicine River* (1991), and his third novel, *Truth & Bright Water* (1999), also deal with issues of personal identity and First Nations identity, but those narratives are written in what has come to be accepted as conventional, linear narrative form. *Green Grass* defies this structure by integrating portions of text written in the performative style of the Native oral tradition of storytelling within a linear narrative.[3] Through this radically structured text, King satirizes Western culture and civilization and its imperialist ideology and institutions by rewriting canonical works, reversing traditional Western gender roles, and making the sacred profane and the profane sacred through humour and irony. The intertext is dense. Characters are named after fictional characters from canonical works and after historical personalities whose own narratives enhance King's goal to depose the centre. King also demonstrates that Native

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[2] For more on King's preoccupation with the arbitrariness of the American-Canadian border, see the story of Amos crossing the border with Sun Dance costumes in Chapter 1, 24; "Borders" in *One Good Story That One* 131-45; and *Truth & Bright Water*.

[3] King is certainly not the first Native writer to use written text to evoke a traditional oral style of performance. See Rabillard on Tomson Highway 15; Jahner on N. Scott Momaday 156-60; Blaeser on Gerald Vizenor 39; Thompson on Beatrice Culleton 91.

views, issues, characters, and cosmology actually encircle the egocentric, linear Western view.

Striving to liberate the narrative from containment, unmask European authority and retrieve an independent identity, King employs oral tradition techniques, some of which overlap with postmodern/postcolonial techniques. Marie Vautier cites Diana Brydon's point that postmodernism has become the "dominant imperial discourse" (qtd. in "Comparative" 5). In his discussion of Gerald Vizenor's fiction, Alan Velie links postmodern techniques with the oral tradition. He suggests that the goal of such techniques, such as "violence, hyperbole, surrealism, and humour," is to resist "mainstream American culture and ideology" and "to develop a new sensibility" (130). Gerald Vizenor refuses the idea that tribal literature is postmodern, since its origins date back long before postmodernism dawned on the theoretical horizon (Preface, *Narrative* x). Robin Ridington, an Americanist anthropologist, points out the theorizing nature of dialogic oral storytelling where authority is shared, another postmodern characteristic (22-3, 25). As Hutcheon and Vautier, among others, have shown, parody, a postmodern technique, is often used to open up textual space for postcolonial discussions ("Circling" 154; "Comparative" 11). Linda Hutcheon finds that inherent to irony is an evaluative attitude (*Irony's* 11). In *Green Grass*, King evaluates not only the literary canon but literary theory--including postcolonial and postmodern theory--as well as satirizing social practices and scripts.

King himself resists the notion of a postcolonial literature as regards Native writing, since the Native oral tradition stands on its own and need not refer back to the colonialist event to define itself. King removes his writing and the writing of his peers entirely from the colonialist discourse by providing terms of his own, "tribal, interfusional, polemical, and associational" ("Godzilla" 12). In his discussion of these new terms, King reveals the values

of the First Nations community, "traditions which have come down . . . through [these] cultures." Associational literature, he suggests,

> leans towards the group rather than the single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of members of a community, a fiction which eschews judgements and conclusions. . . . [I]t reinforces the notion that, in addition to the usable past that the concurrence of oral literature and traditional history provide us with, we also have an active present. . . . ("Godzilla" 14)

Community, family, tradition, orality, a usable past and an active present, a respectful relationship with nature, and the importance of the connection to the land and the animals are values that recur in the Native traditions. There are similarities between these items, and a comparative list of mainstream Canadian small "c" conservative values, such as tradition, heritage, land, community, family. However, the novel illustrates the difference in the constitution and propagation of these values by the different cultures. King's revision of the Flood myth and the story of Noah from Genesis and his use of the flood as the *deus ex machina* at the end of the novel demonstrate these differences. At the end of the novel, the flood removes all evil, but in this version, it is the evil of white mainstream society. The land is restored to the First Nations family. King uses the Flood myth to subvert the absolute authority of Judeo-Christian beliefs which permeate the patriarchal system upon which North American society is based. The holes in the fabric of conservative values are revealed.

Both in form and in content, *Green Grass, Running Water* challenges the conventions of traditional narrative structure by dismantling the founding value systems and assumptions of colonialism and imperialism, thus liberating the subjectivities inhibited by these assumptions. The techniques applied are actually inspired by an irreverent and fluid oral tradition which serves to bind community and aid in individual and communal healing. While seeming to adopt the techniques of postmodernism, the novel speaks against the paradigm, simultaneously mocking the cultural pretensions of any theory as well as specifically

targeting the flippancy inherent in postmodern narrative. By constantly shifting the frames of reference, King brings history, theory, literature, and cultural practices into an immediate and active present in which the reader is engaged as participant and performer. He creates a liminal space in which the reader is able to witness first-hand--live, in a sense--the effects of the assumptions imposed and accepted by Western culture.

Though Native culture has been marginalized by the European-originated settler culture, it predates the colonial presence, and has continued to evolve in conjunction with that settler culture (Horne 256). This text is hybridized because the condition of the Native in North America is hybrid:[4] the choice given by dominant society is assimilation or extinction. These two options are in effect one, for if assimilation to dominant culture occurs, the Native culture would become extinct (Petrone 2; Dvorak 69). King makes use of the semiotic construction of the native which, as Terry Goldie says, exists both historically and ahistorically: the native untouched by European civilization no longer exists, but the image itself continues to exist even though the actual condition of the native has changed. Rather than the definition of Native changing as the culture has adapted to the colonial condition, the image has remained as the norm against which the individual is measured (Goldie 148-9). If the individual assumes attributes of the dominant culture, he or she may no longer be identified as an Indian.

In the novel, this crisis of identification presents itself in manifold ways. Exoticized images are at the base of the marital conflicts of Latisha, a Blackfoot woman, and George Morningstar, an American man. Lionel's self-image, or lack thereof, is proportional to the

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[4] Bhabha uses the term hybridity to refer to the automatic result of mimicry, repetition with a difference. In this unconscious difference the possibility of resistance resides; see discussion 112-122. In her examination of Bhabha's theory, Horne finds that hybridity "does not merely reverse the Manichean opposition, it deconstructs it." She adapts the term, dubbing *Green Grass* a "creative hybrid text," in which hybridity is a deliberate attempt to create something entirely new and autonomous from the established cultures, as well as an act of resistance; see 255.

degree of his hero worship of the Lone Ranger/John Wayne image. The static image of the semiotic indigene constantly inhibits the experience and the perception of experience of the main characters of the novel, and by implication, the First Nations peoples of North America, and by extension, any community or group of people who suffer marginalization.

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, King's main preoccupation is to disclose how these images and their accompanying texts, in all their forms and guises, assault the subjectivity of those on the margins of the dominant culture. He weaves together intersecting narratives and characters in order to show the spectrum of possibilities. In addition, King suggests how this interference in identity can be blocked or disarmed. Because myth, transmitted through text and image, plays a part in the construction of personal subjectivity as well as cultural identity, the de-centering of these central myths impacts the First Nations male characters in the novel, challenging them to construct themselves in their own image rather than positioning themselves in relation to male models of the dominant culture. Through his revisions of imperialist texts, King reclaims the voice for the Native characters, releases them from the bounds of the image and of the word of the dominant culture.

In essence, King rewrites the myths--the social scripts--so that they favour the Native characters and perspective. Whereas in the Judeo-Christian cosmology, the Word demands reverence, and the written word complete faith, words in the oral tradition are valued for their malleability. Reverence is granted and meaning created depending on context, juxtaposition (Turner 23-4; Petrone 27; Hutcheon 57). In the oral tradition, words are to be played with in order to create a meaning that pertains to the particular moment. An oral narrative is improvised around a given structure which is familiar to the audience. It is precisely the changes and new twists that make the narrative pertinent and reveal its meaning and relevance (Turner 26).

Therefore, King's text opens itself up to an exploration of subjectivity. King posits that the self is delimited by ideologies that are encoded and transmitted in the structure and form of the metanarratives of a culture. In essence, the subject is formed by the narratives it absorbs. Because signs in language and in image are the media of narrative, even when they stand alone, they carry the residue of the ideology behind these narratives. In turn, these disassociated signs are used to designate, classify and define. The power of the word, of the image, is pervasive and profound. King demonstrates the problematic nature of this mechanism of subject-formation when the subject is part of the dominant culture and is therefore excluded from full participation in the cultural myth or metanarrative. In the case of a marginalized subject, language subjugates by reinforcing the marginalizing ideology.

The male First Nations characters in the novel suffer the effects of this marginalization far more acutely than the female characters. The reason for this is double-edged. The First Nations cultures do not necessarily make the same distinctions as the West does between feminine and masculine attributes, as suggested by the androgynous trickster-figure of their mythology, Coyote (Lamont-Steward 123; Rabillard 6-7). The female characters in the novel strongly identify with their First Nations identities: King clearly shows that while the Western cultural model offers women little choice and range, First Nations cultures offer the freedom of self-exploration and self-negotiation. The female characters are depicted as subjects-in-process in the best sense of the term: they evolve while firmly grounded in their culture, secure in their identities as women.

In contrast, the male characters are plagued because no matter what guise they assume, they are not recognized as full-blooded men by the dominant culture, nor by their own culture, which they have rejected. In all the texts King alters, the Native sidekick--though a noble savage--is still a savage, and is therefore less of a man than the founding (white) imperialist. The ideology encoded in the imperialist texts limits the possibilities of

becoming for the male characters, and affects them through the process of internal colonization, Julia Emberley's term for this constricting mechanism of identification (17). Trapped in the in-between, they stagnate, or worse, erode. King illustrates the crisis of masculinity that occurs when two cosmologies collide, and the dominant ideology's beliefs are the complete inverse of the marginalized culture. In *Green Grass*, the women do not experience an identity /gender crisis, because they escape through the interstices of this collision, empowered by their own culture.

King makes use of narrative structures and content familiar to both Judeo-Christian and Native audiences. Lionel's story, the linear narrative, follows the familiar structure of the *bildungsroman.* The irony emerges through the fact that Lionel is coming of age at forty. The satire comments on the reason for Lionel's arrested development, which is his desire to be John Wayne, not the actor, but the pop-culture cowboy icon (*GG* 241). Four mythological characters interfere in and perform in revisions of the Bible's Flood, the Garden of Eden, Jesus Christ Walking on Water, and the Immaculate Conception; Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper; *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe; and *The Lone Ranger* television series by Fran Striker and George W. Trendle. King creates a hybrid text by combining these four imperialist texts with performance, oral-storytelling from various First Nations cultures, pulp fiction, fantasy literature, television and film narratives, paintings, songs, maps, and literary theory. The four mythological characters are female entities within the texts; their names reflect their Native identities. However, when in the real-time narrative, they assume the personas of the male, imperialist characters of the rewritten texts. First Woman's counterpart is the Lone Ranger, Changing Woman is Ishmael, Thought Woman is Robinson Crusoe, and Old Woman is Hawkeye (Lamont-Stewart 123-5). Incorporating different sources blurs the distinctions between sacred and profane, but also between male and female, oral and written, dominant and marginal.

These texts are imperialist in their depiction of settlement and nation-building. They also involve the dichotomous pairing of a founder from the dominant culture, a Judeo-Christian hero, and a sidekick/subaltern,[5] native to the land being settled, who is constructed as the bridge between the old ways and this new progressive settlement. Ishmael of *Moby-Dick* has Queequeg, the Lone Ranger has Tonto, Natty Bumpbo, also known as Hawkeye, has Chingachgook, and Robinson Crusoe has Friday (Matchie and Larson 159-62; also see Flick's "Reading Notes"). This sidekick helps the founder to understand the land; the ambivalence of the role is such that in rendering it decipherable to the founder, the helper ensures or condones his own people's loss of the land (Horne 257).

Of the rewritten texts, the Flood myth has the most impact, for it enters into the real-time narrative as well as suffering revision in one of the bouts of storytelling by the four mythological characters. The Flood exists as a structural trope, which reappears and recurs until it serves as the climax of the linear contemporary narrative. Similarly, the Lone Ranger appears as one of the four mythological characters derived from the Western canon of pop icons; however, he/she is the only one of the four characters to have a direct impact on the self-image and subjectivity of the contemporary characters, especially Lionel.

Lionel's identification as main character is due to the depth of his identity crisis. He seems to be lacking so much as a "man." Lionel is the character with the most to learn. As a male in a matrilineal society, he is marginalized. As a man who does not participate in his culture, he is marginalized; as a Native man in a predominantly white society, he is marginalized; as a Native man in a white man's world working retail at the age of forty with no family and little finesse with women, he is marginalized. In the intersections of these margins, Lionel receives the most attention of the four mythological characters, and he

[5] Bhabha uses the term "subaltern" throughout *The Location of Culture*; see 145, 192-3, 205-6, 237, 241.

benefits from their interventions, not in a dramatic turn-around, but in subtle changes and significant shifts in behaviour, which impact the narrative in different ways.

By profaning the Flood myth, a Judeo-Christian sacred text, and sanctifying the Lone Ranger, a popular icon from television no less, King subverts the way in which these texts, and the values they propagate, come to permeate the collective unconscious without question. Both the profaning and the sanctifying, he points out through dramatization, are equally ridiculous. He also includes a different value system, in which, the distinction between the sacred and the profane are deliberately blurred (Lutz qtd. in Petrone 3-4).[6] These very concepts, accepted and implemented, are imposed by the Western imaginary. Since Lionel is clearly a result of these texts, evident to the reader, but not evident to Lionel himself, what is defined as "good," "bad," "successful," "unsuccessful," "man," "woman," "masculine," and "feminine," is dismantled in the process. The crisis of masculinity is caused by the indirect influence of the sacred texts, of which the Flood myth is one, as well as by the constant bombardment of profane media images of the indigene, such as the Lone Ranger. Focusing primarily on the character of Lionel, Chapter One identifies the crisis of masculinity resulting from the clash of cultures. Chapter Two looks at King's revision of the Flood myth and the effect this revision of a sacred, imperialist text has on the male characters and on the novel's outcome. Chapter Three explores the pop culture icon of the Lone Ranger as a metonym of the crisis of masculinity and its resolution. The texts of the dominant ideology, whether sacred or profane, encode social scripts imposed on those marginalized, but to which the marginalized are denied access. Through his revisions of the dominant texts and irreverent play, King eliminates the arbitrary boundaries, limitations, and definitions imposed by the dominant imaginary on the formation of the marginalized subject.

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[6] Hartmut Lutz, "The Circle as Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction To-Day." *Native American Literatures* (Pisa: SEU 1909), 90.

CHAPTER ONE

"Smart move, John Wayne:" The Crisis of Marginal Masculinity

> Gender . . . [is an] accumulation of performances or recitations of the social scripts by which we live. Society imposes and enforces such scripts, but Butler's troubling (and potentially liberating) point is that *people play them out*. And, in the inevitable uniqueness of each performer's own history, experience, and aptitude, there exists the potential for various interpretations, diverse recitations, even modifications of the socially regulated script. (Coleman 33)

From any angle or social standpoint, Lionel Red Dog, the forty-year-old protagonist of *Green Grass, Running Water,* is a poor specimen of a man and an Indian. At the mercy of social forces, assuming no responsibility or agency, Lionel coasts through life, an Indian without a home, a man without a purpose. Though a subject is always in process, Lionel is arrested in his development because he defers to the limitations imposed on him by a culture not his own, a culture which denies him an individual identity.

Lionel's subjectivity has been unconsciously formed by texts carrying the cultural myths of the dominant Western culture. The colonial and imperialist values contained in these myths essentially rob Lionel of identity and agency. He is subjected to others' perception of him as a semiotic indigene, the term developed by Terry Goldie to designate what the image of the Indian has come to represent in Western culture and literature (4). King uses the character of Lionel to illustrate the phenomenon of the textually colonized subject and to show how its harmful effects can be reversed for the individual and the culture.

Through King's critique of Western institutions, Lionel is subjected to a number of situations that put into evidence, through irony and juxtaposition, how the dominant culture effectively dominates marginalized cultures and how the mechanism of internal colonization functions. Lionel is a split subject, split first by his Indianness and his denial of his Indianness, then by his desire to be part of the dominant culture, a project doomed to failure. Julia Emberley cites Jacques Lacan's definition of the split subject as "a subject who lives both 'real' and 'imaginary' relations to the social, a de-centred subject who lives in and through contradictory positions." Emberley then explains how the colonizer maintains

dominance by purposely splitting the marginalized subject: "In the relations between colonizer and colonized, ideology functions in support of economic and political institutions to maintain the relations of domination and exploitation between those subjects positioned as 'colonizer' and 'colonized'" (7). Lionel is split by his dreams of living up to his cowboy ideal. Cowboys are by definition not Indian. Cowboys destroy Indians who impede the progress of Western Civilization. By idolizing and wishing to emulate a cowboy, embodied in *Green Grass* by the Lone Ranger and John Wayne, Lionel obfuscates his cultural as well as his personal identity. Because of his desire to escape the deleterious images of Indians, and his adulation of the manly ideal that is manly precisely because of its opposition to the semiotic indigene, Lionel is adrift without community ties and unable to come into his own as a man.

