

CHAPTER - III

Native Voices in the Fictional Works of Thomas King

3.1. The Career and Art of Thomas King

Thomas King is Canada's eminent native author of Cherokee, of German and Greek parentage. He was born on 24 April 1943, in Sacramento California and raised in Roseville. King primarily regards himself as a Canadian. He grew up mostly in a female-dominated household because his father abandoned his mother and their two sons when King was still a child. This might explain why independent and strong female characters often feature in his novels and short stories. His mother raised King and his brother on her own in a warehouse that housed both her beauty shop and the family living quarters. In his Massey Lectures published as *The Truth about Stories*, King talks about his early life:

My mother raised my brother and me by herself, in an era when women were not welcome in the workforce, when their proper place was out of sight in the home. It was supposed to be a luxury granted women by men. But having misplaced her man, or more properly having had him misplace himself, she had no such luxury and was caught between what she was supposed to be – invisible and female – and what circumstances dictated she become – visible and, well, not male. Self-supporting perhaps. That was it. Visible and self-supporting. As a child and as a young man, I watched her make her way from doing hair in a converted garage to designing tools for the aerospace industry (2-3).

The opening letter in his first published novel *Medicine River* also has autobiographical element that specify his absent father:

Dear Rose,

I'll bet you never thought you'd hear from me again. I have thought about calling or writing, but you know how it is. How are you and the boys? Bet they're getting big. Bet you're probably mad at me, and I don't blame you. I'm going to be in Calgary for a rodeo. Thought I might drop in and see you (1).

The description, along with some letters of the father to his mother, inform us of the fact that the protagonist Will's father had left the two brothers and their mother on the reserve, and though he displayed a wish to return to his family, he never came back. Every time he mentioned in his letters of coming back, all he actually talked about was, "drop in" and "see you and the boys, may take you out to dinner and a show" (ibidem 2). The idea of settling down with her and the children, it seems, never crossed his mind.

At the age of twenty-one, King took a tramp steamer to Australia and New Zealand where he worked as a Photojournalist. After he returned to the United States, he worked at Boeing Aircraft as a Tool Designer. He subsequently entered California State University, Chico, where he earned his B.A. in English in 1970 and his M.A. in English in 1972. Other positions he has held includes Director of Native Studies at the University of Utah (1971-73); Associate Dean for Student Service at California State University, Humboldt (1973-77); Coordinator of the History of the Indians of the American Program University of Utah (1977-79); Chair of Native Studies from (1979-1989). King received his Ph.D. in American Studies and English from the University of Utah in 1986 and, since 1989, King has been Associate Professor of American Studies and Native Studies at the University of Minnesota (Wiget 439). A Canadian citizen, he returned home in the 1980's to accept a position as Professor of Native Studies at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. He is currently a Professor of English at the University of Guelph, Ontario in Canada, where he teaches Native Literature and Creative Writing.

King seriously embarked on a literary career at the age of forty and in the eighties, his creative and critical writings were widely published and appeared in many journals, including *World Literatures* written in English, *The Hungry Mind Review* and *The Journal of American Folklore*. As for poetry, he has published fifteen poems in journals and anthologies to date, but has not compiled it in a book form. King is mainly regarded as a novelist and short story writer. With his first novel *Medicine River*, King came into literary acclaim. He won the Alberta Writers Guild Best First Novel Award, received the Pen/Josephine Miles Award, and is nominated for a Commonwealth Writers Prize. The novel was again adapted into a television movie and radio play in 1993, with King scripting both adaptations. King's second novel *Green Grass Running Water* won the Canadian Authors Award for Fiction and was named The Quill and the Quire's Best Canadian Fiction of the Century List. It was further nominated for the Governor's General Award in 1993. His latest novel, *The Back of the Turtle*, won the Governor General's Award for English language fiction in 2014. *One Good Story that One, Truth and Bright Water*, followed and were received with great success. He also made a name for himself as a successful Children's writer with works like *A Coyote Columbus Story*, *Coyote Sings to the Moon*, *Coyote's New Suit* etc. The short story collection, *A Short History of Indian's in Canada* appeared in 2005 and won the 2006 McNally Robinson Aboriginal Book of the year Award. In 2012, King was awarded a Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, won the 2014 B. C. National Award for Canadian Non- Fiction, as well as, the prestigious RBC Taylor Prize. King's major work also includes edited books like, *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspective. An Anthology of Short Fiction by Native Writers in Canada*, a special issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (1988). *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction* (1990). In 2003, King was chosen to deliver the prestigious Massey Lectures which was published as *The Truth*

about Stories: A Native Narrative. A year later in 2004, he was made a member of the Order of Canada. Today, Thomas King has become one of Canada's highly admired authors. He is an Award winning novelist, short storywriter, children's writer, editor, radio host, scriptwriter, political leader and a photographer.

Coming to his literary art, Thomas King writes by telling stories about native oral cultures. A culture that deals with known and shared myths and is orally learnt, inherited and renewed by each generation of performers and each individual performer. King is an acclaimed native author and a gifted 'Storyteller of the first order' whose creative works have provided an excellent example of written orality. Intrinsic reading of King's popular fictional works, *Medicine River*, *Green Grass Running Water*, *One Good Story that One*, *Truth and Bright Water*, *A Coyote Columbus Story*, and *Coyote's New Suit*, conveys an idea that oral voices is not merely the antithesis of writing, and that both oral and written communication are entwined rather than separate. Writing does not extinguish oral cultural transmission, in other words, "writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it" (Ong 9). Orality has helped King state the thematic focus of representing native people appropriately through storytelling, and has ensured 'oral literature' not as artifact, not a relic of the past but as living entity to portray members of today's native community. In *The Truth about Stories*, King declares his belief that storytellers are not alone but in close relationship with their responsive listeners, or readers, upon whom they must make an impact. He speaks in confirmation: "Perhaps I could frame such a bibliography as a eulogy to remind myself of where stories come from, a chance to remember that I stand in a circle of storytellers, most of whom will never published, who have only their imaginations and their voices" (101). He identifies the circles of storytellers and argues that the advent of native written literature did not in any way mark the passing of native oral cultural voice. In fact, they occupy the same

space, the same time. King states: “And, if you know where to stand, you can hear the two of them talking to each other” (ibidem 102).

Thomas King is one chief native writer whose works can be deliberated as one having a powerfully grounded spoken source. He employs orality in the sense that he likes, ‘to hear his characters talking’, ‘to hear their voices.’ In his 2003, Massey lectures, *The Truth about Stories*, King declares:

The printed word, once set on a page has no master, no voice, no sense of time or place... written stories can be performed orally... oral stories can be stuck in a book. But for the most part, I think of oral stories as public stories and written stories as private stories (154).

His storytelling performance surveys a range of native oral stories, arguing that these narratives collectively offer another feasible way to look at the world. King’s narrative carries a well-noted originality. His imaginative ideas and playful story structures have a strong hold on the native oral tradition that frequently survive along with the universal passage of time. It provides a continual retelling of creation myth, community story, customs, rituals, and the commonly shared pieces of native oral history. King retells native history through an almost light-hearted circular storytelling style, and constructs an honest opinion that there is a difference of narrative strategies between native and non-native writers. Non-native who writes about the Indian usually writes about the ‘historical Indian’ with settings drawn from the native past that has no regular relevance, but King approves that when natives write, they bring out a pragmatic native material, and by using historical mode of conversational narration, the native creates a genuine society, reflective of the whole native nation. King himself has stated that the thematic focuses of his storytelling are, “about broken treaties, residential schools, culturally offensive movies, the appropriation of native names, symbols, and motifs” (ibidem 63). The exclusion of natives from white society, history and culture

remains a prevalent theme in much of King's storytelling. It explores what it means to be a native in a predominantly white culture. The presence of irony, colonial experience of natives, its assimilation and the role of oral tradition also centers King's perceptive attempts at historical revisionism because we find most Canadian literary sources emerging and developing along the lines of historical and geographical exigencies. Native authors actually got down to recording their own history and commenting on society. Native writings have subjects concentrating itself primarily with social, political and economic history because it navigates between issues of right and wrong, truth and fiction, men and nature, asserting the symbiotic relation of man and his natural universe. The contextual basis of this historical writing is a mixture of the ritualistic, the ancient and the contemporary. Native storytelling always have a political dimension inherent in it because it voices the persecution, betrayal and resistance that emanates from oppression meted out to natives since the advent of white man. For example, the ideological conception of King's *Medicine River* makes non-native readers meditate longer and harder about the lives of the first people. *Green Grass Running Water* written as a story cycle in the vein of an aboriginal oral tradition is an elaborated signification on the experience of native community. *Truth and Bright Water*, a coming of age novel depicts the life of native people living in a reserve and in a border crossing, and the tragedies confronting their existence. Discovery of self, their socio-economic and cultural configurations, their individual identity especially in cross boundaries, occupy a characteristic feature, not only of the individual but of all mankind. King's thematic storytelling in *Truth and Bright Water* has brought out such border issues. Borders are important 'thresholds', full of contradiction and ambivalence. They both separate and join different places, and "they are intermediate locations where one contemplates moving beyond a barrier" (McLeod 217). Homi K Bhabha addresses 'border lives' as a place where, "conventional patterns of thought are disturbed, and can be disrupted, by the possibility of crossing. At the border, past and