The novel suggests that the solution to this conundrum is to accept the contradictions that accompany the postmodern existence, while situating identity in one's native (both senses of the word) culture. Once Lionel releases himself from the internalization of colonialism, he is able to assume the role of the Native John Wayne as an expression of his embodiment of Native values. At the end of the novel, Lionel upholds Native ideals in the sacred space of the Sun Dance to save the day and protect the perfectly independent damsel-in-distress. By taking full possession of the script and his identity, Lionel releases himself from the fragmentary and disempowering aspects of the split subject.

As Homi Bhabha points out in *The Location of Culture*, the very fact that assimilation to the dominant culture is impossible undermines its colonizing project (86-7, 112-114). In three disempowering situations, Lionel is subjected to the medical establishment, the government, and commercialism. The irony is structural as well as verbal (Hutcheon, *Irony's* 3). While Lionel calls these situations mistakes because of his being foiled and disempowered, the reader sees the mistakes in a different light, since Lionel's denial of his

identity doubly robs him of agency. Because he is not grounded in his own identity, he is unable to act as a free agent; he is left vulnerable to people whose behaviour towards him is predicated solely on their assumptions about his Indianness.

As Ariel Dorfman points out in his monograph on the effects of popular literature on young colonized minds, the social scripts played out in Lone Ranger literature inhibit Lionel's agency (178). The hero, exemplified by the Lone Ranger, is actually a defender of the status quo, not a supporter of justice (Dorfman 93). Emberley in *Thresholds of Difference* and Judith Butler in *Psychic Life of Power* suggest that these colonizing texts reinforce the psychic split or internal colonization of the colonized subject.[1] As Daniel Coleman outlines above, King plays out different versions of the script through the various male characters who are challenged to create an identity independent of the dominant culture and outside the boundaries of the social scripts. By rupturing the unquestioned authority of the Western canon's imperialist texts, King interrupts the mechanism of internal colonization. Although the only text the characters interact with directly is the Lone Ranger/John Wayne scenario, each character is imprinted by the cultural assumptions propagated by these texts.

The backdrop to Lionel's crisis of identity and masculinity is illuminated by the contrast between the male and female characters. The women are portrayed as strong and independent; their crises are caused by clearly external forces, whereas the men struggle against the internalized colonialism, which has caused the split in their psyches. Though Patricia Linton asserts that "the positioning of individual characters and groups of characters with respect to the dominant culture is unstable" (216), the male characters suffer the most from the intersection of the two cultures. While the female characters are clearly subjects in process without being inhibited by the necessary negotiation with the dominant culture, the

[1] Bhabha also discusses the colonial split subject (91, 119).

male characters' process is dedicated to--indeed, utterly subjected to--their attempt to embody the ideal of the successful male in their respective areas of interest and expertise. In each case, the men are brought up short by their encounters with the dominant culture. Each strives for authority and a certain masculine ideal, but each is identified only as an Indian and therefore as a lesser male. So, like Lionel, the other male characters are doubly robbed of agency.

Each of the male characters in *Green Grass* is waiting for permission from and acknowledgement by the dominant culture. However, as previously pointed out, the dominant culture, by its very mandate, does not permit Indians to be cowboys, the epitome of the successful, independent male in the Western paradigm. Coleman explains the foundation of the masculinity crisis with his theory of cross-cultural refraction. He postulates that though the male who passes through the boundaries between two cultures does not change essentially during the migration, he is perceived differently as he moves from his native culture to the dominant culture, which has "a different set of social codes, including those of masculinity" (3). When these cultural sites contain values in opposition, refraction can result in a crisis of masculinity.

In "Articulating a Different Way of Being," Coomi S. Vevaina itemizes characteristics of the dichotomy between the Native and Christian cosmologies. While the Native cosmology embraces harmony, nature, equality between the sexes, continuity, and a strong sense of community, the Christian cosmology champions duality and conflict, materialism, classifications and divisions--gender divisions, for example--hierarchy, and the individual. To the list could be added the Western obsession with authority and power. The imperialist texts King rewrites contain male protagonists who wield authority and power over their subjects, an authority condoned by God, survival of the fittest, or by some other force invested with omnipotence. King reveals how, for a Native man particularly, moving from a

"holistic, circular, and balanced" culture to a culture that is "atomistic, linear, and hierarchical" can precipitate a crisis of identity (Vevaina 59-61). The anomie is due not only to the First Nations man's subscribed role as "Indian," but because he is a marginalized male.[2]

The women of the novel are exempt from these problematic scripts, because they simply refuse to comply with the rules. As Linton points out, "Babo Jones . . . remind[s] Dr. Hovaugh that to be enslaved is not the same as accepting the identity of the slave . . ." (229). The female characters on the reserve, Latisha, Norma, and Alberta, locate their identities in their community and First Nations heritage. They manage to integrate this identification with the necessity of operating in a dominant culture that does not favour them.

Norma, Lionel's aunt and the matriarch of the family, suffers no crisis; she is the wise woman guiding the others through their uncertainty, bringing each one back to the fold of family and community through the land and through the Sun Dance. Norma guides Latisha in the concept of her restaurant and Alberta in her yearning for family (*GG* 108-9). She coaches Eli to return to the fold, and tries to steer Lionel along the path of life as the novel opens with the two of them in the car, Lionel driving, Norma instructing (*GG* 7-8). It is she who spearheads the rebuilding of her mother's cabin after the flood and Eli's death. The line in the family is clearly matrilineal; the novel privileges the female characters by showing how they avoid the limitations and imperatives of the colonizers' texts by operating according to their own set of values.[3]

Nowhere is this female independence more apparent than in the stories involving Latisha and Alberta. Though both suffer husbands who assume they will be obedient, silent squaws--a combination of exotic fantasy and the Angel in the House, perhaps--they each

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[2] For a discussion of cultural anomie, see Bhabha 157.
[3] The cabin and the land are discussed at greater length in Chapter Two, 56-7.

resist the imposition of their husbands' assumptions. When the novel opens, both women seem very happy to have children without a man around, a situation condoned by Norma who believes that men just get in the way of things (*GG* 124-5). Both Latisha and Alberta participate in the collective life of their community by having jobs that show pride in their heritage and do not compromise their identities. That these strong women have children, or in Alberta's case become with child during the course of the novel, is a representation of their propagation of these values, a hybrid existence they have created to negotiate the present culture with their identities intact. It seems to be this kind of resolution in process of which the male characters fall short.

Latisha, Lionel's sister, raises children who recognize the problematic representation of Natives. Christian's response to the Western is very different from Lionel's feelings about John Wayne; he asks whether the Indians ever win, a metafictional question of which Lionel is not capable (*GG* 192-3). Latisha frees herself from the "psychological imperialism" of an abusive husband who is white (Linton 217). The white abusive husband is constructed in direct opposition to the stereotype of the abusive Native husband. Not only is Latisha's husband George Morningstar--named after General Custer (Flick 146)--physically abusive, but he also fetishizes Latisha's Native background. Once disillusioned, Latisha sees through his words and appearance, which were what had originally captured her, because "[b]est of all, he did not look like a cowboy or an Indian" (*GG* 132). George was exotic for her too.

Liberated from an unsatisfactory marriage, Latisha succeeds as an independent woman. With Norma's encouragement, Latisha opens the Dead Dog Café (*GG* 108-9). The dead dog is a reference to Coyote's dream of the dog who turns himself into a god, then into the Judeo-Christian God at the opening of the novel (2). It therefore satirizes both the Judeo-Western idea that God is at the top of the hierarchy of beings, seeing, as Nietzsche would have it, that God is dead. It also makes white people literally eat their words, in a reversal of

the stereotype that Indians ate dogs. Now white tourists come to eat "dog," and Latisha makes a killing, pun intended. She turns the fetishization of the semiotic indigene to her advantage, profiting from it while retaining a sense of identity. Since her customers are named for key writers in the Canadian canon, she also challenges the cultural assumptions perpetuated by this literature (156).[4]

Latisha is also active in her community. She participates in the Sun Dance by providing food and has a successful business which negotiates the border between the two cultures with great success. Her crisis, her marriage, is in the linear narrative's past. Once her eyes are opened to her husband's true nature, she is free to define herself. Latisha, though at one time engaged in the delusion, has stood up for herself to survive and thrive. Though a woman, and abused, she assumes neither the conventional victim stance, the role of the damsel in distress, nor the image of the squaw.

Neither does Alberta. Alberta's crisis also has little to do with her Native heritage. She wants a baby, a womanly attribute, but she does not want a man, another break with convention. She is quite independent in personality and career. She also marries a white man who wants her to be a "wife . . . not . . . a woman" and to submit to his plans that she quit school and go to work to support his academic career. She ignores his demands which conflict with her own goals until he becomes insistent, at which point she divorces him (*GG* 85-7). Alberta then crafts a career for herself in an institution saturated with the dominant culture's ideology, the University. However, Alberta's identity as a university professor is rooted in her Native identity. She teaches oblivious youth about the hidden First Nations history, validating these experiences and forms of expression and giving voice to those whom dominant history has silenced (18-21).

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[4] The writers appearing in the Dead Dog Café are Pauline Johnson, Susanna Moodie, Archibald Belaney, and John Richardson. See Stratton 90.

While the female characters are represented as escaping the strictures of the social scripts, the male characters are bound by conflicting cultural values and assumptions. Since the texts transmitting the values of the dominant culture play a key role in the subjection and internal colonization of those it chooses to marginalize, it follows that the Native men of the novel suffer as alterior males. They do not fit the Western male model of the rugged individualist, nor of the Marlboro man, since Native culture does not espouse these ideals of the masculine. King illustrates Coleman's point that through each varying interpretation of "the socially regulated script," modifications to that script are made possible (33). As these characters negotiate and renegotiate the problematic construction of their concurrent identities as males and as Indians in North America in the late twentieth century, they exemplify for the reader the plight and possibilities of the marginalized male. Each of them plays out the crisis in a different way, and, through the intervention of the four runaway Indians, overrides the limitations of the social scripts. Eli, the English professor, returns to the land. Portland, the Hollywood Indian, who must wear a nose prosthetic to look like a "real" Indian, wins the war against the cowboys in the film Western revised by the four old Indians. Charlie, the mascot Indian-in-a-suit lawyer for the development company encroaching on Indian land, loses his job and reconnects with his father. Amos, the tribal policeman with no authority over white officials, is redeemed by Lionel's imposition of the precedence of Native values over George Morningstar's New-aged version of privileged exploitation.

Limited in behaviour and self-perception by a dominant cultural consciousness, the male characters are shaped by erroneous images of Indians which reinforce imperialist agendas. These limits are first imposed by the very fact of their assumed Indianness, and then are further affected by the uniforms they assume. The uniforms that they think and hope represent freedom from limitations are only an extension of these limitations. In Lionel's

case, the hospital gown meant to ensure him a vacation from school turns into an urban nightmare which then plagues his medical records for years and blocks his chances of success. The government job for which he must wear a suit at the Department of Indian Affairs exploits him as an Indian in a suit in the same way that Charlie's job does. The "hideous," "horrible gold thing," the blazer Bill Bursum assigns his employees, which Lionel chooses to wear not only on the job, but on his dates with Alberta, designates him as Bill Bursum's subaltern in Bursum's colonization of the image (*GG* 177). In each case, the clothes with which these characters choose to adorn themselves function doubly as a sign of their attempt to assume authority and as the sign of their subjection to the authority of the male code of the dominant society. Though they invest themselves in the garments of power hoping to assume that power, in actuality they are divested of power and end up in identity limbo--not Indian, not white.

In the novel, clothes take on the ritualistic power of costume, imbued with the signification of subjection. The male characters suffer crises that go to the root of their identities. They are all separated from their community, alienated from their heritage and culture because they seek recognition and approbation from the dominant culture. They do not seem to grasp, as the women do, that without a strong sense of self based in their own culture, they are diminished. They can never attain complete acceptance in white society. No matter how much they deny who they are and where they come from, the dominant culture still sees them as First Nations and ascribes to them a set of cultural assumptions which they cannot combat while they are on unstable ground. They are not embodying who they are, so they are empty bodies, dressed in the suits and/or costumes of the characters they are trying to play. If, as Emberley explains, textual violence is often enacted on the body (50), then in *Green Grass*, this same violence is often effected through costume. In an ironic twist, the mythological Native woman assuming the Lone Ranger mask at the mythological level of the

narrative is a replay of what the real-time male characters are doing with little success. Without a strong position in their own diminished-from-a-white-perspective society and without the opportunity to practice agency and be recognized in white society, they are--to borrow one of the prevalent images of the novel--afloat.

Eli Stands Alone, Lionel's uncle, is an interesting example of the crisis. He escapes to Toronto and to life as a professor of canonical English Literature. He becomes romantically involved with a very WASPy woman who wants him to get in touch with his Native side. The narrator of the novel states that "Karen liked the idea that Eli was Indian . . ." (*GG* 163). Karen hands Eli novels on Native topics and begs to be taken to the Sun Dance. However, within her gently prodding solicitude is still an element of fetishism. Marta Dvorak suggests that "[t]he image that Karen projects onto Eli is that of the Mysterious Warrior of dime-store novels" (70), the novels that he himself reads while he waits for the dam to break in his mother's cabin. Eli, despite all his hard work to obfuscate his identity, is almost solely identified with his Indianness. When Karen, his long-time love, dies, it is as though he were freed of the trappings of this false life, the false persona he has donned and fought to inhabit. He returns to Blossom to repossess his mother's cabin and protect it from encroaching capitalist interests. He becomes a crusader, literally inhabiting his heritage--the cabin built, not by a male forefather as in Western mythology, but by his own mother (*GG* 112-4). Eli drowns for his beliefs, and in some way, his gesture of standing alone (his last name) against the huge impersonal dam exonerates him from his earlier denial of himself and preserves the homestead for future generations (142; Donaldson 39). He also serves as a model, with Norma's prodding, for Lionel. It is he who brings Lionel to the Sun Dance on his birthday.

Lionel's cousin Charlie Looking Bear epitomizes success as it is defined in the dominant culture. He is a lawyer for a prestigious firm, hired straight out of law school. He has a great deal of disposable income, a great car, and lots of women. However, even Charlie

himself is aware that he got the job for public-relation purposes, precisely because he is an Indian (*GG* 116). The law firm for which he works serves the company that built the dam. Therefore, Charlie is placed in direct opposition to his Uncle Eli, and by extension, to his community. His success is false; he is blackmailed into sacrificing his community's interests in exchange for the mantle of success in white terms. What Charlie is, in essence, is the subaltern, like Oucanasta in *Wacousta*, betraying her people to Frederick de Haldimar.[5] Though Charlie wears the costume of a successful white capitalist-minded individualist, deep down, he is still the boy who left his father and Hollywood behind to return to life on the reserve. Charlie is released from his binding suit by the revised Western in which his prosthetically large-nosed father in the role of Indian Chief wins. After the dam is destroyed, Charlie is also relieved of his job. He returns to the land of his grandmother's cabin and Eli's sacrifice before going to see Portland, an important gesture of reconnection. His false trappings are gone.

Amos, Alberta's father, absent in the real time of the novel, has his story retold by Alberta. As the reserve cop, he is invested with a certain amount of authority and recognition on the reserve. As soon as he steps out of the bounds of the reserve to consult with the local police, he is told he has no authority. It is clear by the way the police look at him and speak to him that they do not see him as a fellow officer, or even as a man, but as an Indian, a semiotic indigene composed of a set of cultural assumptions (*GG* 307-9). Even though Amos is a law enforcer, "[t]he white concept of law favors the written bill of sale over the spoken statement, and Milford's truck is legally considered sold"

[5] Handsome British soldier Frederick de Haldimar's chaste relationship with Oucanasta, the lovely Native woman, is predicated on her treason (Richardson 237) and on her skills in the forest (Ivison 196-8). Their Relationship also resembles that of Tonto and the Lone Ranger (Chapter Three, 64-5).

(Bailey 49). Amos then goes outside of the law to seek retribution by burning the truck when it is in the possession of the new owner, although he never openly admits to it (*GG* 310).

In a gesture which leaves them disenfranchised, Amos's family's Sun Dance outfits are seized and destroyed by ignorant customs officials. Amos asserts himself, as he did with the police, and explains the significance of the outfits, but again, he is not taken at his word, not treated as a man, but as an Indian. When he protests against the disrespectful treatment of the outfits, he is threatened with jail (*GG* 257). When Amos returns from jail, he is filled with a "deeper, quieter rage." After the story is exploited in Parliament by Amos's MP, the costumes are returned, damaged beyond repair (*GG* 280-3). Amos shows himself to be a man of honour and principle, a man connected to his community, but he is broken by the invalidating effect crossing the border between his own culture and white culture has on him and his identity. The ruined Sun Dance costumes are a metonym for Amos as an individual as well as for the Native culture as a whole. The last time Alberta sees him, he is drunk, sitting in his truck in a puddle amidst the ruins of the outhouse. Then he disappears (87-90).[6]

Portland dons yet another costume. He plays an extra in Hollywood movies, usually the Indian chief, until the powers that be decide he does not look Indian enough. Italians and extras of other ethnicities endowed with large noses get parts before him. To secure parts, he agrees, after being out of work for months, to wear a prosthetic nose so as to look more "Indian" (*GG* 151-3). As Dvorak points out, "Hollywood has turned being an Indian into a 9 to 5 job, has (de)constructed identity into mere matters of cosmetics or costume" (70). Although Portland achieves a certain level of success, the unwieldy and allergenic nose leads

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[6] Perhaps Amos's fatal flaw is that he discriminates against Alberta for being a woman. Amos forbids a maturing Alberta to join the trips he makes into the woods with the boys of the family. In keeping with the no-nonsense depiction of women in the novel, Alberta's mother tells her that there is "no reason" women cannot go along, just because Amos "has his ideas on the subject." All Alberta needs to do is pack a lunch (*GG* 255).

to his career's undoing, so he returns to the reserve with his wife and child (*GG* 154). "The rubber nose is part of the vestimentary dynamics of the novel," another element of costume that seems to imbue the wearer with power and prestige, whereas a void is actually created (Dvorak 71).

Once back on the reserve, Portland teaches the reserve children how to be Hollywood Indians, how to ride a horse and so on, teaching them how to project the image of the Indian (*GG* 180). Even this seemingly harmless pastime is implicitly criticized by the novel. Dvorak explains that "[t]he American film industry has in effect not only widened the gap between natives and non-natives in public perception, but also created a rift between the genuine and the fake, between what Indians *are* and how they must *act*" (71). Portland is robbed of agency and subjected precisely because he can only function as an Indian within the constructed world of Hollywood, where he is a commodity instead of an individual.

Portland is so entranced with Hollywood, so completely possessed by the false image, that he takes Charlie back to Hollywood after his wife dies to relive his early successes before the nose fiasco (*GG* 181-2). While he waits for his big break, Portland works at a strip club. He plays an Indian who captures a frontierswoman and helps her to remove her clothing. Once she is clad only in her underthings, she is saved by a cowboy (211-2). Dvorak points out how the vestimentary code carries over to Remmington's Steak House, where Portland gets Charlie a job parking cars in an "Indian" get-up: "Jobs are divided up according to lingering preconceived notions bordering on segregation. The cowboys wait on the table while the Indians park the cars...." The Natives stay outdoors in the wilderness, so to speak, while the cowboys inhabit the civilization of the indoors (Dvorak 73; *GG* 209). Portland sacrifices the dignity of his real identity as an Indian to be that thing that Hollywood says Natives are. Not only is Portland wrapped up in portraying the Hollywood Indian, but he forfeits his community, his relationship to his son, the things that

make him who he is. This false image he perpetuates by passing on the lessons to the boys. He is saved only when the four mythological characters intervene in the movie so that his chief character wins the battle, big nose and all (*GG* 321-2).

Against the relief of these men trying to negotiate the border between two cultures stands Lionel. While these men have at least acted and/or engaged in action, risking failure and frustration, Lionel has not demonstrated the agency that the other male characters have, no matter how short-sighted or misdirected:

> [Lionel] plans to go to university, but never does; instead, he remains trapped in his job working for Bursum. Like Eli, he avoids his family and his obligations to his relations in pursuit of capital gain. King underscores Lionel's role as a mimic by giving him a history of former employment with the Department of Indian Affairs. Lionel equates advancement, progress, with abandoning the reserve and his 'Indianness'." (Horne 268)[7]

On the eve of his fortieth birthday, Lionel is a *tabula rasa*, blaming his manifold failures on three big mistakes (*GG* 30). However, Lionel's abandonment is the only definitive action he takes. Lionel is the archetypal straight man in this trickster novel: oblivious, naïve, a little self-pitying, completely reactionary. In the three mistakes, certain assumptions are attributed to Lionel based on his identification as an Indian, even when he is "innocent." At the same time, he is not actively engaging in his identity. Lionel sees himself as the victim of circumstances or events; he is reactor rather than actor. His crisis is located at the point of intersection between perceptions of masculinity by the dominant and Native cultures. He wants to be John Wayne, but he cannot, precisely because he is an Indian.

King uses the image of the cowboy as the problematic emblem of subjection. Dorfman clarifies the harmful effects that mass literature, specifically the genre of the

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[7] For a discussion of the text in terms of mimic men, see Horne's application of Bhabha's theory to the male characters of *Green Grass* (268-70).

Western, has had on youngsters: "such fictional forms influenced people, especially youngsters, through a code of half-hidden values, which helped them adapt to reality by blurring out, or perhaps by falsely acting out, its dilemmas" (178). Lionel's lack of agency is directly related to his subscription to the simple scheme of Lone Ranger and John Wayne stories he absorbed in his youth. Dorfman explains that the source of the problem is this mechanism of identification: "The State, which is daily more divorced from those it claims to represent, passes, by way of the heroic (active) subject, over to the consuming (passive) subject." The hero, the Lone Ranger in this case, eliminates contradictions and neutralizes all the points brought up by the crisis in the fiction (110). Butler's examination of Hegel's theory of the slave mentality reveals how the split subject comes to identify with what it sees as "unchangeable" and "pure:"

> Unhappy consciousness seeks to overcome this duality by finding a body which embodies the purity of its unchangeable part; it seeks to come into relation with 'the Unchangeable in its incarnate or embodied form.' To do this, the subject subordinates its own body in the service of the thought of the unchangeable; this subordinating and purifying effort is that of *devotion* (*Andacht*). (47)

Horne describes John Wayne as "a cultural icon of settler society" (268), once again showing how Lionel annihilates himself by his devotion to that which enslaves him. The subject is then subordinated to and dependent on that Unchangeable (Butler 9). By taking John Wayne as a model, Lionel is "[i]nduced into a state of paralysis by his ambivalent identification" (Stratton 91). In essence, Lionel is suspended in a state of arrested development, caught in a childhood stage of hero-worship. Unfortunately, that hero does not really embody worthy values, but simply maintains the status quo of imperialist oppression and the culture of colonization.

In his version of his three mistakes, Lionel chronicles how he ends up a barefoot Indian child in a hospital gown in downtown Toronto, arrested as an AIM activist leader

when he goes to present a lecture on behalf of the Department of Indian Affairs, and working at Bill Bursum's Home Entertainment Barn years later still wearing the faded and unraveling gold blazer. As for his personal life, he is living in a trailer off the reserve, hardly an enviable position. He attempts and fails to take control of the relationship with Alberta, the bright and independent university professor he dates, rivaling his cousin Charlie, the successful--but sleazy--lawyer.

Lionel is a man alienated from himself as well as from his community and his heritage through his abrogation of agency. He identifies with General Custer in a painting, and with John Wayne, both obliterators in their respective fields of his culture. He is offered Native role models by his father, only to reject them (*GG* 241). He fails at being a white man because he cannot escape his identity.

In his first mistake, Lionel trusts an incompetent senile white doctor to get him a tonsillitis holiday and ends up in Toronto for heart surgery. The mix-up affects his future, for he is forever cursed by his "heart condition" (34-7). King's novel, then, satirizes the institution of medicine, as well as the literary canon, and the attitude of the North American governments toward Natives.

Lionel's second mistake is that he feels morally coerced into participating in the AIM actions at Wounded Knee; however, he does not take responsibility as a person of indigenous origin for being there. Though he gets swept along by the tide, he is ultimately brought to account for himself and his culture as the perceived leader of the activists. His subsequent arrest finishes his government career as the token Indian in the Department of Indian Affairs and as a university student (*GG* 55-64).

His third mistake is that he gets bogged down in a dead-end job for an imperialist who distributes equipment to capture the image of the semiotic indigene and celebrate colonialism. Bill Bursum, according to Jane Flick's "Reading Notes," is named after Bursum,

the New Mexican senator responsible for seizing Pueblo land and land rights, and Buffalo Bill, an exploiter of Natives for entertainment (148). Lionel's subjection is reinforced when Bursum watches a movie, in which: "[a]t the movie's climax, the Indians are wiped right off The Map when they are shot and killed by John Wayne and his cohorts" (Stratton 95). Lionel could not be more directly involved in reinforcing the subjection inherent in subjectivity, since "[t]he Map justifies the colonization of North America," in which his idol kills the depictions of his people (95). The irony is lost on Lionel; he enjoys building The Map without realizing what it represents (*GG* 80). This oblivion to his participation in his own subjection explains in part the depth of his crisis.

Lionel is caught without ambition in the linear world of the white man. He is undefined by success of a material nature and has no connection to his First Nations identity, neither to land (he lives off the reserve), nor to his family (Norma claims he does not visit enough), nor to his community (he has not attended the Sun Dance in years). Lionel seems to waffle in the no-man's land between two different spheres of subject-definition. The FBI agents see an Indian and arrest a person they perceive to be an Indian activist. Bill sees a person who no longer fits the image of Indian, so he strips Lionel of the right to the title. As Goldie suggests, "[t]he de-mystified indigene is a de-valorized indigene" (136). Limited by the image he had nothing to do with creating, and adrift from the culture that could define and fill him, Lionel is forced to comply with readings of his self that subject him psychically and physically.

Since Lionel does nothing to assert himself against these assumptions, he is the absence of identity, a ghost man. He absolves himself of agency, and relieves himself of any responsibility. Lionel's story opens on the days leading up to his fortieth birthday, and, coincidentally, to the Sun Dance, the most important ritual event for the Blackfoot people from which Lionel has absented himself for years. The significance of Lionel's birthday

overlapping with the Sun Dance is foreshadowed by Norma's criticism of his job and his lifestyle (*GG* 56,169). While in the car, Norma provides many indications that Lionel is inadequate. For a start, she points out that "selling them televisions is no job for a grown man." Even at the Sun Dance, Norma instructs Latisha and Alberta that "[m]ost men don't even start to get smart until after they turn forty" (371). However, Norma also implies that the road to wholeness is open to Lionel; as a remedy to Lionel's being "ashamed" of his family, Norma suggests that Lionel run for council. When he rejects this and other suggestions, Norma holds up Latisha as an example to Lionel, because Latisha visits the reserve and helps out at the Sun Dance. Lionel counters by mentioning George Morningstar, but Norma talks over him. Once again, Lionel has missed the fact that George is now beside the point. Lionel also does not see the irony in the name of the Dead Dog Café. Norma suggests that a visit to the Sun Dance will straighten Lionel right out and bring him home, just like Eli (56-7, 62-3, 79).

The characters who represent Indianness in the text--Eli, Latisha, Alberta, Norma--live in a way that, though it may not be consistent with an image or a checklist, certainly engages with values that may be identified with First Nations values. All four question these common images of the Indian, Eli by returning to the reserve and his Native identity to live in his mother's cabin and take a stand against economic and territorial annihilation, Latisha by running a café which profits ironically off the image of the Indian, Alberta by teaching Native studies, and Norma by guiding her family to stay within the community and maintain close ties. All four participate in the Sun Dance, keeping it alive. In their actions, in their daily lives, they live out their identity as First Nations. Lionel does not. And because he does not, he is ill prepared to negotiate the world outside the reserve, where he is again and again confronted by the perceptions of an assumed identity automatically attributed to him. In each of his three mistakes, he is pulled back, brought low, blindsided by his First Nations identity,

which creeps back, or is thrown back, to haunt him. And, in a sense, there is an injustice in his being lumped into a group simply because he is Native and in the wrong place at the wrong time. On the other hand, he cannot escape the fact that he is Native, and is therefore implicated in the events at Wounded Knee, whether he is armed, an activist leader, or not.

In the resolution of the novel, Lionel inhabits and then confronts the personae of John Wayne and the Lone Ranger. Lionel finally achieves the focus of his childhood--and adulthood--yearnings, and finds that the pre-fabricated role literally does not fit. First, the four Indians provide him with John Wayne's jacket, which Linton finds magical. The jacket is "materialize[d] in human space . . . drawn from a mythic or narrative realm: the bullet-torn jacket worn by John Wayne's character in a movie western that never existed until the elders altered the videotape to allow the Indians rather than the whites to win the final gun battle" (Linton 221). Ironically, Lionel soon becomes uncomfortable in the jacket, because it smells of fish. By inhabiting the identity, he rejects it. His ideal punctured, Lionel is free of its constricting binds and unpleasant odor. Secondly, he confronts George Morningstar, Latisha's ex-husband--King's reincarnation of General Custer with whom Lionel identified earlier in the novel--disarms his camera, and throws him out of the Sun Dance (*GG* 383-7). For Darrell Jesse Peters, the jacket represents "resistment," his term combining resistance and resentment, and the reversal of the traditional Hollywood narrative in which the Indians are killed and the colonizing whites are victorious. Peters concludes that "[t]his jacket gives Lionel the strength to reject the dominant 'other' and defend the traditions and culture of the Blackfeet" (75). King reverses the basic structure of mass literature in order to free Lionel's arrested, colonized subjectivity. The jacket functions as the metonym of his outdated ideal. Instead of being saved by a cowboy superhero, Lionel is saved--he might say assaulted--by the *deus ex machina* of the four old Indians and Coyote from his own culture. The wisdom

they offer bridges the two cultures, since one of them assumes the persona of the Lone Ranger, mask and all.

The indication that there might be something of substance inside Lionel is suggested earlier in the novel in an encounter between Charlie and Lionel. It is Charlie's implicit criticism of how far Lionel is from his ideal that disturbs the oblivion of Lionel's excuses for his stagnation (*GG* 83-4). Charlie comes to visit Lionel at Bursum's with his flashy red Porsche bought with money made from practicing law in Edmonton. After Charlie tells Lionel that he can do better, Lionel gives Charlie the same excuse for staying at Bursum's he gives everyone: "It's just temporary." Charlie responds with his old cousinly moniker: "Smart move, John Wayne." Then he drives off into the sunset, leaving Lionel standing in front of the Home Entertainment Barn. Seemingly dismayed by the exchange, Lionel sighs at Charlie's departure. Then he turns to look into the store, where Bill is serving some customers. Actually, he feels:

> exhilarated, intoxicated. For a long time, he stood there in the dark, smiling and swaying until the edges of his ears began to burn and he started to shiver. And as he came back through the darkness and into the light, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the glass. (*GG* 84)

What Lionel retains from the exchange is not the criticism of his failure to act, but the fact that Charlie called him John Wayne. The image he sees imprinted on the glass is the image of himself, fully realized as the Native John Wayne.

Whereas John Wayne's cowboy heroes kill Indians to pave the way for Western expansion, the Native John Wayne protects Native culture, family and community from the encroachments of Judeo-Christian claims of entitlement. This image of the Native John Wayne is in turn superimposed on the Home Entertainment Barn. Through the tension created by Lionel's mistaken idol, King doubles the meaning. The Native John Wayne does

indeed triumph in the novel, first by reclaiming the Western, and then by reclaiming the Sun Dance.

The fact that Lionel's birthday coincides with the Sun Dance reinforces the connection between his personal subjectivity and his communal identity. As he is led back into the fold, he finds his manhood, and starts to grow up. At the Sun Dance, he loses his desire to incarnate John Wayne, but comes to embody the values of Justice and fairness by protecting his own people, a veritable Native John Wayne. Lionel adjusts his identity by performing a composite of his contradictory identifications, a reinterpretation of the script. The foundation of his identity is created in this act of negotiation, a hybridized version of the roles made available to him, which makes agency possible. Emberley discusses Julie Kristeva's theory of the *sujet en procès* explored in *Desire in Language:*

> The de-centering of subjectivity, the breakdown of a coherent and unified subject, has given way to a notion of subjective heterogeneity from which subjects may be reconstituted in a process of alignment, articulated through a process of negotiating and constructing autonomous differences. *The subject in negotiation is the subject in contradiction, centring and de-centring its identity and difference in order to substantiate a place and position within the dominant social formation.* (14) [italics mine]

By taking into account the seemingly fragmented "subject-positions" of Lionel's identity and reconstituting his character to include all the contradictions of his self, King validates Lionel as an autonomous, hybridized subject. Lionel is then ready to negotiate a position for himself within the "dominant social formation." Acceptance of inherent contradictions gives the subject a degree of agency in the perceptions of others, and a right to agency in its perception of itself. John Wayne and the Native identity merge in Lionel as he finds his own way to incorporate the different parts of himself. In King's next novel, which also takes place in Blossom, *Truth & Bright Water*, Lionel is mentioned only once, but not directly by name. The salient details identify him. The store has been renamed "Lionel's Home Entertainment Barn." The "Indian guy" who owns it, Lionel, contributes to the community by lending

equipment for Indian Days. Lionel is, within his own milieu, a man with authority. *Truth*'s young protagonist, Tecumseh, describes Lionel, who remains unnamed, as "an Indian guy who sort of looks like John Wayne, only not as heavy." Tecumseh's father mentions that Lionel purchased the Barn when Bursum went bankrupt, "[n]ow that's funny." However, the wall of televisions in the shape of the Map remains, now in Lionel's possession. (*Truth* 87). Lionel finds success in terms both white and Indian, a reflection of Latisha's triumphant Dead Dog Café.

Lionel starts out as a man subjugated, unconscious, "stalled" in the journey of life (Lamont-Stewart 126). He reenters the flow of the living, transformed into a subject in the process of becoming, leaving the bonds of subjugation behind. At the outset of the novel, Norma outlines what Lionel needs to do. He must leave his job at Bursum's, which is "no job for a grown man" (*GG* 56). He needs to leave Alberta alone and not harass her about marriage or children (124-5). Norma then maintains that Lionel needs to stop being "ashamed" of his family and his community and "come home," just like his uncle Eli did (62, 79). At one point during the rumination over his three mistakes, the narrator mentions that Lionel has "divided life into a series of manageable goals," including pursuing Alberta, quitting Bursum's, going back to school, and spending more time with his parents on the reserve, "maybe even go[ing] to the Sun Dance with them" (*GG* 277-8). However, these goals are discarded or dealt with only at the Sun Dance and in the denouement of the novel, when the family gathers at the site of the grandmother's cabin.