present, inside and outside no longer remain separated as binary opposites but instead commingle and conflict. From this, emerge new shifting complex forms of representation that deny binary patterning” (qtd. in McLeod 217). The same idiom ‘borders’ found ingenious expression in King’s short story *Borders*. The story comically interprets the irony of constructed boundaries by narrating the experience of a Blackfoot mother and son, of Indian heritage, trapped between the Canadian and United States borders, only because the mother does not declare herself to be American or Canadian insisting, instead, that she be identified as Blackfoot. The comic dimensions of King’s rendering of the border from a native perspective are precisely what make his works palatable and subversive, entertaining and disturbing. We notice that in King’s artistic stories, natives are no longer conformist figures but unique individuals whose voices demand rights for recognition. King’s edited book, *The Native in Literature* explores depiction of natives in Canadian texts. He states that, “the traditional assumption has been that a discussion of the native in literature means simply an examination of how the presence of the native has influenced white literature” (13). In *Godzilla Vs Postcolonial*, King argues that native writing is not postcolonial and should be described on its own terms. King cautions against reading Native Literature as postcolonial, precisely because such a designation focuses on the colonial moment which has virtually nothing to do with the oral native cultural traditions that preceded it. Likewise, King in his anthologies pay careful attention to the uniqueness of Native literature with all its diversity. He explains that most Canadians have only seen natives through the eyes of non-native writers and yet Native written literature, has opened up new worlds of imagination for non-native audiences because “it occupies that ‘in-between’ space within and without the borders” (12). His works emphasize the importance of oral heritage shared across tribes, and explain the struggles involved to find a working definition of a native writer:

And when we talk about Native writer, we talk as if we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not... there are a great many difficulties in trying to squeeze definition out of what we currently have... perhaps our simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by nations will suffice for, while providing we resist the temptation of trying to define a Native (*The Native in Literature* 9).

Although King often shuns the role of representative for native people, he is widely celebrated as one. King himself confesses, "I do feel an affinity with other Aboriginal people... we seem to be concerned about the same things... and many of the storytelling techniques, the characters and the voices are familiar" ("Written Orality" www.Jsee.revues.org). He aligns himself with those who emphasize continuity and blending of oral and written culture. Intriguingly an adequate amount of King's chief influence comes not from actually listening to spoken words, but from reading a transcription, a printed text. In an interview, King explained that he "was blown away" when he became acquainted with the stories of Harry Robinson, an Okanagan elder skilled both in English and in his mother tongue (Gzowski 72). In his foreword to the anthology, *All My Relations*, King remarks: "Harry Robinson's story, *An Okanagan Indian becomes a Captive Circus Showpiece in England* is a fine example of interfusional literature, a literature that blends the oral and the written. In a traditional oral story, you have the stories, the gestures, the performance, the music, as well as the storyteller. In a written story, you have only the word on the page, yet Robinson is able to make the written word become the spoken word by insisting, through his use of rhythms, patterns, syntax and sounds that his story be read out loud and in so doing the reader becomes the storyteller" (xii-xiii). Likewise, in his article *Godzilla Vs Post-colonial* King praises Robinson for being successful in creating an "oral voice, something he does in a rather ingenious way, for he develops an oral syntax that defeats readers efforts to read the stories silently to themselves, a syntax that encourages readers to read the stories out loud"

(244). King commends Robinson's prose for avoiding the loss of what is generally omitted when oral literature is translated, and for "re-creating at once the storyteller and the performance" (ibidem). King concludes the essay with the following statement about Robinson: "his prose has become a source of inspiration and influence for other Native writers such as Jeannette Armstrong and myself" (ibidem 245). Hence, *One Good Story that One*, King's short story collection has a mimicked oral voice produced out of this kind of inspiration. Narrated in first person singular narrator 'I', King has resorted to imitating the narrative voices of traditional storytellers. However, he has been careful not to exploit this artifice too often or for too long to avoid monotony that a homogenous distinctive voice might have caused. For example, out of the ten short stories he included in his collection *One Good Story that One*, only four are told by a narrative voice which evokes those of such storytellers. These four stories are executed as if they were transcription, stories exactly as told, avoiding all quotation marks found in a conventional text:

Alright. You know, I hear this story up north. Maybe Yellowknife, that one, somewhere, I hear it maybe a long time. Old story this one. One hundred years, maybe more. Maybe not so long either, this story. So you know, they come to my place (*One Good Story that One*).

This one is about Granny. Reserve Story. Everyone knows this story. Wilma knows it. Ambrose knows it. My friend, Napioa, Lionel James. Billy Frank knows it, too... Boy, he tells me here comes that story again... The way I tell it is this way and I tell it this way all the time (*Magpies*).

This one is about Coyote. She is going west. Visiting her relations. That's what she said. You got to watch that one. Tricky one. Full of bad business. No, no, no, no, that one says. I'm just visiting. Going to see Raven. Boy, I says. That's another tricky one (*The One about Coyote Going West*).

It was Coyote who fixed up this world, you know. She is the one who did it. She made rainbows and flowers and clouds and rivers. And she made prune

juice and afternoon naps and toe-nail polish and television commercials (*A Coyote Columbus Story*).

One Good Story that One offers an excellent reading of oral story. It has ideas drawn from a wealth of oral tradition. These stories have both humor and humility. They challenge the idea of universal truths and shed light on the way the communities behave and treat one another. The first person narrator of the title story recounts how a friend brought three young anthropologists to see him so that they could record his stories. In *Magpies* the narrator is called 'old one' by one of the native characters, while the narrator of *The One about Coyote Going West* is called 'Grandmother' and 'Grandfather'. These narrators function on two levels. Although not deemed to be really characters, they take the role of a storyteller and interacts with his or her narratee. Secondly, such a storyteller, in turn, not only commissions and listens to the story but also participates in it. In *A Coyote Columbus Story*, King's storytelling strategy compresses the time and the space. It fuses the oral story of creation with the arrival of Christopher Columbus on the shores of North America. Bored because the Indians refuse to play with her anymore, Coyote makes three ships and soon these men 'in silly clothes' arrive looking for things to sell. It parodies stories of Columbus discovery of Americans from a native own point of view. The oral discursive devices used throughout *One Good Story that One*, are not simply decorative but performs an important functions, of both characterizing its narrator as a real traditional native storyteller and highlighting some of the most polemic matters of contention in the debates about native oral literature. On closer inspection, King's mock creation in *One Good Story that One* bears on the problems of authority posed by the oral and the written modes of expressing worldviews. The Biblical story in 'Genesis' is irreverently challenged by King, as a corrective measure to curb the misrepresentation of native modes of orality. King's native narrator departs from the written version of creation by changing the well-known plot, introducing anachronisms and

mispronouncing the names of Adam and Eve, which he renders as ‘Ahdamn’ and ‘Evening’. Here, the strategy of King’s questioning of authority is not gratuitous, but aimed to make non-native readers understand, why native communities feel offended whenever a story they hold as sacred is treated with the same kind of carelessness, lack of respect or ineptitude by curious strangers. King classifies native oratory as having an appropriate metaphor and vocabulary, a syntax that allowed him to formulate complex relationships between ideas, as well as employing a vivid imagination and literary inventiveness. In *The Truth about Stories*, King conveys the different storytelling strategies he had employed, to tell two creation stories; the story of the crazy woman who fell from the Sky and that of the biblical characters of Adam and Eve. One is ‘Native’, the other is ‘Christian’, as King explains:

Okay. Two creation stories. One Native, one Christian. The first thing you probably noticed was that I spent more time with the Woman who fell from the Sky than I did with Genesis. I’m assuming that most of you have heard of Adam and Eve, but few, I imagine, have ever met charm. I also used different strategies in the telling of these stories. In the Native story, I tried to recreate an oral storytelling voice... In the Christian story, I tried to maintain a sense of rhetorical distance and decorum... These strategies color the stories and suggest values that may be neither inherent nor warranted. In the Native story, the conversational voice tends to highlight the exuberance of the story but diminishes its authority, while the sober voice in the Christian story makes for formal recitation but creates a sense of veracity (22-23).

With King developing the trickster discourse in native stories, a multiplicity of conversational voices are introduced that highlight the exuberance of his stories, avoid solemnity and challenge monolithic authority. This trickster content in native stories is important for it aids speculation about recurrent patterns and motifs that occur in native oral traditions, transcending geographical and linguistic barriers. King’s stories begin abruptly and are considered as “genuine voice pieces that is, fusion texts which have undergone the process of

transforming oral or aural speech into the visual figuration that readers see when eyed at the printed text” (“Written Orality” www.Jsee.revues.org). As a result, such stories emphasize the acoustic dimension of language which makes the audience aware of the fact that sounds have been captured in print form and call for a conscious “phonemic reading” which, according to Garrett Stewart, “has not to do with reading orally but with aural reading” (2). In *Green Grass Running Water*, there is an emphasis:

“Gha!” said the Lone Ranger. “Higayv:lige:i.”

“That’s better,” said Hawkeye. “Tsane:hlanv:hi.”

“Listen,” said Robinson Crusoe. “Hade:loho:sgi.”

“It is beginning,” said Ishmael. “Dagvya:dhv:dv:hni.”

“Okay” (12).