Whereas before, Lionel followed the tide of public opinion--dominant opinion--by the end of the novel he is beginning to think for himself. He is able to articulate his idea of going back to school. He expresses an interest in living in his grandmother's rebuilt cabin, representing a reconnection to the land and to his ancestors. He stands up to George Morningstar, Latisha's ex-husband and the incarnation of Custer, to protect the integrity of

the Sun Dance and his sister. He grows out of the jacket that is both George's (Custer's) and John Wayne's, but he plays the role of the Native John Wayne, preserving the values of the community against the greedy and protecting the damsel in distress. Of course, he does it rather awkwardly, but he still succeeds. He owns himself. The moment when Lionel looks at the image of himself, the Native John Wayne, superimposed on the window-framed interior of the Entertainment Barn, he is imposing the Native presence on the purveyors of false imagery. In *Truth & Bright Water*, Lionel clearly achieves a balanced hybridity. He likes films and T.V., so he takes over the Home Entertainment Barn, a Native selling to Natives, not a white guy selling the image of the Native to Natives. Lionel has modified the social script to suit himself, integrating the diverse subject-parts of himself, relieving himself of the subjugating aspect of subjectivity, redefining himself as a man, and resuming his Nativeness.

The moment of Lionel's epiphany, anticlimactic though it may seem to him, occurs simultaneously with the bursting of the dam, which restores the land to the Native characters. Chapter Two examines King's revision of the Biblical Flood Myth, one of the canonical texts performed in *Green Grass*. This sacred text leaks beyond the few pages devoted to its retelling and ultimately overwhelms the real-time outcome of the novel, a metonym for Lionel breaking out of the strictures of the split subject. Water as symbol and sign saturates the text; because the climax of the narrative involves a modern-day flood, this particular bit of storytelling has a weightier significance than the other stories King rewrites. King satirizes the story of the Flood, imbued with the sacred due to its Biblical source, as an imperialist text which has rationalized imperialism since the nascence of Western civilization. It encodes marginalizing practices that affect Native cultures and individuals indirectly but no less powerfully. In the manner and content of his interference with the sacred canonical script, King offers a suggestion of how agency, unfettered by subjection, is possible.

CHAPTER TWO

Christian Rules and Big Breasts: The Flood Myth and the Bursting Dam

> [T]hese [metafictional novels] make more blatant use, in their challenges to history and to historiography, of the techniques that have come to be considered the markers of postmodernism in fiction: autoreferentiality, intertextuality, playful self-reflexivity, parody, irony, and multiple, often contradictory, retellings of the same event. They also thematize many concerns of postcolonial literatures: the centre/margin debate; place and displacement; language, speech, and silence; written versus oral history; and multiple challenges to the hegemony of the Christian liberal-humanist worldview. (Vautier, *New* 37)

Marie Vautier, in her monograph *New World Myth*, discusses how certain contemporary Canadian writers revise canonical texts for the purpose of destabilizing the assumptions of mainstream culture transmitted through Old World myths. Through the creation of New World Myths, these writers effectively oppose imperialist nation-building while ironically and self-consciously creating a national identity of their own, imprinted by a cultural hybridity (Vautier, *New* 25, 28). King exemplifies this by employing the oral tradition and turning the imperialist social script of Noah's Flood myth into a performance, thus deconstructing the authority of the Biblical texts and the Judeo-Christian ideology it upholds.

Concurrent with Ariel Dorfman's suggestion about the mass literature of Westerns, Old World myths reinforce the status quo, whereas New World Myths disrupt it (Vautier, *New* x). The notion of a divine hierarchy contained in the story of Noah, with God, then man, then woman, and then the animals, is rendered absurd by King's act of performance, which by definition invites improvisation. Like the element of water that permeates the Flood myth of the Biblical Noah story and finds its way into the interstices of *Green Grass, Running Water*, performance is fluid. Each performance is a revision of the previous one (Thompson 99). The act of performance dismantles the boundaries, the "rules," advocated by the epitome of the imperialist written text, the Bible. King creates a metanarrative, another aspect of New World Myth discussed by Vautier (*New* 34). By performing and improvising

on social scripts, King resists the predictability of story structure and the reinforcement of the status quo.

King disrupts assumptions and cultural practices operating in the dominant culture that privilege the authority of the written word and the permanence of textual verity through the use of oral tradition techniques. Oral culture is taken to be closer to nature, which for the purposes of Western ideology, is a sign of its inferiority (Goldie 107). Furthermore, the dominant view is that the oral tradition is immaterial, impermanent, insubstantial, while the written word by its essence is valued for its irrefutable permanence. The "split between literate and non-literate is often used as the defining point for an absolute division between white self and indigene Other," because in Western ideology, "speaking has a more subjective presence than writing" (107-8). Vautier also mentions that biblical scholars eschew "the reduction of the sacred Scriptures to the mere level of myth" (*New* 42). This value system discredits the content of the oral tradition and myth, because it has no faith in transmission that does not involve the technology of writing. Meanwhile, the written word is elevated to the level of the sacred and accepted without question or analysis by virtue of the fact it is written. Writing bestows an automatic authority that resists confrontation and interference.

King employs the strategies of New World Myth together with the oral tradition to lampoon the ossified rules perpetuated by the literary canon. Vautier describes an equal "wariness" on the part of non-mainstream thinking "of biblical myths as having been an extremely strong force in shaping the traditional, inherited thought-system that previously dominated the respective literary canons" (*New* 45). By using actual documents, historical facts and other techniques these texts "problematize the past," and present their revised versions as "equal to, or superior to" the versions considered authoritative because of their adherence to empirical research and because they have written documentation (*New* 49-50).

A word has no more power written down than spoken, for, in the oral tradition, the word is everything and everywhere (Vizenor, Preface x). Historically, the performance of a story in Native culture meant that "each telling was a unique event," though the fundamentals of story remained the same (Petrone 13). The goal of Indian oratory was "to evoke multiple meanings" with complex figures of speech (Petrone 27). Victor Turner explains that, in performance, as in ritual, "[t]he 'same' message in different media is really a set of subtly variant messages, each medium contributing its own generic message to the message conveyed through it" (23-4). Each ritual, or performance, has a temporal structure with variable features which allow for spontaneous invention and improvisation (Turner 26). Oral literature by its very nature resists fixed meanings, so "as a consequence, narratives of more recent origin have adapted and absorbed European folktales, Christian legends, historical accounts, contemporary reserve and urban stories and jokes" (Petrone 17). Sharon Bailey observes of King's play with the traditional Noah story that "[t]he oral narrative strand pokes fun at what becomes the inflexibility of written texts and the superiority of the more plastic oral storytelling technique" (43). By privileging the values encoded in oral performance, King decentres the ideology of civilization.

In the oral tradition, myths and the word contain truth, which is recreated and reified with each revision, each performance. As the text comes to life through performance, it is experienced as truth, not merely memorized, or taken on "faith:" "[the] oral text can serve as a metalanguage which is capable of conveying the true nature of reality which the written text is unable to represent" (Bailey 46). Goldie analyzes white literature in search of orality, and reports that most white texts perceive that writing fails to encapsulate orality: "[Orality] has a power which cannot be contained by [the written]" (122). King overrides these attempts by successfully appropriating a written text for use in an oral-style performance.

Anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of liminality analyzes performance, including storytelling, as a ritual act. *Limen* literally means threshold (Turner 75). For Turner, the alterior time and space created in ritual and performance acts as a threshold between different worlds and states of consciousness. Boundaries are dissolved in the ritual space so that issues of interest to the collective can be explored and resolved: "liminality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and commonsense systems into their components and 'play' with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception" (Turner 25).

Both ritual and performance are acts of reflexivity, because the effect of observing or participating in the performances is to know oneself better; therefore ritual functions on the socio-cultural as well as at the individual level (Turner 81).[1] Bailey explains this function: "[r]epeated telling, even at the risk of never reaching the truth or finally getting it right, assures the relevance of the story to the immediate circumstances" (50). Hutcheon, in her discussion of the semantics of irony, claims that meaning-making is dependant on context (*Irony's* 57). King makes use of the story cycles of the oral tradition, for the four mythological characters tell and retell the story of creation: the last line of the novel is the beginning of the next cycle of the same story (*GG* 431). King uses the liminal space of the story to challenge and explore ideas of interest to the Native collective, as well as to mainstream society.

A novel influenced by the oral tradition therefore engages its audience in the same way a performance does (Jahner 158). Turner relates the act of performance to the written text by insisting on the ways in which the latter is recreated, re-experienced, at each reading. In addition, he suggests that written texts can also reveal "what Geertz has called metasocial

[1] Turner states that the reflexive experience of the performance splits the self "up the middle," because the person is both the subject and the object of the performance (25).

commentary" (Turner 87). In addition to deconstructing Old World myths as absolute truth, New World Myths oppose the mainstream mandates of "homogenization and universality" (Vautier, *New* 13). Turner, from his perspective, sees ritual, and by extension performance, as an act of resistance to "regularization" (79). Therefore, it is King's rereading that causes the alteration to the story of Noah (Bailey 50). In a sense, King does not rewrite the Noah story so much as reveal the impact of its ideology on the indigenous peoples of North America.

Another aspect of oral literature is the presence of irony. In the oral tradition, the categories "sacred" and "profane" do not exist (Petrone 3-7; Vangen 199). In Judeo-Christian culture, the profane is marketable and the sacred untouchable. Irony, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, is a performative happening because of the necessity of an engaged audience (*Irony's* 123). In order for the irony to be effective, the audience must be made up of members of the "discursive communities" drawn upon to create the irony. By using a known story, the condition of dramatic irony is built in (*Irony's* 17-8).[2] This kind of foreshadowing, according to Jarold Ramsey, is the most frequent narrative strategy in Indian myth ("From" 31). For example, the irony in King's novel relies on the reader's knowledge of the story of Noah and/or on the familiarity with Changing Woman and the Native Flood myths. His purpose, however, is to negate the precepts of Judeo-Christian ideology contained within the original Biblical text.

The purpose of irony is to engage the audience in the performance. As the audience, and therefore the individual, undergoes a change, society is affected (Turner 22). The theory is also endorsed by Elaine Jahner, who asserts that that artistic performance encodes moral and cultural heritage: "The precise forms of the past are reminders that the very act of presenting or participating in the performance of any particular tradition was an enactment

[2] Hutcheon refers to King to support her contention that irony lends humour its status as a survival tool (*Irony's* 26).

and interpretation of values, achieving the transformation of those values into personal ideals" (160). King transmits cultural knowledge to help strengthen tribal identity and continuity in a written performance that makes the reader an active participant through an ironic use of familiar terms, figures, and stories. On this "shifting ground," King and other New World Myth writers, "question the past in the present and carry out their original investigations of myth, place, and identity" (Vautier, *New* 23). By incurring the discursive signs of the Flood myth, first in a revision of the myth itself, then in the climax of the real-time narrative when the dam breaks, Native agency is restored over its land, its peoples, its cultures, and its names. As Jahner explains: "for *where* one is shapes a fundamental relationship between self and land that, in turn, leads to a particular way of formulating that relationship in language that corresponds to the matching of self and place" (165). Ramsey calls the act of rewriting a Biblical story "imaginative sabotage" ("Ti-Jean" 210), because in the space created by magical realism, the very premise of dominant thought-systems are blown wide open (Vautier, *New* 20-1). The impact of the ideology transmitted through the Noah story and other imperialistically coded texts is reversed as balance in the natural world of the novel is restored. One of the key methods employed by King is the reversal of point of view.

In King's version of the Flood myth, mythological Changing Woman performs the story, while her male persona, Ishmael, named for the narrator of that other great tale of domination, *Moby Dick*, relates the story. This intertextual narrator is another characteristic of New World Myth:

> [T]he narrators instill a tension between Old World myths and their particular versions of New World Myth. They do this by actively working at breaking down the barriers between myth and history or fiction and by deliberately blurring the boundaries between what constitutes a myth and what does not. (Vautier, *New* 51)

Because of the Native refusal to stick with the script, the performance revises the story, eliminates limitations, barriers, boundaries. While the dominant ideology privileges the male and the written text, King privileges the female and the oral experience of the text that provides the opportunity for metasocial commentary and an evaluative irony.

To better understand how King manipulates the myth, a close reading of the original story of Noah is necessary. In the Genesis version of the Noah story, the tone in which the story is recounted resounds with authority and resists question. We are repeatedly told that Noah is righteous, just, the "comfort" of his family, and presumably of his God. We are assured that humanity is wiped out because "the wickedness of man [is] great in the earth, and . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil continually" (Gen 6.5). God wants to destroy his creation because it is "corrupt before God; and the earth [is] filled with violence," and because "[a]ll flesh ha[s] corrupted his way upon the earth" (6.11-12). Thrice it is repeated and reinforced that the coming obliteration of humanity save for one family is deserved and necessary. God repents when he sees the evil his creation has perpetuated. The metonym of "flesh" appears more than once to connote this creation (6.12,6.17). Therefore one might deduce that the corruption is of the flesh, lechery for instance. Above this corruption rises the figure of Noah.

Noah, whose name means "comfort," is characterized as "righteous" throughout the text (Gen 5.29). Because Noah is descended from Adam, God's original creation, he is chosen to propagate the race of man and to steward the representative animals in the *tabula rasa* of a postdiluvian world. He has "found grace in the eyes of the Lord." However, Noah's true significance seems to lie in his very ability to propagate. First, he is presented after a lengthy list of "begats." Then the importance of having "fair" wives to marry is mentioned (6.2), then Noah's "generations:" "[t]hese are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (6.9). So in actual fact, by the

pairing and juxtaposition of these two qualities, "just" and "perfect in his generations," Noah is aligned with God. The significance of lineage is reinforced by the repetition of the fact that Noah has three sons (5.32,6.10), as well as by the proclamation of the covenant which God "establishes" with Noah: "[b]ut with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee" (6.18). Noah is a breeder, as are the animals chosen to come aboard.

Once the groundwork has been laid in the text for a) the absolute corruption of humanity at this time, and b) the righteousness and breeding potential of Noah and family, the flood is introduced. God announces that he will "bring a flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die" (Gen 6.17). Again, God's agenda is repeated: "every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth" (7.4). The reader is saturated by the immensity of the project: all living matter is to be destroyed. The flood itself is described as an absolute and total upheaval: "all the foundations of the great deep [are] broken up, and the windows of heaven [are] opened" (7.11). Thrice is the increase of water described in wave-like rhythm (7.17-19); thrice is the death and obliteration of the "flesh" repeated (7.21-23).

Noah obeys all of God's commands without question, just as the reader is led to an acceptance of the tale. As a reward, Noah and his sons are told that they will "[b]e fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (Gen 9.1). Their sovereignty over the animals is made clear, and it is a reign of "fear" and of "dread." The covenant is reestablished; their colonizing activities, husbandry, the vineyard, begin. There is an element of exemplar in the story of Noah, for Noah goes on to get drunk from the wine from his vineyard, and to pass out with no clothes on, not very righteous behaviour. However, within the actual story of the building of the ark and the flood, Noah is consistently described as righteous, and until we

reach Chapter Nine, we are given no reason to doubt these assertions, or to question his preservation to the exclusion of everyone else.

The ideology transmitted through Noah's story privileges authority, patriarchy, the written word, and the imperialist agenda. For a minority culture with different values and gender definitions, texts conveying this ideology have a damaging trickle-down effect. King dismantles the patriarchal apparatus by injecting a female mythological character from Native creation myths, as well as talking animals, and a lecherous Noah whose only imperative is to consummate his lust. The absent God and very present Changing Woman illustrate a basic opposition between the two cosmologies. In Christianity, God and humans are separate, whereas "Indian cultures affirm that sacred beings inhabit the same space as humans . . . frequent interchanges with them form a necessary part of both individual and tribal experience" (Allen qtd. in Donaldson 31-2).[3] Whereas Noah in the Bible is lent authority as divine representative on Earth because of his covenant with God, King depicts a Noah lost at sea without a direct link to God. Noah is not righteous; rather, his rules are "self-serving" (Linton 226). His only goal is to propagate, which highlights the nation-building and land-settling mandate of imperialism. This same mandate is satirized again and again in the real-time narrative of *Green Grass*. The Native mythological characters perform within the stories but tell the stories as male imperialist counterparts, emphasizing the arbitrary designations "myth" and "truth." In addition, the superiority attributed to male writers is undercut because the performance disrupts the social script encoded in the written text, thereby dismantling the boundaries established in the spirit of containment.

This free, uninhibited style of Native storytelling challenges the ideology of containment encoded in the Flood myth while criticizing the unqualified acceptance of

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[3] Paula Gunn Allen, *Grandmothers of the Light* (Boston: Beacon, 1991), 6-7.

the written word. King employs the authoritarian character of Noah as a metonym for the authority of the written word in order to suggest that the story of the Flood is an imperialist text. This text justifies the dominance of one man over another, over women, over animals, because it aligns one man with the power of God. King's argument, revealed by the interchanges between the "I" narrator and Coyote, is that the Bible is just a book (*GG* 349). With reference to Bhabha, Laura E. Donaldson sees the rewritten text as a site of resistance. In her discussion of intertextuality, myth, and hybridity in *Green Grass*, Donaldson reveals that "[e]arly Euramerican accounts positioned Native Americans as descendants of Noah's disgraced and exiled son, Ham" (29). Donaldson (34) and Bailey (44) find that King creates a hybrid text, drawing on many different cultures in order to successfully resist the one authoritative text. In Donaldson's words, King's version of the Flood myth "parodies and resists the way dominant Christian stories have too often been used" (34). King deconstructs the signs accepted in Judeo-Christian ideology.[4]

The King version plays on the contrasts between Christian and Native myths.[5] Thomas Matchie and Brett Larson explain that Christian myths have a linear and hierarchical structure based on "a sinful act of some kind that leads to a struggle with evil culminating in a final redemptive action by a saviour." Native myths do not begin *ex nihilo*, as the Christian myths do, nor do humans dominate the earth and its flora and fauna. Instead, the world starts with water and earth, all entities are equal, and "creation is an on-going act, both physical and spiritual, in which the purpose is to establish harmony among all natural forces" (158). The retelling of the story of Noah becomes a

[4] Flood myths exist in the Native tradition as well; see Petrone 17.
[5] King's complete Noah story appears in *Green Grass* 144-8.

parody that draws us away from the authoritarian tone and values imbued in the Biblical version, and invites the reader to question. As Linda Lamont-Stewart asserts in her analysis of the text, this rewriting "challenge[s] the authoritarian ideology of the Judaeo-Christian tradition which is the foundation of Western culture" (116). The story as presented in the novel is separated into two parts, with a great deal of real-time action in between. None of the characters involved in the story take themselves seriously, except for Noah, who is so ridiculous that he acts as his own straight man, eliciting laughter from the reader.

The character of Noah in this version is anything but righteous and just, and more like the naked drunkard we encounter in Chapter Nine of Genesis. Noah blames his poop-ridden situation on Eve, who "sinned, you know." Donaldson refers to Augustine's statement that the punishment for disobedience in Eden is unruly genitals, another irony (35). Noah insists that Changing Woman stop talking to the animals since "[t]his is a Christian ship. Animals don't talk. We got rules." He names himself only when he thinks Changing Woman is a "gift from heaven," a new wife. Obviously, in this version of the story, Noah and God are not in close dialogue. Noah is lecherous, reducing women to their breasts, a common dominant-culture synecdoche. Changing Woman is a "gift," a possession. His language is anything but respectful: "Lemme see your breasts ... I like women with big breasts. I hope God remembered that" (*GG* 145). God becomes some kind of pimp trading in another kind of commodity, that of the female body. Simultaneously, King is also satirizing the categorization of the signs "body," "feminine" and "commodity" in the centre/margin or European/Native binary. In privileging the body/feminine, King upturns the entire value system.

Bailey locates the origin of Noah's reasoning to the Christian precept announced in *Corinthians* that a woman's duty is to be pleasing to her husband; ergo, if the husband desires big breasts, it is the wife's duty to comply (47). In contrast to the Christian attitude toward

women, Changing Woman actually represents Mother Earth in Navajo and Apache mythologies, and thus "engenders respect toward women," which compounds the irony (Donaldson 37). Every time Noah perceives Changing Woman to be undermining his authority, he uses Christian rules as the excuse for his rebuke. Self-interest is the motivation for his maintenance of the rules, or as Bailey puts it, "cultural value is given the gloss of religious dogma" (48). However, his lechery leads him to fall in the poop, a moral indictment wrapped in slapstick. Changing Woman escapes by dancing away (*GG* 146); this dancing smacks of the magical, for Coyote influences events by dancing (416), and the men and women of the Sun Dance participate in the ritual by dancing (137, 387).

The procreative imperative is also highlighted in King's version, but with dire results. As opposed to the Biblical Noah who celebrates finding land because it means the beginning of a new world settled and ruled over by his progeny, King's Noah celebrates finding land because it means he can "procreate" with Changing Woman. His shout, "[t]ime for procreating!" signals the continuation of his sexual demands on Changing Woman; when they land, Noah proceeds to chase Changing Woman around the beach. The animals, who possess voices and opinions, bet on who will win. When Noah tires, having failed to catch Changing Woman, "that one has to sit down. Well, this certainly is a mystery, he says." Then he announces, "I better pray" (*GG* 146). The ritual is made ridiculous, because the mystery is ridiculous. The reader is forced to question the nature of this absent God who does not speak to Noah, who has not sent him any gift from heaven, who at the very least leaves Noah to assert "Christian rules" in defense of his lechery. The procreative imperative is deflated, like Old Coyote, by this turn of events.

Old Coyote is flattened by Christian rules as a metonym for old Native ways and beliefs, and Natives themselves. According to Old Coyote, Noah dumped his wife and children overboard when they championed Old Coyote and "us," presumably the animals and

their belief system(s), thus bungling the whole point of the enterprise in the Genesis version. This version aligns the wife and children with the values Old Coyote and "us" espouse; they are described as friends. Noah is not thinking of fulfilling his duty as procreator; he is seeking the pleasures of the flesh, the sin which motivated the Flood in the first place. When rest time is over, Noah is up and about shouting his mating call. As Old Coyote says, "Noah has these rules. The first rule is Thou Shalt Have Big Breasts" (*GG* 147). The commandments, the expression of the absolutism in Judeo-Christian belief and the underpinning of the European patriarchal system inculcated in North America, are put to question again and again, with humour.[6]

King's Noah is a caricature of the original, which makes his insistence on the rules all the more absurd. At first, Noah is described as a "little man with a filthy beard" who "jumps out of the poop at the front of the canoe" and begins to chase Changing Woman out of a sense of lecherous entitlement. Even the seriousness of Changing Woman's predicament is undercut by Coyote's ridiculous questions. We are reminded that this is a story, and therefore, as in postmodernism or Native storytelling, cannot be taken as absolute truth. Repetition, a common device in oral storytelling, is in operation in this text as well: poop, Christian rules, the visual picture of Noah falling in the poop, all are repeated (*GG* 144-8).

Another stereotype of the indigene King overturns is the idea of the Native's "naturalness." Goldie explains that "[s]catological and sexual language simply represents one more way in which orality transmits natural truth" (120). Instead of hypnotizing the reader into compliance, as is the effect of repetition in Genesis, the repetition of scatological and other terms serves to highlight the comedy of the situation, amplifying the

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[6] King describes himself as "a serious writer who uses comedy as a strategy;" humour carries the message more effectively than a didactic approach (Reading). Vizenor also uses satire and humour as a "weapon;" see Velie 136.

subversion of the sacred text. When Changing Woman, the champion of change, the rebel, and from the Christian standpoint, the heretic, proclaims the need to "get rid of those rules"--the mandate of the novel altogether--and continues to elude Noah's grasp after rest time and praying, Noah gets angry and stops:

> No point in having rules if some people don't obey them, says Noah. And he loads all the animals back in the canoe and sails away.
>
> . . . .
>
> 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. (*GG* 147-8)

Contrapuntal to the repetition of the word "poop" is the repetition of the word "Christian." The emphasis brings the seemingly opposing values of these two words into collusion. Noah does not tolerate this disrespect. Instead of questioning the rules, Noah eliminates everything that does not fit their paradigm, whereas the Native tradition includes all word forms and life forms in its cosmology.

Since Changing Woman is the heroine of the story, the reader's allegiance is with her. The reader encounters Noah as an outsider to his story instead of as a participant or self-interested descendent reading about his/her roots. It is Changing Woman's curiosity that plunges her and us into the Noah story. Because Changing Woman is the representative of the Native viewpoint, traditionally the outside position, we enter the story from the outside; we are situated within the Native viewpoint. While from up above, in her perch in the sky, the canoe--surrounded by the pervasive water--looks big and white and like "a party," up close it is full of "poop" (*GG* 144), "a deliberate flouting of decorum" which undercuts the sanctity of the traditional story (Rabillard 19). Changing Woman lands on Old Coyote, who gets flat and makes a scatological noise. King makes use of the scatology, not to characterize

the naturalness, but as a tool of irony.[7] This noisy disruption abets the more profound reversal of perspective.

As the heroine, Changing Woman performs the story. From a white perspective, being inside the story is the inferior position, but from the Native perspective, to participate in the story, to inhabit and change it, is imperative. Ishmael, a male character's name chosen from the literary canon of imperialist texts, tells the story of this female character. However, in the story, it is the female character with agency who questions the story, criticizing and resisting Noah and the rules. The whole scene is watched by Coyote and "I" as entertainment, instructional entertainment, but entertainment nevertheless. Noah, the righteous, is made uncomfortable; robbed of authority and dignity, he is now a commodity himself. Patricia Linton relates the rules of the Noah story to the effects this same assumed authority has on the characters in real-time:

> In transcendent space, biblical mythology reflects the rule-making authority of the male deity and patriarchs like Noah. In the world of human activity, Native characters find that the rule-making authority of the dominant culture always works against them, exerting constant pressure to force them to yield to the interests of the Euro-American majority. . . . (225)

Changing Woman has power because she is invested with authority and identity by a different code. She lives a social script that allows for improvisation, revision, and freedom from gender and textual limitations. Noah tries to exert authority by trapping Changing Woman within the confines of a name, a role, a title, and to subject her by this name. The language he uses to interpellate her is intended to define and limit the subject. Because of her code, founded in Native cosmology, Changing Woman is able to resist the process of *assujetissement* (Butler 5). This resistance is similar to the female characters in the real-time novel and in opposition to the alienated male characters.

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[7] For a more in-depth discussion of the assumptions of Native naturalness, see Goldie 119-20. On the use of scatology to satirize these assumptions, see Rabillard 7, 12.

Free from the limitations of Noah's language, Changing Woman is free of his authority. Changing Woman rejects Noah's words, assumptions, Christian social script and hierarchy--his "cultural chauvinism" (Petrone 3). She does not respond within the role suggested by the interpellation of Christian (Noah's) authority (Butler 86). She is an "autonomous," "coherent" subject independent of any reference or relationship to "authority." Though Noah tries to enact his power on Changing Woman's body, she successfully dances away from his grasp. Therefore, Changing Woman also resists the interiority of subjection. Her idea of herself and her identity are presented *a priori*, or at least *a priori* to the Noah story. This identity remains consistent throughout the story, despite Noah's attempt to colonize, subject, and claim. Noah's voice is meant to have God-like power; however, Changing Woman successfully resists the limitations of a subjectivity formed through interpellation (Butler 110). Coleman's refraction is therefore resisted by the female mythological characters who inhabit the space of story and real-time simultaneously, and without loss of face or power. The mythological women, similar to the women in the real-time of the novel, "feel neither imposed upon nor threatened by the bookish reality to which other characters subject them" (Bailey 48). By playing with ideas of gender and sexuality, King "destabilize[s] the system of binary logic upon which a variety of patriarchal and imperialist structures of power and authority are founded" (Lamont-Stewart 116). The attributes of oral performance provide the vehicle for this destabilization.

The "oral" performance of the tale ruptures the absolute stance and authority of the Biblical text. Coyote and Ishmael keep laughing, and the antics continue. The Native representatives are more tolerant. Both Old and New Coyote can allow that there is a "sense" to the Noah side of things. This expansiveness is all the more potent since it includes a system of exclusivity that within the story provides a real threat to the Coyote cosmology. The authority of the tale itself is constantly being challenged by digressions between the "I"

and Coyote. As opposed to the omniscient narrator of the Genesis version, which parallels the omniscience of the God involved in the story, the King version is told from one viewpoint, Ishmael's, and is announced as such. Whereas in the Bible version we are told the exact measurements of the ark and of time, the time given in the King version for the length of the journey is a month (*GG* 146). This vagueness is more in keeping with the oral tradition, and again, an indication that neither the story nor the storyteller is sharing the gospel truth. The relationship with animals is different, since Changing Woman speaks to them as equals, raising Noah's ire. The hierarchy of three in the Biblical version is replaced by the recurrence of the number four, four tellers, four stories, four elements, four women characters and four males characters, who are all more or less on an equal footing. In this version, God does not even make an appearance. The abhorrence of flesh asserted in Genesis is reverted to an obsession with breasts. The Biblical importance of family and procreation is subverted by the report that Noah threw his family overboard because they favoured Coyote *et al.* and would not follow Christian rules, which the reader realizes means Noah's rules. Whereas the recovery of land is the motivating factor in Genesis--the attainment of what could be a new Eden in a world washed clean--the canoe, the symbol of the preservation of the just and righteous, is full of poop. What has been wiped out in King's version are the good people, the people who are friends with Coyote and the animals, and what is kept is the excrement of these values and this ideology. The attainment of land in this version merely provides Noah with the opportunity to further pursue Changing Woman, in contrast to the Biblical agenda of founding a new and pure world. As a result, the ideology behind the moral imperative comes under question.

This rewritten text has an impact on the real-time narrative, for, in keeping with the oral tradition, there is no real separation between the mythological and the everyday. In the liminal space of play established by the subversive New World Myth version of the Flood,

the dominant system in real-time is disrupted and the consequences clearly favour the Native view of land, treaty rights, family, community, and gender.

The flood that occurs within the real-time narrative of *Green Grass* impacts the white technology--the dam--imposed on land which is the birthright of the Natives (Horne 266). The Earthquake, actually the fracturing of the dam, occurs because of Coyote's meddling. Though it is previously revealed that the dam is not well-constructed--it is starting to crack (*GG* 136)--the four elders find out that Coyote has been dancing and singing again (416), which in the Native cosmology is how power is exercised (Petrone 18-9; Donaldson 39; Goldie 118). The presence of Coyote displaces the Christian precept of Absolute Truth (Bailey 46). Coyote is not merely the "wily but reckless, self-seeking Trickster" but a "transformer" (Ramsey, "From" 29). Coyote is the liminal force by which the text is made pliable; he is "the shapeshifter who mediates between man and nature, man and deity, who challenges us to reimagine who we are, who balances the world with laughter" (Owens 152).[8] The four old Indians are not omniscient and omnipotent like the Judeo-Christian God in that they cannot control natural forces, but Coyote can (Lamont-Stewart 126-7). King resists the exploitation of Native culture by white novelists in search of mystery and by tourists like George Morningstar so as to reclaim the mystical power of music and song for the Native people. Simultaneously, he plays and counteracts images of the indigene in the liminal space of the story. The end of the dam represents a reassertion of Native hegemony.

The dam functions as a metonym for the imperialist agenda; its destruction parallels the dismantling of this agenda throughout the novel and the effect this has on the real-time characters. Hawkeye, whose name is not Indian but "sounds like a name for a white person who wants to be Indian" (*GG* 395), says that the dam does not look like an Indian dam, and

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[8] Novelists Gerald Vizenor and Louise Erdrich also feature the trickster and employ pliable trickster narrative techniques; see Smith 260; Velie 136.

the lake does not look like an Indian lake (409). Linton suggests that Eli's story shows that the Natives are never consulted about "their" dam (Stratton 93), showing "the one-sidedness of Western law" (Linton 225). However, the diction used to describe the flood, borrowing heavily from the titles of postcolonial novels by Chinua Achebe and Timothy Findley, indicates that powerful forces are at work: "beneath the power and the motion there was a more ominous sound of things giving way, of things falling apart," "a sudden shifting, a sideways turning, a flexing . . ." "[a]nd the dam gave way, and the water and the cars tumbled over the edge of the world." As the dominating structure corrodes, the balance of power shifts to the Natives, restoring the water and the order of things to their natural course (*GG* 414).

In addition, the "poop" of dominant ideology is washed away in the destruction of the dam. Eli mentions to Clifton, the dam's engineer, that the dam looks like a toilet (*GG* 136). The image of the overflowing toilet recurs in the lady's washroom at the Dead Dog Café (135). The flooding of the dam flushes away the excrement derived from the mistaken ideology which stems the flow of life. The dam is an image of the dissolution of the boundaries imposed on the Natives, both culturally and territorially: "That performative quality . . . is figured in the water . . . a fluidity that seeps through boundaries, confounds systems, and allows new configurations to emerge and mutate" (Gray 121). The leitmotif of water recurs throughout the novel as puddles and leakages that accumulate, ultimately resulting in the flood at the end of the novel (Gray 124-6). This leakage represents the inclusiveness of the Native cosmology which does not acknowledge boundaries, binaries, opposites, or conflicting definitions.

The point of the flood in Genesis is to wipe out all the mistakes, and clean the slate. In *Green Grass*, the flood at the end of the novel wipes away the dam and dismantles the cabin, as well as drowning Lionel's uncle Eli (420). Dam engineer Cliff Sifton's initial threat

that the cabin will turn into an ark has come true, but with results that favour the Native cause and destroy the dam. Rather than Eli being redundant, as Clifton claims, it is Clifton and his dam that are irrelevant (*GG* 141-2). What the flood dissipates is the polarized position of the interests of the dam against Eli, whom Lamont-Stewart sees as the "chief figure of resistance to white power and authority in the text" (128). The ambiguity of the ending and the limited powers of the four trickster figures present a cosmology based not on absolute authority, but on balance. The old Indians "fix" some things, but mess up other things. The female creator-figures, though not absolutely powerful, can perform small miracles (Lamont-Stewart 126). Both the dam and Eli are destroyed, and certainly, in the case of Eli, that is a tragedy. However, as his sister Norma says, "he had a good life, and he lived it right." Most importantly for her, and the values she represents, Eli "came home" (*GG* 420). The continuity of the collective, not the individual, is preserved.