Oral features function as narrative techniques. It is chosen consciously to promote communal ways of listening and reading. There is a channel of communication existing between storyteller and audience, between theories of postcoloniality and native modes of narration, and between traditional stories and popular culture in expressive written orality of King. Speech is the dominant narrative mode and usages of direct speeches are common. For instance, Harlen’s chatty tone in *Medicine River*: “You know, Will, I don’t really mind that Louise doesn’t give out free pens” “Hmmmmmmm” (27). Also in *Green Grass Running Water*, King adopts a style of presentation, which is meant to render on the page the specific nuances of Native verbal rhythms. He uses a lot of mimicking, rhetorical digressions and expressive words such as “Okay.” “Maybe. Maybe not. Can’t say.” “hee-hee. Hmmm. La, la la, la”, echoing a storytelling cadences (ibidem 253-56). King’s intention is to spot his reliance on native oral tradition and on dialogue, in his fiction. He shares this strategy with Jace Weaver: “I like to hear my characters talking. I like to hear their voices” (56-7).

Demonstratives are also significant in transcribed oral texts. Its features give a sense of the oral performance in a written device. King applies it in order to present his writing as if it were performative of oral traditions. It has oral demonstrative, the “oral lightly assumed in the written text” (Lee 462). More thoughtfully, King applies this demonstrative rhetorical device in the narrative, *Green Grass Running Water*, and *The One about Coyote Going West*. References of both are cited below:

So

In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water.

Coyote was there but Coyote was asleep. That Coyote was asleep and that Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen.

I can tell you that

So, that Coyote is dreaming and pretty soon, one of those dreams gets loose and runs around. Makes a lot of noise

Hooray, says that silly dream... that Dream sees all that water

Oh, oh, says that noisy Dream (*GGRW* 1).

Tell me grandmother, says Coyote. What does the clever one make first?

Well, I says. Maybe she makes that tree grows by the river.

Maybe she makes the buffalo. Maybe she makes that mountain.

Maybe she makes them clouds.

May be she makes that beautiful rainbow, says Coyote.

No, I says. She don't make that thing. Mink makes that.

Maybe she makes that beautiful moon, says Coyote.

No, I says. She don't do that either. Otter finds that moon in a pond later on
(*All My Relations* 97).

Critical assessment of King's short stories and novels demonstrate that his own writing is, both, interfusional and associational. He draws upon oral traditions of multiple native communities, bringing in various trickster traditions to challenge entrenched stereotypes, and to create a sense of spoken language which is laconic but effective. King's associational stories also show native communities living their lives with "a matter-of-fact quirkiness, wrapped up in each other" ("King Thomas" www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com). For instance, the narrative in *Green Grass Running Water* is both interfusional and associational. It gives a popular merger between oral and written tradition, the story has a dualism that is present throughout, starting with Coyote and Dog. In King's storytelling, Coyote is the trickster figure in native tradition, whereas the Dog thinks that he is 'God' but is merely a dream of Coyote:

I am god, says that Dog Dream. "Isn't that cute," says Coyote. "That Dog Dream is a contrary. That Dog Dream has everything backward." But why am I a little God? shouts that god (2).

Green Grass Running Water defines King's storytelling strategy. It features a unique manner of recounting a story, with King poetically weaving two plots. The first story is a mythical one based on oral indigenous storytelling, and the second is a realistic story based on western written text. King's written orality employs an unnamed narrator and a popular trickster figure, Coyote, to tell and preside over this two interwoven story. Coyote is a significant trickster figure in native mythology and no oral storytelling is complete without it. Interestingly, enacting a central role in King's story, Coyote is a link metaphor and is virtually a bridge that connects the mythic and the real world. The mythic story starts with a series of creation stories. Coyote and the four old Indians primarily belong to this mythic

story, but sometimes leap into the real story and interact with the characters. The mythical Indians take over literary names. They are changed to western figures, First Woman to Lone Ranger, Changing Woman to Ishmael, Thought Woman to Robinson Crusoe, and Old Woman to Hawkeye. They explain real events that have happened to the ordinary citizens of the town of Blossom, and inform readers of their interpersonal relationships, their attempt to making a living in the white world, and their ongoing debates over a proposal to build a hydroelectric dam in the native region.

King's performative phrase, "Forget the book, we have got a story to tell", is emblematic of native belief that stories and no fixed truths, enact retelling (ibidem 387). The psychoanalytic approach of language also implies that words exist as a structure, and that "language is a system already complete and in existence before we enter into it" (Barry 113). Such form of linguistic claim in storytelling, lends support to the co-evolution of the word and the word being believed as sacred, native people associate an idea with an object, with visual memory. It has been pointed out that according to native themselves, much of the dramatic power and fun of their mythology and folklore emerge only when their stories are told in the original language, that they tend to pay more attention to the implications or suggested meanings of their words and their "metaphors embody an emotional force" (Benson, and Toye 2). Hence, in *Green Grass Running Water*, King's oral form of narrating stories is more abundant than the written one, with respect to understanding and interpretation of the story. Only a person who has specific knowledge about storytelling conventions takes the role of a narrator. King aptly notes the fact that if unskilled narrator tells a story, it can be dangerous and because of this, the four Indians do not allow Coyote to tell the story: "Wait, wait," says Coyote. "When's my turn?" "Coyotes don't get a turn," (365). It also resorts to repetition and pauses such as, "oh, oh," ... "hey, hey," ... "hey, hey, hey. What are those two doing?" "Swimming," I says. "Oh. . ." says Coyote, that in turn, helps the listener to

understand and follow the narration as well as establish a bond between the narrator and the listener (*ibidem* 248).

Retaining a conversational bicultural oral tone in the story, King also gives his audience a sense of what it is like to experience the authentic storytelling tradition from a Native American point of view. He reconstructs some of his creation passages in a style that is imitative of preserved, transcribed and translated texts from various oral traditions. The presence of goddesses such as First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, validate an integration of stories from various oral traditions. In King's story, First Woman is comparable to Clark's story of a woman who fell from the sky; each has a divine deity falling out of the sky and is intercepted by Ducks, placed on a Turtle's back, upon which earth is created by using mud. The other deities, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman, follow comparable beginnings. Each figure falls out of the sky but the events leading up to, and following the fall, are taken from Navajo, Pueblo and Blackfoot traditions. In King's narrative, Changing Woman falls from the sky and lands on a big white canoe with full of animals. Thought Woman converses with a river, gets into the river believably for a bath, and then when that river starts flowing again, she finds herself drifting and "floats off the edge of the world and into the sky" (*ibidem* 297). This beginning is alike to Silko's story and the integration of Reed Woman from the Pueblo tradition "who bathes and creates rain for the world" (13-14). Likewise, Old Woman looking for tasty things to eat digs up a 'Tender Root' and while digging, "Old Woman digs and digs and that one chases that Tender Root under the Tree and around the Tree and pretty soon that one has dug a big hole. Oops, says Old Woman and she fall through that hole into the sky" (*GGRW* 366-367). The narrative of Old Woman is similar with the 'Poia' legend and the Cherokee story. In the poia legend, "Feather Woman digs up a giant turnip" (Welch 350-351). In the Cherokee story, "Star Maiden/Woman digs up a root that creates a hole where this deity looks down

from the Spirit world into the world of People” (Flick 161). King alludes to the oral traditions by incorporating these stories and having them interact with stories from the dominant literate culture. King is, in fact, replicating these stories, much as an oral performer would in an actual storytelling performance. Jennifer Andrews confirms how, “the flexibility of oral transmission means that stories can be revised to suit the immediate needs of the community” (93). In the Judeo-Christian Biblical stories, First Woman meets “Ahdamn” who is busy “naming everything” (*GGRW* 41). Changing Woman meets Noah in a “Christian ship” (*ibidem* 160). We see that both Ahdamn and Noah are figures from Christian stories. Thought Woman meets A.A. Gabriel who is named from the Biblical figure, “the angel Gabriel” (Flick 159); Old Woman meets “Young man walking on water” (*GGRW* 387) who is the Biblical figure “Jesus Christ” (Flick 161). King’s purpose behind the juxtaposition of native and non-native creation stories is to show that native creation stories were present within the oral traditions, long before the colonizers came to North America and proceeded to impose their religious belief upon the native people. His lone objective in mixing up oral stories, is to further give his audience a sense of what it is like to experience the storytelling tradition from a native point of view, and their link to mythical world. Both human character of the anonymous narrator ‘I’, and omniscient character ‘Coyote’ converse:

“Earthquake! Earthquake!” yells Coyote

“Calm down,” I says.

“But it’s another earthquake,” says Coyote.

“Yes,” I says. “These things happen.”

But we’ve already had one earthquake in this story,” says Coyote.

“And you never know when something like this is going to happen again,” I says.

“Wow!” says Coyote. “Wow!” (*GGRW* 458).