Norma, as the present matriarch of the family, does not waste time in mourning. Eli may be gone, but the cabin, pieces intact, and the family remain triumphant: "the Stands Alone house, built log by log with his mother's hands, represents not only his maternal and cultural heritage but also the only hope of stopping perhaps the most effective technology yet developed for the genocidal annihilation of Native cultures" (Donaldson 39). When Charlie comments at the site of the cabin wreckage that there's "[n]ot much left," Norma responds, "Everything's still here" (*GG* 421). It is not just the river that is "slowly coming back to life," and ensuring the continuity of the Sun Dance by bringing nutrients to the essential cottonwood trees (376), nor is it simply the potential rebuilding of the cabin, the beams of which are still buried under soot and sand. The family is also resuscitated, coming together to incorporate new members, such as Alberta, as well as absentee members, like Lionel. Charlie is going to L.A. to be reunited with his estranged father, who is "a big star again"

(421), disassociating himself from his sleazy and anti-Native law practice. The cabin provides the foundation for the reassertion of Native relationship to the land.

The cabin, built by hand by Lionel's grandmother, has become family myth. However, the claim is not justified by colonialism; rather, there is a sense of returning home to the land. Each member of the family wants to spend time in the cabin. The major obstacle obliterated by the flood is the outside interference with the family's connection to the land, which "enables the Blackfoot to resist governmental control of their lives and to reclaim their homeland," by the "washing away of Columbus's colonial heritage" (Donaldson 39-40). The family reclaims the posts that are now embedded in the ground. Norma plants her stick in the earth to claim the point of beginning: "[w]e'll start here." After his credulity at the project passes, and after being given an ultimatum between helping and selling televisions, Lionel chooses to help, volunteers to live in the cabin "like Eli" (*GG* 423). He also voices the possibility that he might return to school, something that he has thought about throughout the novel but never vocalized.[9]

The impression conveyed is that this is a positive, forward-moving action for a character who has been inert and blind. Stratton remarks that "Lionel, having rediscovered a sense of place, begins the process of remapping an identity and of locating a space of resistance and freedom" (397). Now that he has reconnected to his family, tradition and the land of his ancestor(s), Lionel can consider reentering the University, the institution of the mainstream culture (*GG* 424). The values of Native culture, ancestors, accessible history, the active present, family, community, and a connection to the land, are exemplified in the resolution of the real-time action.

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[9] The act of vocalization is key. In First Nations cosmology, the voice wields incredible power. See Chapter Three; Godard & Vevaina 10, 91; Jahner 157-8; Peters 78; Petrone 10; Thompson 91.

Once this resolution occurs, the larger mythological scheme is reiterated within the story cycles of the narrator and Coyote. The cycle of nature, the story cycle, the circle, and the Sun Dance represent the Native value of inclusion and they also resist containment (*GG* 388). The restoration of the natural order is represented by the water "roll[ing] on as it had for eternity" (415) and "the river coming slowly back to life" (421). The last line of the novel is the beginning of the story of the water (431). We are reminded that God is contained within Coyote's dreams, and the conception of Jesus and the first flood, major events of European civilization, are caused either by Coyote's dreams or by his singing and dancing. Hawkeye comments on both these events; regarding the flood, Hawkeye points out that "we [the four figures] had to start all over again." Regarding Jesus' allegedly miraculous birth, Hawkeye comments that "[w]e haven't straightened *that* mess out yet" (416). The Judeo-Christian God is actually robbed of his agency, since Coyote and the four characters are, according to the novel, responsible for events habitually attributed to God. The whole of Christianity and its cultural products are summed up by the derogatory term, "mess," a pun with "poop." None of the pivotal events in the Judeo-Christian civilization can be accepted on faith as solid or secure; all are arbitrary and the product of a "mischievous" and "irresponsible" trickster figure (Lamont-Stewart 126). The containing discourse of the colonial agenda is in turn contained within the larger inclusive practices of traditions that were excluded from the central belief practices. They were located outside the centre, not as a margin, but as an enveloping circle. King not only subverts the central practices, but the mode of analysis posited within the centre/margin discourse.

The crisis of masculinity depicted in *Green Grass* is foregrounded by King's disruption of these canonical texts. As Vautier explains, the "[t]extual blurring of fiction, history, and myth frequently provokes a certain malaise" (Vautier, *New* 54). The ultimate destruction of the dam in the real-time narrative parallels the revision of the Western film

which disrupts the conflict between Indians and the perenially victorious cowboys. The novel attempts to free male characters from the pointless self-justifying rules of Judeo-Christian culture. While the government and the Duplessis firm justify the building of the dam as being beneficial to the Indians, the truth is that the dam would have been better built elsewhere, and that the Natives are beings deprived of land and sovereignty by the dam's very presence (*GG* 110-1). It is Noah's attitude of "Christian rules" on a large scale. With the eruption of the dam, Eli preserves the integrity of his homeland and ancestors, makes resistance possible, and acts as a model for Lionel, fulfilling his role as uncle by transmitting Norma's message to Lionel: "We need the young people to stay home, Eli. Figured you could tell him about that. . . . We've been here for thousands of years." (287). Charlie is divested of his role as token Indian in a suit and is freed to reconnect with his father. Though Amos never reappears, he is resuscitated by Alberta's memory. His disappearance in a puddle suggests that he too is alive somewhere in liminal space. Lionel is on the road to agency, with a pit stop at his ancestor's cabin; he is reconnected to the land and to his family. King successfully shows that the conservative Canadian values of Land, Order, and Good Government are excuses for regularization and shows what land, order, and good government mean in Native terms.

In the original Genesis story, Noah operates as a representative of Judeo-Christian values, the epitome of the just. In King's version, Noah remains a representative of the patriarchy based on these values; however, he is a representative of all that is negative: self-interest, exclusion, obliteration, lechery, exploitation. Noah is contained within the story told from Changing Woman's perspective. His pretence of authority backfires and is made to look ridiculous. Changing Woman's perspective is bigger, so it contains the limited worldview of Noah as well as a broader knowledge of how the universe works. King draws the reader outside the cosmology of the Bible in order to question the position of absolute authority. He

does this by employing humour and an oral style in stark contrast to the formal tone of the King James Bible, by splitting the story in two parts, and by including digressive discussions between the "I" and Coyote. As readers, we are implicated from multiple perspectives: as the descendants of Noah, as audience to Coyote's questions and to the (oral) storytelling, as readers of a text, and as participants in either set of practices being discussed. We are invited to question the assumptions that have been thrust upon us, and are left with the choice to drown or to laugh.

In keeping with Native storytelling attitudes, the sacred can be profaned, and the profane can be elevated to the level of the sacred. King does not limit his attacks to the sacred texts of the Western canon. Chapter Three examines how King exposes the disastrous effects of seemingly innocuous pop icons marketed as role models. He dramatizes the manner in which images of the indigene are commodified in mainstream culture and packaged as "authentic." Pop culture texts, such as the Lone Ranger trademark, combine the pop icon/role model and "authentic" Indian, and thereby perpetuate Western ideology in a more visible but no less odious way than the sacred and/or canonical texts. To release the subjected male characters of the novel, Lionel as the John Wayne acolyte in particular, King infiltrates the media that carry these harmful images and ruptures the assumptions they sell.

CHAPTER THREE

Unmasked: The Lone Ranger Beyond the Frame

> How Bursum loved his Westerns, Lionel thought. Every one was the same as the others. Predictable. Cowboys looked like cowboys. Indians looked like Indians. The chief in this one was a tall man on a black horse. He was naked to the waist. His long black hair was hanging loose and tied around his head with a leather band. It was his eyes that got you and that great nose.
>
> Lionel didn't have a great nose like that and he had always thought he looked more like John Wayne. (*GG* 318)

The image of the Indian in popular culture affects the way mainstream society views and values Native individuals and cultures. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the male characters suffer from these images in a spectrum of ways. The images of Natives in the dominant imaginary include the inarticulate subaltern Tonto from the *Lone Ranger* television series, the doomed noble savage of the Western novels, and the enemy warrior--played by Charlie's father Portland--who threatens Western expansion and Native annihilation in Western-genre films like *The Mysterious Warrior*, described in the quotation above. In a performative revision of the film at Bill Bursum's Home Entertainment Barn on Lionel's fortieth birthday, King simultaneously identifies and overturns the effect that the dominant culture's skewed gaze has on the subjectivity of his male characters. Through his characters, as well as through authorial commentary, King shows how resistance to the images transmitted by the popular scripts of Westerns, both films and novels, is possible.

Lionel's identification with the Lone Ranger/John Wayne cowboy image has arrested his development in a number of areas, resulting in his alienation from the reserve, his family, and himself. As a child at the outset of the identification process, Lionel is offered many First Nations role models by his father Harley, whose identity is firmly rooted in his community:

> By the time Lionel was six, he knew what he wanted to be.
>
> John Wayne.
>
> Not the actor, but the character. Not the man, but the hero. The John Wayne who cleaned up cattle towns and made them safe for decent folk. The John Wayne who shot guns out of the hands of outlaws. The John Wayne who saved stagecoaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks (*GG* 241).

Lionel's father tells him to "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?" Nevertheless, Lionel rejects positive First Nations role models in favour of that which he can never be: a cowboy. In terms of Dvorak's vestimentary code, the falseness and cheapness of the image to which Lionel subscribes is represented by the John Wayne ring he mail orders which breaks when he shows it off to Charlie. The relation of the event is another manifestation of Lionel's failure pattern; in addition to revealing the degree to which Lionel is subjected to this image, the memory also reveals the failure of the image to be authentic. On the morning of his birthday, when this memory is related, Lionel decides to walk to work. His reasoning is still situated in the subjected consciousness. He thinks that walking would be "a good way to start his new life. That's what you did when you began again. That's what John Wayne would do" (*GG* 241-43). Only at the viewing of the film at Bursum's does the image of John Wayne lose its grasp on his sense of self.

The subjection results in an abnegation of self. Usually, when Lionel walks into the bathroom in the morning, he does not look at himself. He feels that "[l]ife . . . had become embarrassing. His job was embarrassing. His gold blazer was embarrassing. His car was embarrassing." This embarrassment is reflected in his face; by refusing to look at himself, Lionel refuses to examine himself and his life honestly: "He had gotten into the habit of not turning the bathroom light on in the mornings. It hurt his eyes, but mostly he did not want to look at what he had become--middle aged [sic], overweight, unsuccessful." Obviously, the face in the mirror is not the face of a cowboy, but the face of an Indian. The refusal to view his face is a denial of that aspect of his identity. The day of his birthday is different: "today he flicked out a hand like a whip and snapped the light on. . . . 'Today,' he shouted at the

mirror. 'Today things change'" (*GG* 239-40).[1] Not coincidentally, the last thing Lionel does the night before is fall asleep in front of *The Mysterious Warrior,* starring John Wayne with Portland as the Indian chief. He does not take note of the four old Indians who invade the screen, but perhaps his enthusiasm for change is evidence of their subtle impact (216). Regardless, Lionel is still bound by the John Wayne model.

The reason for this self-abnegation can be found in the unappealing images available to the First Nations male in popular culture. The most common depictions are of First Nations attacking whites, not speaking, suffering as childlike victims or captives "caught between two cultures," and of course, performing the role of the faithful companion (Hauptman 82). Tonto, the right hand man of the Lone Ranger, is the companion/subaltern to the masked hero of Western expansion and Native decimation. Laurence Hauptman, in his analysis of the hardships of "playing Indian," examines both the depiction of Tonto and the life and times of the actor who crystallized the image of the Indian, Canadian-born Mohawk Jay Silverheels (Harry Jay Smith). Silverheels was an accomplished professional lacrosse athlete recruited to act in "B" Westerns as a stunt extra. Because of his film experience and his prowess on a horse, Silverheels earned the role of Tonto. Though the actor himself was articulate in his promotion of Native American actors, setting up the Indian Actors Guild and Indian Actors workshop, his role as Tonto, as well as his other exclusively Indian roles, perpetuated the Hollywood image of the Indian (Hauptman 88-91; *Jay Silverheels*).

The characterization of Tonto places him in opposition to the Lone Ranger in terms of purpose and ability. Dorfman itemizes the Lone Ranger's characteristics. The Lone Rangers possesses physical force, skills, and abilities, persuasive talents, and irreproachable

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[1] Godard and Vevaina assert that "[a]ttention to . . . the performativity of the speech act . . . disrupts this mirror of representation . . ." (45). Lionel also articulates his commitment to change in the scene at the cabin by vocalizing his intention to return to school and to live in the cabin.

ethics (71). By confronting and resolving a central problem, the Lone Ranger removes disharmony (71). The introduction to the radio program, the inspiration for the television series, contrasts "the daring and resourceful masked rider" who upholds "law and order" with the Lone Ranger's "faithful companion Tonto" (*The Lone Ranger* television series qtd in Hauptman 90). Tonto wears no mask, rides a mundane brown horse named Scout, and speaks in "butchered" English; this "clipped monosyllabic" speech was considered "the perfect foil for the Lone Ranger." Tonto is decent, with an "innate," "primitive" wisdom to help the Lone Ranger track down "bad hombres." To accentuate the difference, the word *tonto* means "numbskull" or "fool" in Spanish (Hauptman 90). In the first episode of the television series, "Enter the Lone Ranger," the discrepancy between the obvious intelligence and superior athleticism of Silverheels and the stilted dialogue that limits him creates a palpable tension. New details emerge with the visual medium. Tonto is the last of his tribe; his loyalty to the Lone Ranger is established in flashback and is due to the Lone Ranger's saving Tonto's life when the rest of his tribe was eliminated. Because of this loyalty, Tonto saves the Lone Ranger from death, asks childlike questions, and performs the dangerous stunts necessary for the successful execution of the Lone Ranger's plans. However, Tonto is subtly essential to the Lone Ranger's project of establishing law and order and the West as a decent place to live: in his subaltern, childlike role, Tonto makes the mask and creates the name that will define the Lone Ranger ("Enter the Lone Ranger").

The Indian's mysterious connection to nature is considered an authentic part of the image, but it is a perversion of the genuine respect accorded nature in First Nations cosmology (Goldie 113). This mysterious connection is condescendingly admired by dominant culture. Hauptman cites Vine Deloria, Jr.'s assertion that even though Tonto was inferior, because of his identity as First Nations, he had an innate understanding of the

mysterious in nature, one of the main attributes of the image of the indigene, paired with his inarticulateness:[2]

> [Tonto] occasionally called upon his primitive wisdom to get the Lone Ranger out of a tight spot. Tonto had some indefinable aboriginal knowledge that operated *deus ex machina* in certain situations . . . as if the Lone Ranger had some tragic flaw with respect to the mysterious in nature which Tonto could easily handle and understand. (90)[3]

Dorfman cites the Lone Ranger's inventor with the subaltern's credo: "'Talk little. Contribute much' . . . succinctly exposing the essence of the theory of domination, whether it be of countries, social classes, or individuals" (130). It is as though, due to being inarticulate, the indigene is able to decode signs in nature. Gerald Vizenor bemoans the lack of connection of these images to the reality of tribal experience:

> [H]ow ironic that the most secure simulations are unreal sensations, and become real without a referent to an actual tribal remembrance . . . tribal wisdom is weakened by those imitations, however sincere. The pleasures of silence, natural reason, the rights of consciousness, transformations of the marvelous, and the pleasure of trickster stories are misconstrued in the simulations of dominance. . . . (*Manifest* 8)

This notion of authenticity is the inverse of that sought by the dominant culture; authenticity is compared to the image of the indigene as presented on film. From the First Nations standpoint, the "authentic" image presented on the screen is anything but real, but because of its pervasive domination, First Nations individuals are constantly forced to negotiate these images. By reducing a way of life to an inferior, contained image, the dominant culture invalidates First Nations belief systems and modes of behaviour, which become merely quaint and picturesque.

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[2] Ironically, parents liked *The Lone Ranger* because "of the hero's faultless grammar--which in itself was unique for the Old West" (Brooks and Marsh 607).

[3] Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969. NY: Avon, 1970), 199-200.

The practice of hiring men possessing large noses--regardless of origin--rather than First Nations actors to portray Indians in Westerns, further reveals the falsity of the image of the Hollywood Indian. Portland's role as the Indian chief in *The Mysterious Warrior* involves attacking a band of white soldiers led by John Wayne. Inevitably, as happens in every Western, the enemy Indian forces are slaughtered by the righteous power of white ingenuity. Lionel, in the quotation above, distances himself from the depiction of the Indian chief. He relates the shape of his real nose to the great nose of the depiction, which, as pointed out in Chapter One, has more to do with the "authentic" Hollywood Indian than with the visage of any real Indian. Portland's fellow Indians comprise men of ethnic origins other than First Nations, but who are endowed with a large nose, such as his friend and fellow extra, C. B. Cologne (*GG* 182). Portland's characterization has many points in common with Jay Silverheels' story, one of which being the fact that Silverheels actively "promoted the use of Native people in 'Indian' roles, rather than relying on white actors such as Sal Mineo . . ." (Hauptman 91). C.B. Cologne, a white actor with roles similar to Mineo's, points out the semiotic conundrum to Charlie: "Nobody played an Indian like Portland. I mean, he is an Indian, but that's different. Just because you are an Indian doesn't mean that you can act like an Indian for the movies" (*GG* 185). Portland's narrative exposes truths of the situation that he himself does not see, unlike Silverheels.

While Charlie, Lionel, Alberta, Latisha and Christian watch the Western separately on television the night before Lionel's birthday, Eli reads a novelization of the Western that highlights the pervasive imagery in all genres of text (*GG* 160-5).[4] The portrayal of the mysterious warrior differs from what the reader is presented in the film version, for in the

[4] The presentations of the novelization and the film intersect and details appear to overlap, but the title of the novel is never actually given. Whether or not the novelization is actually of *The Mysterious Warrior* is, in a sense, immaterial; King's point is that Western narratives are generic.

novel-form the warrior is the 'noble savage' as opposed to the 'ravaging avenger' seen in Portland's depiction: "The Indian's name was Iron Eyes, and his family had been killed by whites. He was sworn to stop western expansion onto his people's land and he had spared Annabelle's life because he wanted her to see that Indians were human beings, too" (164). Eli's identification, though different to Lionel's, is equally harmful and limiting. He pictures himself and Karen as the lead characters, himself as the mysterious warrior and Karen as the white woman taken captive only to be transformed into the beloved (199-203).

The fabrication of this kind of fantasy literature can be explained by overlapping tropes: exoticism, fetishism, a perverse romanticism witnessed in the reverse in the relationship between Latisha and George. In this text version of the coupling, the white woman can explore her sexuality with the earth-connected, natural, unknown other, retaining the dominant position without suffering any long-term, uncomfortable consequences. The image on the cover of the novelization captures the horrific yet erotic thrill of their cultural encounter, given validation by the conventions of film: "The cover featured a beautiful blond woman, her hands raised in surrender, watching horrified as a fearsome Indian with a lance rode her down. There was a banner stamped across the front that said, 'Based on the award-winning movie'" (160). Iron Eyes is doomed by this encounter; though at the outset of the novel he seems in possession of power, his Indian-ness seals his doom: "Iron Eyes would be forced to choose between Annabelle and his people. In the end, he would choose his people, because it was the noble thing to do and because Western writers seldom let Indians sleep with whites. . . . He'd be killed, of course, and the novel would conclude on a happy note of some sort" (199). That Eli is reminded of Karen while reading the novel is not accidental, as Eli's recounting of the novel's plot is intertwined with the memory of his courtship with Karen:

> Most of the books that Karen brought were about Indians. Histories, autobiographies, memoirs of writers who had gone west or who had lived with a particular tribe, romances of one sort or another. Eli tried to hint that he had no objection to a Western or another New Woman novel, and Karen would laugh and pull another book out of her bag. Magic.
>
> "You have to read this one, Eli. It's about the Blackfoot."
>
> What amazed Eli was that there were so many.
>
> (*GG* 162)

Through the conduit of a white woman and white texts, Eli comes to "know" himself, but he is also alienated from his home, returning there only once in twenty years when he takes Karen to the Sun Dance (201,344). He is also contained within the texts Karen chooses for him, for what is apparent in this passage is his lack of agency in finding his own texts. Karen sees him as her Mystic Warrior (Dvorak 70), and when she tells him this their first time in bed, she is on top, holding his wrists, and pushing down hard (*GG* 164). Karen eroticizes and contains Eli within the image of the Mystic Warrior recreated in the novelization of the film.[5]

Eli also uses movie diction to characterize himself and his relationship with Karen. He describes himself as "[t]he Indian who couldn't go home" and "is destroyed," "trapped between two worlds" because of his leaving "the traditional world of the reserve" behind and being exposed to white culture and education. He acknowledges that the theme of the Indian who couldn't go home is a "common enough theme in novels and movies" (*GG* 286). After twenty years together, Karen contracts cancer. All she can talk about is going back to the Sun Dance. Eli promises her emptily that he will take her back, but he knows he will not, because "[e]ach year laid more space between who he had become and who he had been. Until he could no longer measure the distance in miles" (287). Eli reflects that: "They had become a melodrama. . . . A bad movie with absurd dialogue"(289). The expectations and assumptions conveyed through movie diction pervades Eli's relationship with Karen. From a narrative standpoint, the fact that Karen is killed while Eli lives to return to the reserve might be seen

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[5] For more on Karen, see Horne 265.

as a reversal of the traditional ending of the Western--the warrior goes on to fight another day, while the white heroine meets her demise.

The issue of identification outlined in the role of Tonto, Portland's portrayal of the Indian chief, and the image of the Mystic Warrior is problematic because these images have little or nothing to do with the reality of the First Nations experience. It is for this reason that both Eli and Lionel come into conflict with their identities as First Nations males. Lionel distances himself from derogatory portrayals, while Eli aspires to be the romantic Indian hero, but in either case, both types of images, because of their limits and inauthenticity, are damaging to the characters' subjectivity. As previously mentioned, Emberley has established that the ideology of civilization is encoded in Western expansion texts (6-7). Hauptman, seconded by Vizenor, Dvorak, and Peters, asserts that "film portrayals of Indians . . . have little or nothing to do with the realities of Native American life. False images of the 'Indian,' whether demeaning or not, are usually simplistic and generally classify the great diversity of Native America into a single entity . . ." (Hauptman 81). Dvorak states that this "simplistic literature" is "codified by a given sociocultural reality, by the conventions and system of values of the society which produces it . . ." (69-70). Peters claims that "Hollywood Westerns[,] the popular narratives of the colonial culture," represent Native Americans "as the 'other' who must be destroyed in order to preserve the dominant way of life" (74).[6] Vizenor calls these images "simulations of dominance:" "Manifestly, movies have never

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[6] The documentary *Hollywoodism* explores the Jewish origins of Hollywood. The cinematic depictions of the American Dream were orchestrated by Jewish studio heads who had survived the ghettos and persecution of Europe. The narratives package the Jewish will to survive as the general will to survive. Inspired by the Jewish tradition, these films combine high culture, education, music, and art with popular culture in celebration of America as the land that gave their creators freedom and the chance for success. They preached assimilation, as well as the values of industriousness, piousness, wholesomeness, and decency and feature the disenfranchised, particularly African Americans. The Jewish movie moguls identified with the African-American legacy of oppression; they saw African Americans as quintessentially American. Native Americans only appeared in Westerns.

For another scathing indictment of the Hollywood system and the lobotomized depiction of Native stories in mainstream cinema, see Vanderhaeghe's novel, *The Englishman's Boy*.

been the representation of tribal cultures" (*Manifest* 6). The simulations only serve to perpetuate the "surveillance and domination of the tribes in literature" (*Manifest* 4). The "symbolic value" of Native depictions is their use as "textual commodities;" these images contain "the subjectivity of native peoples in the images, stereotypes, and representations deployed in colonial discourse" (Emberley 109). Lionel's work at the Home Entertainment Barn is a literal enactment of the subjectivity of image.

Bill Bursum represents this dominant point of view. He loves Westerns and creates the Map, a series of television sets organized to project the narratives of Western expansion on the visual recreation of the North American continent, as well as to display his products (*GG* 265). Marlene Goldman qualifies that Bursum's map, "like most maps . . . offers a vision of wholeness, permanence, and stability; everything is known, named, and claimed" (28). Bursum also sports another map, the map of Parliament Lake, the man-made lake formed by the dam which imposes on Native land, because he owns one of the lakeside plots (*GG* 266). Bill's enjoyment of Westerns is not surprising. In fact, in Bill's opinion, the best romances are Westerns, an indirect reference to Eli's love story. Bill watches *The Mysterious Warrior* as though he is "praying," illustrating the worship of popular culture's icons and the adherence to the false image (188). For Bursum, Westerns are sacred.

Bill's view of the real Indians he knows is influenced by stereotypes, images, and his own sense of entitlement. He thinks that Indians get money gratis from the government and that they are all related; the only reason he wants an Indian employee is to bring in business from the reserve (*GG* 80). Bill does not even grant Lionel and Charlie the nomenclature "Indian:" "And you couldn't call them Indians. . . . Even Lionel and Charlie could get testy every so often, and they weren't really Indians anymore" (187). Bill's preconception of an Indian does not grant Lionel and Charlie authenticity, because they do not fit the picture of an "Indian" in the films he so cherishes. Peters comments that the appeal of these Westerns is

that the dominant culture "can feel good about itself and what it has done when Native American cultures are either absorbed or contained" (72). Lionel himself is seduced by the Map, the representation of his annihilation and the images created by the dominant culture: "It was, Lionel had to admit, pretty impressive. . . . It was more than advertising, Bursum had told him. It was a concept, a concept that lay at the heart of business and Western civilization. He had said some other things, but Lionel had forgotten exactly what they were" (*GG* 298). Lionel is completely taken in by Bursum's reading of the Map, unconscious that he is complicit in his own subjection. Only by intervening in a "ceremonial performance" in which the four old Indians chant is the social script/inscribed Map altered (Goldman 28).

Subjection occurs through images by a complex process of identification with the very symbol of domination. The reason that these Indian men want to escape their identity is that they have a limited self-image: "Christian based, Western narratives . . . want these Native American characters to assume familiar roles, preconceived roles demanding that Indians be stoic, inferior, and powerless on the tragic path to disappearance" (Peters 74). However, in responding to the containment of these images by trying to flee them and by embracing their dichotomous opposite--the cowboy--the Indian male still binds himself with the definitions of the dominant culture. In subliterature stories, the crisis is presented in terms familiar with the real world, so that the reader can recognize himself "within a carefully circumscribed social reality whose main cause and effect, links with the real world, have been efficiently broken . . . " (Dorfman 91). Subliterature stories act as comforters. The danger, Dorfman argues, is that the reading of Western subliterature necessarily demands the digestion of the conqueror's history and the idealized version of the conquest. In these stories, the absence of responsibility and process result in a crisis with a tidy resolution effectuated by a hero who behaves as the "hyperactive" agent (95), but who has had nothing to do with the instigation of the crisis (105). The truth is concealed, like

layers of irony. The hero eliminates contradictions, neutralizing all the points brought up by the crisis (110). The problem with this literature is that it also absolves its reader of responsibility and process.

Thus, the reader identifies with a hero whose agency is illusory. Resistance and transformation are waived by the tidy resolution of these stories. Lionel's lack of initiative is directly related to his desire to be John Wayne, "the character, not the actor," another version of the cowboy-hero represented by the Lone Ranger (*GG* 241). Through the mechanism of identification, the reader has "the experience of overcoming his condition of being an object, his alienation. Once the Ranger gallops out of the reader's situation, the reader can avoid confronting some actual crisis which truly worries him. He's freed from having to transform himself into the subject of his own story" (105). Dorfman's language emphasizes the subjecting impact of this literature on the psyche of its consumer; in identifying with the hero, the reader feels as though agency is restored; however, this agency is as illusory as the hero's victory for right and justice.

Matchie and Larson, as well as Dorfman, outline the whitewashed version of Western expansion embodied by the Lone Ranger and other Western-genre fictions.
The myth from the cowboy era that "has survived is that of a skillful white macho male moralist (like a Lone Ranger) who goes around righting wrongs by killing off the 'bad guys,' especially the Indians"(Matchie and Larson 157). Dorfman identifies the insidious way in which this "comforting" literature "seeps through the borders of fiction to mold 'reality'" (Dvorak 70):

> Industrial fictions *invent* commercial characters who drain that history of all its defiance and discontent. The popular masses that consume the myth in its newest form have not participated its origins, in its development, in the battles for its modification. The superhero descends upon their brains just as magically and ubiquitously as the mass media penetrate their homes. (Dorfman 107)

Similarly, for the First Nations' characters of *Green Grass, Running Water*, the map of the settler-invader culture "is reinscribed on a daily basis through the media" (Goldman 29). Lionel is saturated by the ideology encoded in Westerns. His identification with John Wayne arrests his development as a man and alienates him from his community and his family. The parallel moments of Lionel seeing his reflection--when he looks in the mirror on the day of his birthday and when he sees the image of himself as the Native John Wayne superimposed on the framed view of the Home Entertainment Barn (*GG* 239-40, 83-4)--relates to feminist film theorist Kaja Silverman's examination of Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage in which the subject is able to recognize himself as a separate entity. In "Masochism and Subjectivity," Silverman "concludes that in decisive moments in the history of the subject, the individual learns to take pleasure in pain and loss. Cinematic activity, like many other forms of cultural activity, replays these moments of loss . . ." (Modleski 69). In his appreciation of Westerns and Bursum's Map, Lionel reifies his acceptance of and subjection to the dominant culture's version of history and their image of the male indigene.

The four old Indians make resistance to this subjection possible by transforming the spectacle of the Western film (Peters 75), in which Indians are images without agency, into a performance. As discussed in Chapter Two, performance is similar to ritual in that its structure leaves room for improvisation (Turner 26). The participants can experience the text as truth through the performance (Bailey 46). The performance is made possible by the dissolution of boundaries, so that issues can be resolved and healing can occur, impacting both the individual and the community, as well as the greater society (Turner 25). Because of the experiential nature of the performance, no knowledge is taken for granted or on faith, which makes resistance to the regularization of the image of indigene possible (Turner 79). B. Ruby Rich contradicts the passivity assigned to the non-dominant film viewer conceptualized by Christine Johnston and Laura Mulvey. Rich argues that the non-dominant

viewer, in this case, the woman, experiences patriarchal culture dialectically, similar to the exile, in a way a man could never understand.

This range of experience means that the non-dominant viewer plays an active role in the creation of meaning, despite the dominant ideology encoded in mainstream narratives; therefore, "the possibility for texts to be transformed at the level of reception and not to fall into a trap of condescension toward our own developed powers as active producers of meaning" (Rich 278). The relation of gender and film is further highlighted by the four old Indians' gender-bending performance in their own narratives.

In the relationship to the camera and the lack of agency over the image, the role of the Native in Hollywood films can be likened to that of the woman in mainstream cinema. Silverman argues that "whereas the male subject has privileges conferred upon him by his relationship to discourse, the female subject is defined as insufficient through hers" (309). The Native characters of the Western appear as a group and have no voice; Tonto is renowned for his incomprehensibility (Hauptman 90; *Jay Silverheels*). In addition to a different relationship to discourse, the female/Native's "relation to the camera and the scopic regime is quite different from that of the [dominant] male's" (Doane 43). The recognizability of the image of the indigene thus becomes increasingly important for the resolution of these simplistic scripts, which explains, to borrow once again from Silverman, the reason the Western's preoccupation with an unvarying construction of the Native body "in ways which are accessible to the gaze" and with a desire "to hear it attest in a familiar [visual] language to dominant values" (313). Thus, dominant male subjectivity possesses the "agency of the look" (Doane 44). So while the Western could not exist without the ascribed image of the indigene, Natives, similar to women, are denied access to the system of cinematic representation (Doane 43). Again, the Native man is robbed of agency, of that vigorous masculinity associated with the cowboy; for even the brave Indian chief cannot win and is doomed to the

failure of vanquished death. By rewriting the Western so that the Indians win, King "relocates power" and "grants respect" to the First Nations' presence and experience (Peters 71).

In the novel, King comments on the film through the real-time characters' response to the film and by the mode of intervention exercised by the four old Indians. The film is shown twice: once on television the night before Lionel's birthday, and then again with an audience in the Home Entertainment Barn on the day of Lionel's birthday. The four Indians infiltrate the frame on television, but the change does not stick, perhaps because it is not witnessed (*GG* 214-221). The four are not even sure whether they changed *The Mysterious Warrior* or another Western, since "[a] lot of them look the same" (320). Christian and Latisha watch the film on television as well, but resist its predictability. Christian asks Latisha why the Indians always get killed and asks what would happen if the Indians won. Latisha tries to downplay the importance of the question by reminding her son that "[i]t's just a movie." When pressed, she admits that "if Indians won, it probably wouldn't be a Western," to which Christian replies, "Not much point in watching it then" (192-3). To paraphrase Silverman, the Western genre depicts the story of loss. To protect Christian from this depiction, Latisha turns off the television so that her son does not have to witness the defeat (215). Mirroring Latisha's liberated response, Alberta watches the film bemusedly, noting that it is "[j]ust the sort of thing that Lionel and Charlie would like" (178-9). She bemoans the bastardization of history presented by the dominant culture, the idealized history Dorfman identifies: "Teaching Western history was trial enough without having to watch what the movie makers had made out of it" (214). The female characters escape the subjecting project of the Western because they are able to discern its semiotics and so remove any reference to themselves. The males

only find true release in the performative space created by the four old Indians in the Home Entertainment Barn.[7]

The four old Indians effect change in the film in two key ways: first, they invade the frame of the narrative, and when that proves ineffective, they chant to change the outcome of the battle between the cowboys and Indians. The diction of "being in the middle" recurs, for at the climax of the film, the Indians are trapped "in the middle" of the river (*GG* 320). Being in the middle is habitually portrayed in a negative light. However, the change comes just as the cavalry appears over the rise, but before the cavalry can reach the Indians. Concurrent with this change is the transformation of the black and white film into colour. The movie becomes genuinely real, as opposed to the reality posed by the conventional Western (321). The Indians do end up winning the battle, and the effect upon their viewers is exceptional, for the men are elated. Whereas Charlie first views the film with annoyance: "It was the same stupid movie he had seen last night on television. The same stupid wig. The same stupid headband. The same stupid nose," he undergoes an attitude adjustment (318). The revised ending causes Charlie to lose his lawyer-ly cool and root for his dad with an intensity that again makes this battle very real. His eyes flash "as he watch[es] his father flow through the soldiers like a flood. 'Get 'em, Dad,' he hissed." Eli's approbation is more understated: "Now, that was some movie, Bill" (322). The effect of the performance of the film is that for once the characters do experience the truth of the story, and instead of passively watching, they undergo a catharsis made all the more powerful because of the repetition with a difference. The "displacing gaze," in which the "observer becomes the observed" upsets the conventional roles of the Western (Bhabha 89). As Bill checks all his copies of the film, the reader realizes that the film is permanently changed by this intervention (330, 359).