In addition to the existing storytelling tradition, King creates the real sense of time, and retells a tale of modern Indians who are struggling to find proper recognition while still fighting white cultural absorption. The real time story explores individual's effort to fit oneself, both within his community and heritage. Lionel, the central protagonist, searches for his identity in a world that is pulling him in two different directions. Not only does he have the familial pressure to stay true to his heritage, he also has the societal pressure. Lionel Red Dog is a disaffected Blackfoot on the eve of his fortieth birthday. He sells televisions in a rural part of Southern Alberta but tells himself that one day he will go back to college to get his Ph.D. like his uncle Eli. Meanwhile, his relationship with his girlfriend, Alberta, lacks certainty, since he has to share her with his lawyer cousin, Charlie. She also resists the mere mention of marriage, preferring to have a child by artificial insemination than be saddled with any man. A unique interpretation of King's *Green Grass Running Water* shows an interrogation into what is real and magical. King situates the real alongside the magic, combining within the stories a realistic and fantastic or bizarre skilful time shift, making it fall into the category of Magic Realism. King writes for a native community and poetically weaves the traditional storytelling with Western written text. The two narratives form, apparently, different structural patterns, which distinguish the writing styles in the story. While the two interwoven texts appear to contrast and contradict each other, the mythical text forms a frame upon which the real text sits. The mythic text sets the real text up, joining the two texts in a cohesive narrative. In the realistic plot, King uses many flashbacks explaining certain character's past, wherein the stories of mythical characters like First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman move in an undefined time and space. When Changing Woman meets Moby Jane, they "swim around like that for a month. Maybe it is three weeks. Maybe not" (249). Time is unnecessary and unstated as the text repeats itself; the exact time becomes irrelevant, making the events universal and eternal. The real

time text must be defined, so when beginning a memory for the real characters, King defines the time. He writes, “When Alberta was thirteen, the family went across the line to Browning. Just South of Cardston” (ibidem 282). Therefore, the real-time histories fit into the real-time narrative as precise events, relying on the character’s authority to be proven correct.

King’s recurring structure in the mythical text defies western notions of literature. It evolves from an oral tradition keeping many oral conventions. The text is repetitive in retellings and in phrases and words. When First Woman falls from the ‘sky world’ the Ducks put First Woman on grandmother Turtle’s back: “Ho, says grandmother Turtle when she sees that woman on her back. You are on my back” (ibidem 39). That the First Woman is on grandmother Turtle’s back, is stated repeatedly. To western audience this reiteration appears redundant but in an oral telling this technique emphasizes the point, clarifying and distinguishing it as important. Mythic stories are also, told as conversations and appear more interactive due to Coyote’s interruptions and questions:

“Was it like that wonderful, misty water in California,” says Coyote...

“No,” I says, “this water is clear.”

“Was it like that lovely red water in Oklahoma,” says Coyote...

“No,” I says, “this water is blue.”

“Was it like that water in Toronto...”

“Pay attention,” I says, “or we’ll have to do this again” (ibidem 112).

With Coyote’s constant interjections the readers actively participate, and King expands the audience from a solitary reader to ‘that reader’ and Coyote. Furthermore, he reminds the reader that there are other readers. This expanded audience recalls the oral tale. King uses different grammatical structures with the cyclical magic passages, and the four parts tell the same story but from different perspectives. They all begin in the ‘Sky World’ and end up at

'Fort Marion'. All the stories are told to teach the reader that there is more to the story than first appears. The mythical figures and the real-time characters socialize actively in the native healing rituals, like those of the traditional Blackfoot ceremony of the 'Sun Dance' or 'Medicine Lodge ceremony.' The native community believes that their prayers would be carried up to the creator, who would bless them with well being. Symbolically, it is during the 'Sun Dance' ritual that King unites the mythical story and the realistic story with a little help from Coyote. Coyote brought about an earthquake which changes the entire course of shifting and healing adjustments. Lionel is brought back to his tribal roots by a unique intervention from Coyote, while Eli, finally, wins his one-man stand against the Government Corporation that built a massive dam just upriver from his mother's log cabin with a little help from trickster Coyote, whose dancing summons an earthquake and Alberta receive Coyote's blessing of immaculate conception. Through this performance of healing rituals, King's stories try to send out the idea that native storytelling still exist and maintain their power. He considers orality as storytelling strategies to resurrect a native past and to imagine a native future. A constant running dialogue, 'fix up the world', instituted in almost all fictional narrative of King, offers a tricky discourse, which is an effort to bridge the symbolic meaning contained in native stories. In King's *Medicine River*, the character, Harlen Bigbear, is rationally depicted as a Modern day trickster figure: "he was like a spider web. Every so often, someone would come along and tear off a piece of the web or poke a hole in it, and Harlen would come scuttling along and throw out filament after filament until the damage was repaired" (29). In *Green Grass Running Water*, the four old Indians offer to "fix up the world" and their constant involvement makes the Blackfoot events meaningful (133). In *Truth and Bright Water*, the trickster figure 'Coyote' is connoted as a good luck figure and "a medicine bag isn't complete without one" (231). King's storytelling technique to engage mythic/trickster figures, is to explore and reinvent cultural myths, to resist and challenge

cultural stereotyping and to unsettle reader's conventional assumption about identity. King himself says, "The trickster is an important figure for native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil, order and disorder is replaced with the more native concern for balance and harmony" (*The Native in Literature* 13). The trickster is a comic redeemer in a narrative. In King's curative storytelling, it functions on two levels. One is to incorporate into the written text, the key feature of native oral storytelling. Secondly, it succeeds in recovering a certain balance, amid the apparent chaos of most situations by means of a type of humor that they believe to be integral to all kinds of life on this earth. It is the spirit of the versatile trickster creator that keeps native alive and vital in all phase of life. The native cultural hero or trickster-transformer figure shields King as a trickster storyteller who aimed at restoring the physical and psychological harm inflicted by the dominant European culture.

3.2. Conscious Resistance of Eurocentric Parody

Canada's constitution identifies the natives into three specific categories; Indians commonly referred to as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. According to the 2011 Canadian census the population of the original peoples or the natives consist of, First Nations-851,560; Inuit-59,445; Métis-451,795, which stands at 4.3 percent of the country's total population ("Population of Canada" www.en.wikipedia.org). The aboriginal peoples in Canada exhibit unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. Reflectively, King's fictional work offers a judicious study on the First Nations or Indian bands, generally inhabiting lands called reserves. It shows a strong tendency to recapture native voices that were once misinterpreted and ransacked by the white colonialism, who maintained power by

writing its own history, systematically ignoring and silencing other competing histories of the places and cultures, they came into contact.

King's popular novels *Medicine River* (1989), *A Coyote Columbus Story* (1992), *Green Grass Running Water* (1993), *Truth and Bright Water* (1999) trend a positive portrait of Native presence that reflects a consciousness of, and resistance to, a long history of Eurocentric misrepresentation. It has helped create a new literary image of the native. The story in *Medicine River*, universalized the main native protagonist who comes home to his Blackfoot society. It reclaims voices of native people from stereotyping by the dominant culture. A Native campaigner interested in promoting native origins are particularly keen on the return of the native, and King, as one twenty first century native author and an advocate for a First Nation cause, also normatively brings home his native character, Will Horse Capture, mainly to serve as a critical standpoint through which all other stories can be interpreted. These dutiful returns often precipitate a quest, an attempt, a discovery or a journey, and in King's story, the return of Will involves a sorting out, an ordering of relationships, memories and possibilities, an attempt to come to terms with the past, an attempt to find a native future. Acknowledging the Blackfoot native to be his primary audience, King tells typical stories of Blackfoot descent, the Indians residing in the Great Plains of Montana and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Blackfoot started as 'woodland people' but as they progressively made their way over to the Plains, they had adapted to the new ways of life. They established themselves as "one of the most powerful Indian tribes on the Plains, in the late eighteen century. Their stories traced their residence and possession of their territory to time immemorial" ("Blackfoot." www.en.wikipedia.org). Anthropologists also believe that the Blackfoot originally coalesced, as a group, while living in the forests of what became known as Northeastern United States. They were mostly located around the Maine and Canadian border. By 1600, the Blackfoot

had decided to relocate in search of more land. Eventually, they settled in wide north of the Great Lakes, in present day Canada. Today, many of the Blackfoot live on reserves in Canada. About 8,500 live on the Montana reservation of 1,500,000 acres. King's native story carries constructive opinions that are often associated with the authentic native voice of this Blackfoot community. One could hear and identify groups according to political, cultural and racial ideology, especially the ethnic voices in Canada. Native voices being a product of individual interactions, history and geography, it thematically sought to explore native experiences, beliefs, perspectives on human relationships, the spiritual world and the nature of the world of the modern Indians. In *A Coyote Columbus Story*, the story mixes history and fiction. It brings out the native cultural voice by retelling the historical tale of Columbus's journey to the Americas from a Native North American point of view. A story of Coyote, who fixed up this world, controlled all events to her advantage until a funny looking red-haired, named Columbus, changes her plan. In its typical story, Thomas King uses a list of thematic activities to play upon imperialist discourse. By removing stereotypes surrounding Columbus's voyage, King reframes Columbus' glory to the advantage of the native people. King's second novel *Green Grass Running Water*, also evokes aspects of native history, mythology, and culture. King draws a multi-layered text and once again, the figure of the native trickster is central. Coyote belongs primarily to the frame story and King's absorbing narrative ensures a viable identification of native presence. The story aims at redefining the negative portrayal of natives. King has said of *Green Grass Running Water*, that it is, "directed at non-native readers, reflecting the need to engage those readers in a mutual decolonization" (270). It seeks to challenge their potentially stereotyped and undifferentiated understandings of native cultures. King's subsequent novel, *Truth and Bright Water* is a realistic retelling of people's story. Set in the border of American and Canadian towns, the story captures the essence of reservation life with dark humor and cutting satire. Tecumseh

and Lum, coming of age story, is representative of the sometimes sad and tragic lives of the real natives in their struggle for recognitions.

An added novelty in which King shows a conscious resistance and Eurocentric parody, is in his use of native humor. King's objective of humor is to explain the seriousness of issues confronting native society. He rewrites historical event with healing laughter. This is because humor has capacity to provide an essential optimism and it can bridge an understanding between Canada's Native and Euro-Canadian population. Overall, humor in relations, between native people and non-natives, tends to play a didactic logic and to some extent, diplomatic role. It lures readers into a space in which confrontational issues can be addressed in a manner that does not foreclose further intercultural dialogue. By laughing, non-native readers are often unwittingly tricked into assuming new perspectives, into acknowledging the validity of native viewpoints and, possibly, even into questioning their own. King goes on to explain about his use of comedy:

I think of myself as a dead serious writer. Comedy is simply my strategy. I don't want to whack somebody over the head, because I don't think it accomplishes much at all. There's a fine line to comedy. You have to be funny enough to get them laughing so they don't feel how hard you hit them. And the best kind of comedy is where you start off laughing and end up crying, because you realize just what is happening halfway through the emotion. If I can accomplish that, then I succeed as a storyteller ("King in Canton." www.CollectionsCanada.gc.ca/obj/com).

The novel's title *Green Grass Running Water* is a running ridicule on the white man's failure to relieve natives of their civil rights. Insightfully, *Green Grass Running Water* radically explores what it means to be native, in a chiefly white culture. By means of humor, King rewrites native culture and delineates an essence of historical accountability. For example, Latisha's role of running and owning a successful restaurant in the name of 'Dead Dog Cafe'

that bilks thrill-seeking white tourists by purporting to serve them authentic Indian dog meat, is a successive mockery on outsider's view of native culture, it states:

“People come from all over the world to eat at the Dead Dog Cafe.”

“She sells hamburger and tells everyone that it's dog meat.”

“Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy, Brazil, England, France, Toronto. Everybody comes to the Dead Dog.”

“The Blackfoot didn't eat dog.”

“It's for the tourists” (59).

The ‘Dead Dog Cafe’ is advertised as Indian, yet it depicts cultures the white tourists would like to believe, rather than the way it truly is. King uses his humor to express the ludicrousness of what people views native cultural voice to be. His humor is, sharpest in the depiction of Portland, a native artist who goes to Hollywood to become a western actor, but who must wear a fake nose because he does not look ‘Indian enough’ to perform an Indian role:

Portland's nose was not the right shape. As long as he had been in the background, a part of the faceless mob of Indians falling off their ponies in the middle of rivers or hiding in box canyons or dying outside the walls of forts, things had been okay. But, now a center stage playing chiefs and the occasional renegade, the nose became a problem. The matter came to a head when Portland auditioned for the Indian lead in *The Sand Creek Massacre* starring John Wayne, John Chivington, and Richard Widmark. The director, a slight man with a sparse blond mustache that made his upper lip look as if it caked with snot, told Portland that he could have the part but that he would have to wear a rubber nose. Portland thought that the man was kidding and told him that the only professionals he knew who wore rubber noses were clowns (168).

The above passage roughly exposes white man's falsification of native identity, perhaps, written with humor as a weapon. In King's *A Short History of Indians in Canada*, the humor chiefly proves to be disruptive, not only in the conventions of realism and causality, but also of the expectations arising from its title. The text requires readers to decode a puzzle that mixes concepts and terminologies from two vastly dissimilar fields- ornithology and the stereotypical ideas about native cultures. The story tacitly revolves around Bob Haynie, a businessman visiting Toronto for the first time. Unable to sleep, he leaves his hotel and walks towards Bay Street. He sees, "a flock of Indians fly into the side of a building. Smack! Smack!" (62). Bill and Rudy, two birdwatchers whom Bob Haynie encounters, are busy categorizing the stranded 'Indians':

Mohawk, says Bill.

Whup! Whup!

Couple of Cree over here, says Rudy.

Amazing, says Bob. How can you tell?

By the feathers says Bill. We got a book...

Holy! Says Bill. Holy! Says Rudy. Check the book, says Bill. Just to be sure.

Flip, flip, flip.

Navajo!

Bill and Rudy put their arms around Bob. A Navajo! Don't normally sees Navajos this far north. Don't normally see Navajos this far east (2-3).

King's dissimilar blend of birds and Indians and the comical idea of telling Indians by their feathers evoke surprise laughter. Yet the story also lures readers into pondering further into the underlying connections, an effect enhanced by the kind of conversation in which the birdwatchers frame their observations on the Indians. They tell Bob that he is lucky to

witness the spectacle: “A family from Alberta came through last week and didn’t even see an Ojibway” (ibidem 4). Further, Bob is informed that Indians are ‘nomadic’, ‘migratory’, and fly into skyscrapers because “Toronto’s in the middle of the flyway... The lights attract them” (ibidem 3). The birdwatchers policy is to bag the dead ones and tag the live ones, “take them to the shelter. Nurse them back to health. Release them in the wild” (ibidem). Haunting parallels emerge between ‘wild birds’ and ‘savage Indians’. The inference shows that native people are kept under control, reducing them to only as exotic objects of entertainment. The logicity in King’s stories is to open a reevaluation of the Eurocentric version of history. It is to banish the pain inflicted by centuries of misrepresentation and helps to envision a more self-determined native voice, a distinct future for Canada’s native people.

3.3. Historical Issues and Political Voice

Thomas King uses history as a source of evidence to expose injustices, inequality, and inferior social positions of native people. Historical accounts reflect societal experiences and provides authentic device, by which King can respond to a past. It helps to delineate the political voice of the native society. King’s debut novel, *Medicine River*, deals with the complex history of native’s struggle. The problem to acquire lawful Indian status to confirm identity within native community is expressed, using the historical issue of the terms ‘legal’, ‘registered’ and ‘status’ created by the *Indian Act*. According to the original *Indian Act* (1876), “Indians are a permitted name given to only those registered person as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as Indian” (Frideres 11). Registered or ‘status Indians’ are allowed with certain privileges, whereas non-status Indians are denied many rights. King’s objective in *Medicine River* is to censure such anonymous laws that categorize Indians in the white man’s legal sense. The story recounts the traumatic experiences of Will Horse Capture as a

non-status Indian. Will has an absent white father identified as Bob, and is only visible through private letters to his wife. The letter notes:

Dear Rose,

...Thanks for the pictures of the boys. Good-looking boys. I didn't know I had such good-looking boys. Well, you had something to do with it, too, chick. Maybe you should send me one of our wedding pictures (5).

The actual problem starts with a white father who has left and ignored his family. The protagonist Will was about four years old, when his father left them in the Indian reserve and is unknown since then. He relates his lonely story of growing up knowing just his mother and brother James as family, apart from the occasional visit from his maternal granny, Pete, who tells them of the relations they have with Uncle Tony, Uncle Rupert and Uncle Frank. Will's contented idea of having one's relation with his uncles takes a distressing turn, on the day he actually met them. His hopeful uncles came to their place to help them move from Calgary, i.e. a native reserve place for Indians, because the Indian law says that they are not status Indians. The running action of Uncle Frank offering a cigarette, which is assumedly an adult provision, and advising Will to take charge as man of the house is a symbolic gesture that enables Will to comprehend his real identity crisis. The conversation between Will, James and Uncle Tonys' boy, Maxwell, has the following emphasis:

"We going back to the reserve?" James asked.

"Maybe," I said.

"No" said Maxwell, "you can't. You guys have to live in town cause you're not Indian anymore."

"Sure we are," I said. "Same as you."

"Your mother married a white."

"Our father's dead."

“Doesn’t matter.”

I could feel my face hot. “We can go to the reserve whenever we want. We can get in a car and go right out to Standoff.”

“Sure,” said Maxwell. “You can do that. But you can’t stay. It’s the law” (8-9).

The narrative highlights the plight of mixed breed and miscegenation. When Will responds with an affirmative answer of going back to the reserve, he is snubbed by his own cousin Maxwell: ‘you can’t... you’re not Indian anymore.’ During this episode, the fictionist King has exposed the politicizing of native identity by the whites. He deliberately addresses one of the most dramatic changes, of native losing Indian status through intermarriage. The ‘Indian Act’ has a criterion, which states: “any legally Indian female who married a non-Indian male lost Indian status for herself and for her children. On the other hand, if an Indian male married a non-Indian female, the female became legally Indian, as did any offspring that may have resulted” (Frideres 11). Thus by decree, Will’s Indian mother Rose Horse Capture, by marrying a non-Indian male identified only as ‘Bob’, has lost Indian status for herself and for her children. They became outcasts within their own inherent community. The narrative accentuates the fact, that is, Will’s alienation within his circle of family and friends is a stereotype output perpetuated by outsiders. His subsequent quest for an identity in a new place, Medicine River, suggestive of the title *Medicine River*, is a symbolic Indian struggle to repossess their identity usurped by the white society with their erroneous laws. The identity of Will as an Indian photographer, especially to provide pictures for Indians who do not wish the white people to click their intimate pictures, helps Will to appreciate the larger expanse of native community. He is a contributing native member and a ‘family’ living in Medicine River, as Harlen remarks: “you got a lot of relatives... You think they’d go to a stranger for their photography needs when they can go to family?” (MR 91). Will’s act of inventing a new

personality to describe his absent father in life, is an allegorical act of coming to terms with his own identity. At one point, he actually gives out his own profession as a photographer to be the profession of his absent father. He says:

I was at least twenty-five when I told that woman on the plane that my father was a senior engineer. And there was no reason to do that. I didn't miss him. I didn't even think about him. I had never known the man.