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[7] For the complete scene in the Home Entertainment Barn involving the revised movie, see *Green Grass* 316-22.

With the change of the conventional narrative comes a change of reality. The four old Indians return the gaze by demonstrating the awareness that the image of the cowboy is a construct based on Indian decimation. Ishmael contradicts the vast popularity of the John Wayne persona and creates a new set of criteria for the evaluation of that persona: "We told [John Wayne] that shooting Indians wasn't too good for his image" (*GG* 317). John Wayne, in their view, gets his just deserts, since he does not achieve his goal of becoming president, a cryptic reference to Ronald Reagan, star of many B-Westerns who did become president (Flick 161). However, the dominant view still does not register the significance of the change, for Minnie, another Barn employee, asks wonderingly, "Who would want to kill John Wayne?" (*GG* 359). Nevertheless, change in perception occurs, as indicated in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. For Lionel, this is a moment of maturation. Lionel registers the falseness of the image, the predictability of the conventions, and notes the difference between reality and image, with himself as the barometer.

The four old Indians also perform the Lone Ranger aspect of the cowboy myth and appropriate the metonym of the mask. The mask is yet another example of the vestimentary code at work in the novel. The Lone Ranger is the persona assumed by First Woman in real-time. Peters concludes that "[i]n this world, Native Americans are allowed freedom only when existing behind the mask of the Western narrative. However, the ability to speak from within the discourse of the dominant culture is also an asset" (74). Survival necessitates the disguise of a "safe canonical figure" which also shows the "permeability of literary identity"(Linton 230). The story of this assumption of identity, also a Lone Ranger creation story, is retold/performed by the Lone Ranger herself. To counteract the immediate assumption by the live rangers that Indians are responsible for the dead rangers, First Woman "takes some black cloth out of her purse. She cuts some

holes in that black cloth. She puts that black cloth around her head." The mask is instantly recognizable: "Look, look, all the live rangers say, and they point their fingers at First Woman. It's the Lone Ranger. Yes, they says, it is the Lone Ranger." However, their trust does not extend to Ahdahm, First Woman's clueless (male) companion.[8]

The rangers are in fact quite hostile to Ahdahm. They immediately offer to "shoot this Indian" for First Woman. Instead, First Woman defends her "Indian friend," but slips in her explanation that "[h]e helped save [her] from the rangers." The rangers correct her: "You mean the Indians, don't you?" but they do not pierce the sanctity of the mask. First Woman agrees with the correction, and introduces her friend by name as Tonto. The rangers do not approve and offer suggestions of their own: "That's a stupid name, says those rangers. Maybe we should call him Little Beaver or Chingachgook or Blue Duck," but First Woman is insistent that "his name is Tonto." Ahdamn/Tonto, quivering from fear, seconds the motion: "Yes . . . my name is Tonto." This declaration prompts the rangers to "gallop off, looking for Indians and buffalo and poor people and other good things to kill." However, the moment that First Woman takes her mask off, they both get arrested for the crime of "Being Indian" (*GG* 70-72).

This masquerade is an instance of irony happening in a dynamic space precipitated by overlapping discursive communities. The four old Indians overturn two conventional stances of dominant culture, 1) the male gaze, and 2) the settler-invader gaze. Laura Mulvey describes the masochistic and passive process of being forced by the structures of narrative cinema to identify with a hero who is always male. In wearing the clothes of a man, the woman gains mastery over the image and the possibility of exerting her own power. At the

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[8] Previous to this encounter, King satirizes the scene in the Garden of Eden (38-41, 68-69). For another brilliant, unorthodox exegesis of the story of the Garden of Eden, see Lynch's essay "Bible Studies," in which he makes a direct correlation between "[t]he Fall of Man and Free Market Capitalism" (54).

same time, the destabilization of the image of the female in the masquerade "confounds this masculine structure of the look. It effects a defamiliarization of female iconography" (Doane 48, 49). Since these females are also First Nations, the defamiliarization is likewise twofold, for the encounter is told from the point of view of the First Nations figures. The strategies of subversion employed by certain female depictions in mainstream cinema include the returned gaze, physical freedom, the occupation of space (Arbuthnot and Seneca 116), and "the alignment of the female voice with a male body, or that of a male voice with a female body" (Silverman 315). These strategies are all employed by the Native Lone Ranger in this story. By wearing the mask of the stereotypical Western male hero, the "image is shown to be different from itself" (Emberley 160). Masquerade operates as resistance because "it constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask--as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity . . ." (Doane 48). Ironists, as well as mythical characters, wear masks (Hutcheon, *Irony's* 120). From a postcolonial perspective, Bhabha notes that as the hybrid asserts itself against discrimination, "the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery" (120). By putting on the mask of the Lone Ranger, the image of the Indian-destroying hero, the Native Lone Ranger reveals the emptiness of the icon.

In the original text of the Lone Ranger, the Lone Ranger always wears the mask. The hero persona has no everyday alter ego, because the man he was is supposedly dead (Dorfman 101; "Enter the Lone Ranger"). Only the masked face of impartial justice remains, since the mask signifies "the guarantee of [the Lone Ranger's] marginality, of his private life, of his rejection of the public state" (109). The mask also suggests the mystery of the hero, who wanders in exile. Since outlaws usually wear the masks, the mask also forces the Lone Ranger to earn his success, for he has to prove himself again and again. In this way, the Lone Ranger embodies the hero of American dream, the individual who must create himself and his empire out of nothing. According to Dorfman's analysis, "if you don't succeed in living

up to this model of mobility, then you simply don't deserve it. . . . [I]f you're still an outsider and they still don't believe you, you can be sure that you're dealing with an individual problem of your own making; it could never be the way the world is organized" (104). Lionel is further trapped by this mode of logic, for the onus of failure falls on him, rather than on the skewed gaze of dominant culture that prohibits him from being anything other than "Indian." Dorfman adds that the mask "ends up being a point of contact between reader and protagonist, the emotive mechanism that allows a projection to take place" (104). The Native Lone Ranger disrupts this mechanism by appropriating the mask and showing the falsity of the image it helps to maintain.

In King's version of the Lone Ranger myth, the Native male, Tonto, has no agency at all. Once again, the Native female possesses the knowledge, the wisdom to survive, because she operates beyond the limits of masculinity as well as settler-invader culture. Ahdamn/Tonto can only parrot the speech of First Woman/Lone Ranger; he quakes with fear while he does it. First Woman seeks the protection of a certain name, a certain identity through the donning of the mask, the metonym of the great cowboy hero. This utterance "disrupt[s] the specular regime upon which mainstream cinema relies; it would put her beyond the control of the male gaze, and release her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze sustains" (Silverman 313). King's revision effects the "reclaiming of voice . . . that has been systematically marginalized" (Peters 78). The utterance disrupts the "corporeal" and "specular" construction of the indigene (Silverman 313). The ultimate evidence of the four old Indians' freedom from constraints of any kind is their ability to leave Fort Marion at will, their catalyst to travel, the mask:

> 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.

When the soldiers tell them to say "hi" to Tonto, the four elders have no idea who Tonto is, because they do not recognize this false image of the indigene (*GG* 417-8). They align themselves with power and exercise agency.

In the oral tradition, as in feminist film theory, the voice suggests agency, and the real-time male characters have an opportunity to use their voices with authority at the Sun Dance. Vizenor clarifies that tribal stories are conveyed through voice, sound, and in these "mediations," "more is heard, seen, and remembered in oral stories than in a thousand pictures" (*Manifest* 130). Eli's memory of the intrusion of white tourists and their sacrilegious cameras is repeated with a difference with George Morningstar assuming the role of invader-photographer with New Age pretensions (*GG* 138-43, 379-81). Vizenor explains the New Age take on the same imperialist attitude:

> The Western movies, of course, are not cultural visions, but the vicious encounters with the antiselves of civilization, the invented savage. . . . The new scenes of postwestern simulations are the melancholy antiselves in the ruins of representation; the tribal others are now embraced, a romance with silence and visions." (Vizenor, *Manifest* 7)

By seeking to capture the image of the indigene, as countless researchers and anthropologists have done, it is as though "the tribes must prove with photographs the right to be seen and heard as the other. Mere presence is never the last word at the borders and margins of civilization; the sounds of stories, the human touch of humor and silence, and visions must be documented with photographs" (Vizenor, *Manifest* 129). The romanticization of the image still contains and prohibits agency in the living First Nations characters; it functions as another form of commodification.

George attempts to turn his family relationship into a commodity and fails. Whereas, when Eli was a child, the white tourist changes film canisters and escapes with the sacred images (*GG* 138-43), Eli, now wise to the manoeuver, grabs the right film and exposes the images to the light. As Eli rushes George, Lionel "step[s] in between the two men, forcing George back" (385). Both Eli and Lionel redeem themselves in this unified act of protection; Eli has successfully performed the traditional role of the uncle in guiding his nephew home (262, 264). George shows up at the Sun Dance to take pictures for *New Age* magazine, capitalizing on his family connection to the Sun Dance (371-2). In his insistence, he makes a lot of assumptions based on the perception that Indians have a value only as an image consumed by the dominant culture. No cameras, he argues, is a rule for strangers, not for family. He insists that it's old-fashioned to forbid cameras, since even churches allow pictures. His last point is that the more people know, they more they will understand. However, as the novel suggests, that which is decoded through the dominant imaginary only refers to the dominant culture, and instead of illuminating truth only perpetuates the dominant view. Finally, George refuses the Sun Dance its sacred status in the Native (Blackfoot) cosmology: "I mean, it's not even sacred, it is? More like a campout or a picnic" (381). Because the Sun Dance is not sacred to him, merely potentially lucrative, George cannot recognize that it might have value for the participants.

George's callous attitude is supported by his disrespectful behaviour. During the discussion with Latisha, George is taking pictures anyway (*GG* 379-81). His final defense is to preach tolerance, disguising his imperial sense of entitlement: "you guys have your beliefs, and I have mine. Nothing wrong with that" (384). The greatest insult is George's response to Eli's reassertion that it is forbidden to take pictures at the Sun Dance. George becomes defensive as well as offensive: "No law against it. What are you going to do, scalp me?" (385). Once George realizes he has failed to convince them, he attempts to devalorize the Sun

Dance altogether, calling it "a little pow wow" with "a bunch of old people and drunks sitting around in tents in the middle of nowhere" (386). He sneers that "[n]obody cares" and is incredulous that they actually think the Sun Dance is "important, like it's going to change [their] lives" (386). Since George is denied access to the commodity, the commodity itself loses value.

George's ethnocentric attitude and arguments capture the basic attitudes and arguments employed by white authorities since the conquest. In King's version of the confrontation, the Indians win, echoing the revised Western. The Native characters also free themselves from the restricting frames and limiting gazes, and from the constant referent of "the movies" which George, Karen, and other representatives of the dominant culture are constantly making (*GG* 203, 263, 336).

Lionel returns the constricting jacket of the cowboy to George, Eli destroys the images contained in the film, and everyone goes to watch the men dance, welcomed into the circle of the community. Lionel does not notice the change in himself, and is incredulous at the four old Indians' claims that they have changed him. However, something small but significant has altered in Lionel and in the other Native male characters with repercussions in the greater culture. The image of the Indian has been brought to life and given a voice which demasks and punctures the empty shell of the imperialist hero. The conventions of the Western and the ideology they encode and perpetuate are rent asunder, and the Native male characters come into possession of their identities and their manhood.

Conclusion

Green Grass, Running Water challenges the conventional structure of the novel and the conventional portrayal of gender. The performative element of the novel and the short-scene structure draw the reader into a participation with the novel that is not usually possible with a written text. King uses Native oral-storytelling techniques and values as the basis for his unconventional choices. Therefore, *Green Grass, Running Water* offers multiple angles of approach for any reader. For Native readers, it offers the chance to see their own culture take centre-stage. For non-Native readers, it offers a new perspective on Native experience and ideology. For North American readers, the text provides a satire of self-serving, corrupt institutions. These reader-positions are not exclusive and may indeed overlap, as Linda Hutcheon asserts in her discussion of discursive communities in *Irony's Edge*. *Green Grass*, because of the complexity of its intertext and its comedic formula, is accessible from multiple positions, and this accessibility makes the generation of irony possible.

The performative and gender-busting elements are refreshing, precisely because they operate outside the realm of Euro-American literary theory. The discussion of the text is forcibly defined by its Native content, because Native ideology is given precedence over Western ideology. The unconventional structure and depictions resist traditional interpretations, so King, in a larger sense, overturns traditional Western reading practices. His text operates on multiple levels: in addition to content and form, King commandeers the metatextual. The revision of the dominant ideology is watertight.

King explores gender at the two levels of narrative. In the real-time narrative, the female characters negotiate their identities in the mainstream culture with a strong sense of themselves as Native women, encouraged by a cosmology that values and validates women. The female characters successfully create identities which are hybrids of the intersecting cultures. The four mythological elders assume male imperialist personae to function in real-time. However, in their interventions in the imperialist texts, they are revealed to be women

with a strong sense of their identities as women and Natives, capable of deflating the overblown pomposity of the canonical texts with deadpan delivery and clearsightedness. Thus, the text favours the Native female characters, while highlighting the plight of the male characters.

The crisis of masculinity is presented in terms of the marginalized Native male. Lionel's memory of his three mistakes reveals his alienation from himself and his own culture, as well as how his subjectivity is defined by mainstream expectations and limitations. His fortieth birthday converges on the Sun Dance, so that his release from his non-agency coincides with and is caused by a cultural reawakening. Lionel simultaneously locates his manhood and his First Nations identity. The process of self-realization culminates in the donning of the John Wayne jacket, and the subsequent rejection of the jacket. Lionel retains the qualities of fair play and justice, but rejects the false male machismo and the imperialist agenda. He is then able to negotiate for himself a hybrid identity as a Native John Wayne in the defense of his sister and the Sun Dance against the encroachments of the anti-cowboy cowboy, George Morningstar.

The male characters of the novel are robbed of agency and identity by the simplistic and therefore erroneous image of the indigene. However, they further bind themselves by ascribing to dominant social scripts in which they perpetually lose, and by their desire for recognition and validation from the dominant culture. They reject their culture to attain this recognition and validation, but never receive it because they are seen through the settler-invader gaze, a gaze by which they are perceived as the image of the indigene conditioned by film, mass literature, and imperialist canonical texts. The male characters are contained in a language tempered by these images, and by the costumes they are forced to wear to fit into the roles they covet. They are freed by the interventions of the four mythological elders who

disrupt the sanctity of the canonical texts as well as the pop culture narratives, and who thus make resistance possible for the real-time male characters.

King first identifies the social scripts enacted in Western films and novels, and then counteracts their evil effects by showing their flaws. The Indian as fetish is derided in the Eli/Karen and Latisha/George stories; Indian as commodity is redirected in the rewriting of Bursum's film and in the triumph over George and his invasive camera; the reduction of the Native cosmologies to the notion of "authenticity" as distracting fictions for the masses is reversed when Portland as chief--and despite fake nose--shoots and hits John Wayne. The interventions of the four elders resist the containment of film images, which Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners* calls the simulations of dominance, through ironic reversals that instruct the male characters how to resist as well. First Woman wears the mask of the Lone Ranger to appropriate his power in order to survive the conflict of her narrative, but also to demonstrate the falsity of the icon.

In terms of content, the crisis of male subjectivity is resolved through the rewritten ending of *The Mysterious Warrior* Western, the Sun Dance and the bursting of the dam. Lionel's development is no longer arrested as he is freed from the social scripts of the dominant culture in which he was always the loser. He is no longer the split subject suspended in the limbo of the Entertainment Barn's frayed gold blazer and the failure of the trailer park.

Each mini-narrative describing the failures of the male characters are a *mise-en-abyme* of the Western-film resolution where the Indian loses and the cowboy wins. At the end of the novel, this convention is broken by the new film ending scripted by the four elders in which the Indians win. This triumph implicates Portland, who is the representative victorious Indian in the film, and Charlie, Lionel, and Eli, the audience members who can now identify with the Indian hero, freed from pre-determined failure. The Sun Dance

provides a similar liberation. Lionel and Eli, who assumes the traditional uncle role, are able to win against imperialist interests, represented by New-Age exploiter, George Morningstar. Finally, the destruction of the dam ensures the restoration of the land to the Blackfoot people, represented by Norma's family and the founding cabin.

The difference between the two cultures is demonstrated in the very different structure, tone, and diction of the two types of narrative. The linear narrative leaves no room for reader interaction, though the reader is free to interpret implications, cross-references, and ironies. However, the performative revisions engage the reader as a listener and an audience-member in a more visceral, sensory engagement. In the performances, the reader is called as a witness to the absurdity of the colonialist ideology. The difference is mirrored in the opposing views of gender and manly ideals. The Native cosmology is founded on community, whereas the Western ideal champions the individual. Canada is considered founded on community values, in opposition to the individualistic United States; however, the novel argues that Canadian community values are selective and exclusive. In this total revision, King bridges the gaps between male/female, Native/Western, and oral/written, positing a worldview of creative hybridity.

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