So, I began to invent him.

“My father's a pilot. He flies the big jets for Air Canada.

Dad's in stock and bonds.

He's a career diplomat.

He's a photographer.

He's a doctor.

He's a lawyer” (ibidem 76).

Thinking up new professions for his father every time, and his deficiency to furnish his father's profession, is an intentional negotiation by King, to reclaim the political voice of the native Indians. The final sublimation of Will's identity comes from his mother Rose, who sends him a photograph of his father as his twenty-seventh birthday gift:

The photograph was of my father. He was leaning against a fence with four men. He had a pair of jeans, a work shirt and a hat that was pulled down over much of his face. There was a short letter from my mother with the photograph that said, “Happy Birthday. Found this picture. Third from the right. That's him.”... My mother had drawn a circle around him with an arrow pointing at the side of his head...

She had pinned the photograph to the shirt pocket. “That's him,” the letter said, as if knowing was an important thing for me to have (ibidem 82-84).

This acknowledgement is also a mark that allegorizes Will to reconcile with his family roots. It is remarkable because Will's mother, at first, hides the father's letter in a wooden chest in her closet and prevents her children to read it. She was upset on finding Will reading his father's letters which she kept it as private and does not want Will to ever go into her chest again. She always tells stories to Will and his brother James about the times they were children, and often about their childhood, but intentionally dismisses their father to 'someone' when she comes across the father's part in her storytelling. Nevertheless, the last act of Rose sending her son the photograph of his father with arrow pointing at the side of his head, is a symbolic act of uniting absent father with his son. Knowing the father's identity was an important thing, hence, the mother fulfills the duty of providing what his missing father fails to do. It gives a desirable preparation and completion of Will's discovery of self.

Colonized and subjugated people do not write their own history, which led to the appropriation, distortion, and misrepresentation of facts about native by the dominant groups. Therefore, Thomas King, as an advocate writer for First-Nation voice, has tried to present authentic, non-stereotypical historical rights of native society. Racism, social prejudices, and falsification of natives in movies, literature and popular culture of dominant group are prominent historical clashes in the initial relationship formations between native and non-native society. Racism, that is the real and practical side of native life, emerged as a subjective theme in King's fictional works. *Medicine River* gives a practical reading on the mistreatment of native people by white society. Clyde Whiteman is a typical character. He is always in and out of jail for many wrong reasons. No matter how hard he tried, the disappointment of Indians in jail is a fact that remains in record. Hence, Will draws attention to the existing racist attitude of white government, and he pacified Clyde by giving his remarks: "Hell, Clyde, there isn't a man on the team hasn't been in jail... Floyd's been arrested... So has Elwood and Frankie. Just like you" (120). As an Indian photographer in

Medicine River, Will wishes to establish his Medicine River Photography studio with a portion of loan from government establishment. However, the incident of Will's inability to get a small-business loan processed even after meeting sixty or seventy people, also lies in the fact that most of the bank belongs to the white people and they resist helping Indians.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, racism is set in the forefront through the appearance of two intermarriages in the novel. Eli Stands Alone is a University professor. He has met a white woman Karen and has married her. However, the idea that Eli is an Indian does not exit out of Karen's fascination. She lures Eli to move into her house and gives him the name 'Mystic Warrior' to substantiate the characters she has read of Indians in Eurocentric western books. Even after living with an Indian, Eli, for two years, Karen is still ashamed and apprehensive of exposing her love in front of her progressive white parents. She is fond of the false Eli that often appears in literatures and movies, and not the Indian husband she married. On the day Eli introduces Indian cultural festival to Karen, she apathetically remarks: "The Sun Dance!" said Karen. "I didn't even know you guys still practiced that. Is it true?" (225). The ignorance of Karen towards Indian cultural rituals is visible when she proposes to borrow her father's camera and has overlooked a lone Vulture bird for an Eagle in a native town of Alberta. Her first expression on seeing the tepees and lodges, was like a movie or any of the curious white historians, when they accidentally stumble upon Indians for the first time: "My God," she said. "That's beautiful. It's like right out of a movie" (ibidem 227). After a long trip to Eli's native place, it was just casual for Karen to remember only all those tepees that attract her in a filmy way, but for Eli, it is the people he mostly remembered. Again, racism is more clearly inferred in the marriage between George Morningstar and Latisha. Though married to a Canadian woman, George could not put off the distinct label of his race, Americans, as being a superior race. Early on in their marriage, George began to look down upon Latisha as one belonging to traditionalist family and point out the essential differences

between Canadians and Americans. For him, Americans are independent but Canadians are dependent. Even the name 'Country', given to Latisha, is evocative of his stereotype ideas. Through the character of George, the author has emphasized the historical representation of 'Indians as inferior.' There is a veiled prejudice in his pointed thoughts:

“It’s all observation, Country,” George continued. Empirical evidence. In sociological terms, the United States is an Independent sovereign nation and Canada is a domestic dependent nation. Put fifty Canadians in a room with one American and the American will be in charge in no time” (ibidem 172).

For George, it was a statement of fact, an unassailable truth, a matter akin to genetics or instinct. Nevertheless, the real irony lies beneath George prejudices because Latisha could recognize that the reason George wondered so much about the world, was that he did not have a clue about life. Thus, King’s historical narratives are mostly therapeutic exercises in which he conveys real stories to protect native political voice, and his racial stories are directed mainly to prevent further exploitation of natives.

Green Grass Running Water is a contributory study that provides historical facts like stories, to delineate native experience in the hands of white governments. For example, the title, 'Green Grass Running Water' carries a political baggage. It expresses the disappointment of natives in dealing with white man’s policies. In most treaty procedures, the government assures the native that all native land and resources will belong originally to them 'as long as the grass is green and the waters run', or the world stands. However, the truth, always, is that 'treaties' are white man’s weapon to acquire native land. The significance of the title 'Green Grass Running Water' hence is a parody on the land snatching policies of the white people. King remarks:

Treaties, after all, were not vehicles for protecting land or even sharing land. They were vehicles for acquiring land. Almost without fail, throughout the

history of North America, every time Indians signed a treaty with whites, Indians lost land. I can't think of a single treaty whereby Native people came away with more land than when they started. Such an idea, from a non-Native point of view, would have been dangerously absurd... In fact, treaties have been so successful in separating Indians from their land that I'm surprised there isn't a national holiday to honor their good work (*The Inconvenient Indian* 224-225).

It exposes the empty promises of white governments and social discrimination committed against natives. The native mythical character 'Changing Woman' getting trapped on the island, for not obeying western Biblical 'Noah' rules, while in his Christian ship, as narrativized in *Green Grass Running Water*, is King's way of explaining the unwanted positions of natives under White man's rule. It infers:

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 (163).

'...you're not wanted on the voyage' can be explored, allegorically, in terms of Indians having rights of occupancy but did not hold legal title to their land. Treaties are negotiated with natives, but the powers to execute land use are in the manipulative hands of white governments. For example, the episode of constructing a governmental dam on native land in spite of resistance from native populace of Alberta as depicted by King's *Green Grass Running Water*, is a premeditated disclosure of this political truth. The inference noted in 'Young Man Walking on Water' and the Old Woman. Credibly, 'Young Man' is the biblical Jesus Christ and 'Old Woman' is the native mythical figure. Here, King's narrative ridicules the white man's superior desires, to set all the rules. The 'Young Man Walking on Water', a reference to the *Bible*, when Christ walked on Water, is irritated with the interference of 'Old

Woman' floating in the water, a reference to native myths, when she offers him help. She wants to help 'Young Man' look for a boat filled with men, who need to be rescued, and he remarks that she is not aware of the Christian rules:

Christian rules, says Young Man Walking on Water. And the first rule is that no one can help me. The second rule is that no one can tell me anything. Third, no one is allowed to be in two places at once. Except me (388).

Here, the rules are under the control of biblical figure 'Jesus Christ', which is metaphorical of subjugation by the white government over natives land policies. Furthermore, *Green Grass Running Water* brings to life the tragic history of the native people. It shows natives fighting for recognition and their desire to reclaim their voice. Hence, the return of native Eli to the Indian lands after leaving all privileges in the world of the European invaders, is effectuated in King's stories to give an unfailing political voice to the native community. Eli is a University professor in a white intellectual world. He comes as defender and protector of his traditional roots and he establishes himself in the comfort of his Indian community in Alberta. It explains King's way of reconstructing the Eurocentric views, and to afford historical arena to protect the natural route of Indian cultural values. The Indian resistance and blocking of the proposed spillway for the Grand Baleen Dam, illegally built by white government to serve their stake, can be symbolic in identifying native realization of their civil liberties. Eli's victory to withhold white government's unlawful progress, although with a modest help from Coyote, a trickster cultural hero, and providing a natural water flow to the native river, is representational of the power struggle that natives will eventually succeed.

In *Truth and Bright Water*, King concentrates on the historical issues of borders, colonialism, authenticity, internal racism and commercialization of native cultures. The story takes place in the small reserve in Canada, which is a border divide, 'Truth' on the American side with 'Bright Water' on the Canadian side. The term 'border' is a political and mental

divide that separates individuals from one another, and King's narrative has dealt with this conflict in native society. It engages with the artificiality of the border for North America native people, many of whom do not recognize the American-Canadian border as a legitimate divide, but as a European construction that they transcend. The novel depicts life on the Bright Water next to the small town of Truth. The narrator is a fifteen-year-old Indian boy, Tecumseh, and he relates the daily life of his relatives and other community members, all of whom are preparing for the approaching Indian Days festivals. Within the colossal story of Tecumseh, the fictionist also embeds a symbolic composition with allusions to historical heroes and the arrival of Cherokee figures from the imperial past. These symbols and allusions permit King to evoke on specific ethnic history as well as reach a wider context by interfusing several cultural traditions, colonial conflicts, and historical tragedies. For instance, Tecumseh is an imitative name of a historical Shawnee resistant leader, who helped defend Canada during the war of 1812 and attempted to establish an independent Indian nation. Rebecca Neugin is a historical character from the Cherokee Trail of Tears. She appears in the novel as the representative survivor of removals, looking for the same 'Duck' she left behind during colonial dislocation. The character, Lum, is symbolic of the historical leader Geronimo, one of the last unifying forces to stand against the aggressive colonial power. In King's story, all these historical characters are interspersed and get a new lease of life during the Indian Days festival. Furthermore, through the figure of Monroe Swimmer, the fictionist King has revealed political, religious, and aesthetic troubles that the colonial legacy has left behind for native communities. Monroe is an Indian artist and a restorer of nineteenth-century landscape paintings in museums. He is hired by Smithsonian to restore difficult painting because images of Indians keep bleeding through into the land, picturesquely featured in the painting. He painted the Indian landscapes back to its original form. However, Monroe steals Indian bones from many museums and returns home to bury them to their ancestral lands. In

the midst of all these illusions, King again integrates the issue of authenticity and commercialization of traditional cultural forms. Inside the story, the enduring colonialism has also introduced a sense of global tourism. The narrator Tecumseh's pensively states, "When Indian Days came around... the crowds of tourist were everywhere" (25). King satirically describes the native community's reinstatement of their traditional customs as a theme park, filled with popular stereotypes. The character, Lucy, says with derision, "Indian Days are the only time we make any money without having to fill in a form" (ibidem 22). Elvin, too comments on the situation: "Everybody's going crazy over traditional Indian stuff. I figure I can sell these for fifty bucks as fast as I can make them" (ibidem 32). Further, Elvin signed his name to ensure it as saleable cultural objects. He urges, "Sign (your) name" "so they know it's authentic... A lot of this stuff comes out of Japan and Taiwan, so it's hard to tell unless you got a (name) card" (ibidem 32). Authenticity relates to the restoration and recovery of the past, but has become a misappropriated product in the modern world. It expresses:

The tourists who show up for Indian Days would get almost anything they want. Beaded belt buckles, acrylic paintings of the mountains, drawings of old-time Indians on horseback, deer-horn knives, bone chokers, T-shirts that say things like "Indian and Proud," and "Indian Affairs are the best". And all of it, according to the signs that everyone puts up, is "authentic" and "Traditional" (ibidem 209).

King has defined authenticity as a phrase that can be "slippery" and "limiting", and the same is true in the depiction of modern Indian cultures (*All My Relations* xv). In the narrative, King portrays 'Indian-ness' and the view of authenticity with the description of the modern assimilation of native identity into the Hollywood image. The characters in *Truth and Bright Water* continually compare themselves and the world through movies and popular culture. For example, Carol is scheduling a motion picture, "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!*" but

with Indians “instead of dwarfs” (21). Monroe Swimmer’s hair reminds the narrator of “Graham Greene’s hair in *Dances with Wolves*” (ibidem 45). When Lum cuts his hair, “short and uneven” and painted himself, the narrator comments how he, “looks like the Indians you see at the Saturday matinee” (ibidem 225). Lucy Rabbit carries an old magazine picture of a famous Hollywood actor, Marilyn Monroe, in her purse. She wants a “blonde hair” to look like Marilyn Monroe. Lucy has an assumption that the whites adopted Marilyn Monroe. She believes that Marilyn was “really Indian” because “She died young, of drugs. Sounds like an Indian to me” (ibidem 200). Retrieving biographical information from internet sources, Lucy has developed a full theory that Marilyn’s father also had a son, Elvis Presley: “Elvis actually played an Indian in one of his movies” (ibidem 202). Lucy also attempts to bleach her hair to resemble Marilyn, for reason the narrator explains: “Marilyn was ashamed of being Indian,’ she said. “That’s why she bleached her hair.” (ibidem 201). Although the conjecture is absurd, Lucy makes a point; she bleaches her hair, “So Marilyn can see that bleaching your hair doesn’t change a thing” (ibidem). On one hand, Lucy’s act of changing her appearance is an attempt to erase the ‘Indian-ness’ from her identity. Nonetheless as, King has pointed out, the concept of ‘Indian-ness,’ is a “nebulous term.”, and is itself a dubious stereotype and identity cannot truly be erased, a point reinforced by the fact that Lucy never succeeds in turning her hair blond (*All My Relations* xv). Thus, Lucy’s inability to turn herself into Hollywood icon, reviews mainstream stereotypes of the figure. Ultimately, replication, hyper-reality, image saturation, simulation and simulacra seem more powerful than the ‘real’ images and the entire native world becomes overtaken by the image. The narrator frequently clarifies how the world around him appears as if it is from a magazine picture. In the climax scene on the bridge, i.e. right before Lum’s incidental jump to death, the narrator remarks that, “Movies are a lot better at this. In the movies, when something goes off the top of a building or off a cliff, you get to watch it fall all the way to the bottom. In real life, the skull only falls

a few feet before it disappears between the girders, and all that's left is Lum standing there, his head down, his arms at his side" (*TBW* 257). Finally, the hyper-real Hollywood image has fabricated the native community. It is evocative as the narrator makes a poignant observation after Lum's funeral: "There are more people at the theatre than were at the funeral, but that doesn't surprise me. Dying on stage can be funny, and most people would rather laugh than cry" (*ibid.* 265). Hence, King's story demonstrates how the authentic as characterized in the Hollywood media representation, has overshadowed the authenticity of traditional native cultures.

In the storyline of *Truth and Bright Water*, King also has engaged the concern of internal racism. For example, the repeated abuse Franklin imposes on his son, Lum, is normally ignored, and overlooked by the community. The bodily harm and beating he endures from his violent father are not hidden, his bruises are "the color of blood, dark purple and black" (152). Lum is diligently training himself to participate in "The Indian Days long-distance champion" and the most obstructing injury Lum receives from his father is a limp, destroying his goal of competing in the annual race (*ibidem* 4). Lum is a victim of physical abuse. He poses as the most absurd and tragic character and his disappearance over the edge to a signified death in the river, is symbolic of the scars inflicted upon many native Indian communities owing to the issue of internalized racism.

3.4. Social Ethos and Cultural Identity

Essentially, a voice drawn from the native Blackfoot society, King's insightful novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass Running Water* trend an optimistic presence of native society. Social ethos in King's stories are strong. He consciously selects names in relation to the identity of the native people. In *Medicine River*, 'Calgary Restaurant' is a steady place

always filled up by the Indians. 'The American' was the Indian bar. 'Medicine River Friendship Centre' was the meeting place for Indians to gather and discuss their problems. 'Medicine River Photography' set up by Will is primarily a place meant for those Indians in the reserves. Lastly, the 'River Friendship Centre Warriors' was an all-native basketball team. Percy Walton argues that, "In *Medicine River*, a positive native presence is generated through its difference from the negative attributes that the native has been made to signify within English-Canadian discourse" (78). Another unique feature is that King's characters exhibits deep social attachment. For example, there is the episode shown in *Medicine River* where Harlen Bigbear and Will Horseshoe drive back at night from a basketball tournament in Utah and pass the Custer National Monument in Wyoming. Their decision to stop and visit the Monument is guided by social affiliation. It is in this very place that all those Indians came riding out of the hills and defeated Custer during the battle of Little Bighorn. Indians had a moment of victory over whites and Harlen says, "It's part of our history" (102). The reason for Harlen's insistence to visit the historical Monument is because he wanted to see in real and get a clear picture of him and Will standing over Custer's grave. Again, Harlen's choice to pick out only Indian place for supper is because local spots are beneficial, they got the best food, and good food that will cheer them up. By visiting Indian place called the Casper Café, he, too, wishes to get hold of the book on the Little Bighorn as knowledgeable help for the proposed visit to the National Monument. Harlen is also particular in choosing places run by natives because he nurtures a belief in helping out relations whenever possible. He voices, "Got to help each other out when we can" (110). Will substantiate this habit of Harlen's as they rested by, in another Indian restaurant, he remarks, "We got a room at the Big Chief Motel. It had a neon sign that flashed Vacancy and You Like-um. Harlen chose it because he figured that, since we were near the Crow reservation, the tribe probably owned it" (ibidem). In *Green Grass Running Water*, there is, the constant interjection from the

mythical characters to, “Mind your relations” (39). It serves a social purpose in unifying natives under one common code. Norma is the classic promoter. She wishes for a secure lifestyle and throws an advisory talk as she converse with her nephew Lionel. She counsels Lionel to get a real job that will pay well and provide free trips all over the place and cites an example of success where his sister Latisha made her own luck by establishing her restaurant. She quips, “That restaurant of hers is going to make her a rich woman” (59). Norma also does not forget to point out the comfort it brought when one settles in life and in turn contributes socially, she relishes that it is, “Nice to have a real Indian restaurant in town” (ibidem). To encourage Lionel to seek for a stable job, Norma again considers Lionel to try running for council that will allow him to do good and become famous. There is a purpose as she states:

If you ran for council, you’d be on the reserve and you could see your parents before they die.... They don’t have that many more years left. Your father just set up his lodge at the Sun Dance. Said he hoped he would see you there this year (ibidem 66).

To keep Lionel socially rooted within the native community, Norma formally brought in Eli’s way of life. Eli is Lionel’s uncle who went to Toronto, studied in white man’s University and got a merited job as Professor. He came back to his own native town as protector of native traditional society. In Norma’s words, he is now “a hero” defending the Blackfoot river which sustains the cultural life of the natives living in Alberta (ibidem 67). According to Norma, Eli at the beginning is rootless, willing to pass off as whites by wearing white shirt, slacks, and fancy shoes and married a white woman brought her out to the Sun Dance. But what actually strengthened Eli right out was his participation during Sun Dance and the inspiring moment is that he had not left the reserve even after ten years of being at home. Lionel reminds her of Eli, and she declares proudly of Eli’s efficacy: “He came home, nephew. That’s the important part. He came home.” (ibidem).

Cultural identity is another appealing premise in which King portrays native society. Various cultural and social theorists investigate cultural identity in terms of content values as guiding principle to meaningful symbols and to life-styles that individuals share with others. According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is viewed in two different ways. The first position examines cultural identity in terms of one's communal culture reflecting typical historical experiences and shared cultural codes. Further, such cultural codes and common historical experiences provide us, as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. The second view relies heavily on the individuals' experience of their culture. Through this view, culture is always changing, "far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power" (Hall 393-394). Thomas King's fictional narratives are suggestive of this type of cultural identity. His debut novel *Medicine River* is a native homecoming story, similar, in trend, to native writers bringing back their native heroes at home. It recounts the story of Will Horse Capture, who returns to his hometown, only to attend his mother's funeral, however in the course of time, he finds his own cultural identity in the native community of Medicine River. Will lives as a photographer in the city of Toronto but moves back home to establish 'Medicine River Photography', which is specially a studio to serve photography needs to Indian family and relatives residing in Medicine River. Will's character precipitates a change right after the death of his mother. The town 'Medicine River' is a chosen place of Will's mother after she is forcefully dislodged from a native reserve 'Calgary' for marrying a non-Indian man. Eventually, Will occupies the same spot his mother once occupied as member, which is symbolical in underlining the continuity of native cultural tenacity. Will becomes an Indian and Medicine River is very much his own, that is the reason why his photography service belongs purely for Indians. In the course of his flashback to childhood experience with his mother, Will relates of how he is a son of an Indian mother, who is dismissed by her

family from the day she married the non-native man. Rose's marriage to Will's father alienated her from her community who disowned her of her native status. Even after her husband has abandoned her, the relatives never accepted her nor with her children. They finally settled in Medicine River, a native town, because it was a matter of cultural pride for Will's mother to be in close proximity to the native reserve. Will notes of his mother's pride in Indian cultural identity: "It wasn't so much the law as it was pride, I think, that let my mother go as far as the town and no farther" (9). He also describes an occasion, when she refuses to accept the nylons as a gift from her best friend, Erleen, saying, "friends don't need to get each other presents" (ibidem 56). Like Rose, native characters in King's stories exhibit a certain pride, just as Will, too, experiences such a pride within him. He got to witness a quarrel between Eddie Weasel and Big John. Both has a pride, and does not want to give in to the stereotype name. The trouble began when Eddie threw a knife at Big John who called him 'a pretend Indian'. After a long drawn quarrel which turned into a serious one, the two did get reconciled through Harlen's intervening philosophy that, "being related was more important than some small difference of opinion or a little name calling" (ibidem 68). The cultural pride of an Indian is visibly shown in the character, Bertha Morely. She is an independent, "thick, handsome woman with a talent for rescuing the truth from falsehoods and flights of fancy" (ibidem 168). When Bertha Morley decides to join a Calgary dating service, her Indian pride can clearly be noticed in the way she fills up her form. She filled up carefully, avoiding any mistakes, but under weight, height and date of birth, she had printed 'NOYB'. She later explains to Will that it means, "It's none of their business", for they got her picture and would be able to see what she looks like and "the rest of that stuff is just nosy" (ibidem 169-70). King skillfully notes Bertha's character to show her pride inspite of the position she is in. Though it becomes evident that she has had a troubling, and even abusive, relationship in her past, this does not stop her from expressing herself confidently:

I'm a Blood Indian woman in good health with lots of friends who say I'm good-looking. I'm not a skinny woman, and I graduated from high school. I got a good job and I've raised four kids and have no objection to a couple more. I got my own car. I like to go fishing and hunting and I play bingo every Thursday (ibidem 170).

King's overdramatization of a scene, at its core, has so much to relate on the idealistic aspects of cultural life. It allows one to relate to the identity of Bertha, down on her luck but not desperate and damaged, perhaps not in need of any rescue.

In *Borders*, the mother reveals cultural pride in her Indian heritage. She is a member of Blackfoot tribe and when asked to declare her citizenship at the Canadian-American border, she resolutely identified herself as 'Blackfoot' and never faltered in her attitude:

"Purpose of your visit"

"Visit my Daughter"

"Citizenship?"

"Blackfoot" ...

"Canadian side or American side?"

"Blackfoot side," she said (169-170).

She strongly believes that she is neither Canadian nor American and obstinately keeps replying with the same answer: "Canadian side or American side?" asked the guard. "Blackfoot side," she said (ibidem 170). The mother is proud to be a Blackfoot and she keeps coming back to the border to confirm her Blackfoot identity. The narrator hence recounts his mother's pride when he says, "Pride is a good thing to have, you know, Laetitia had a lot of pride and so did my mother. I figured that someday, I'd have it too" (ibidem 172). It means that cultural identity is a thing that distinguishes one's perception about culture in any societal coordination.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, there are two parallel stories, one mythological and magical, and the other contemporary and realistic. King's intention is to explain the popular cultural presence in a native world, hence employs a central performer, Coyote, who is a cultural trickster hero. Coyote is a link to these two plots, by which the magical characters adapt to the real world and freely intermingle with the realistic characters. In their interactions, the magical 'Four old Indians' fixes the conventional Indian's role, where white actors defeat Indian's at all times in Hollywood movies. The magical Indians on a mission to 'fix up the world' has rewritten Hollywood history by colorizing old black and white westerns. They transform the plot by allowing the Indian 'savages' to triumph over James Wayne and the United States Calvary. The revised westerns are now in favor of Portland, an Indian actor, who acts minor Indian roles in western movies. The narrative gives:

Portland and the rest of the Indians began to shoot back, and soldiers began falling over. Sometimes two or three soldiers would drop at once... John Wayne looked down and stared stupidly at the arrow in his thigh, shaking his head in amazement and disbelief as two bullets ripped through his chest and out the back of his jacket. Richard Widmark collapsed face down in the sand, his hands clutching at an arrow buried in his throat.

The cavalry came riding over the hill again, and just as they got to where the Indians were waiting in the river, they disappeared. The Indians charged out of the river and massacred John Wayne and Richard Widmark (358-367).

Western artifacts have drastically ruined the original Indian cultures. Hence, the accepted change of Indian victory over whites in westerns', can be articulated as a source of seizing dominant cultures and initiating in it, the cultural identity of natives.

King's storyline in *Truth and Bright Water* is affirmed mainly to understand cultural identity amongst native and non-native community. The action of Monroe Swimmer dumping Indian skulls into the river, and Lum racing off the river, are all symbolical contents that

explain cultural rebirth as 'water' signifies renewal of native cultural identity. Every character placed in King's *Truth and Bright Water*, hopes for a new start which will grant them fulfillment in life. For example, Helen is a self-willed character. She yearns to leave Bright Water and move to a big city and turn into an actress. But her dream of becoming an actress remains at the surface, for in reality she is professionally a native beautician and is strongly attached to her cultural roots in Bright Water Reserve. However, she has real moments of living her acting dreams, when she gets to play the Queen's role in the political satire *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, put up by a community theatre group. Cassie here, is a new mysterious character. She travels around the world, but always comes back to her cultural hometown of Bright Water Reserve, mainly to atone her secret guilt. The tattoo on her hand with the letters 'AIM' on "the knuckles pulled tight and stand out against the skin" provides a kind of obscurity that is never disclosed (56). The narrator Tecumseh guesses it as AIM- MIA, which could imply Cassie's lost or abandoned daughter, or Cassie's membership of the American Indian Movement (AIM), or else she just got the tattoo to be cool. Like Cassie, there is another mysterious character, Monroe Swimmer, a 'famous Indian artist'. King allows Monroe to take a major role in the unveiling of the theme of native cultural identity. Monroe is a specialist in restoring paintings. He buys the abandoned Methodist missionary church building and proceeds to paint it 'out of' the landscape; he paints the church into Prairie landscape, to such an extent that not even he can find its door, giving a cultural affiliation to Magic Realism that makes use of "convoluted plots or even labyrinthine narrative" (Murfin and Ray 242). There is miscellaneous use of dreams, myth and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or the mysterious, and King's cultural narratives employ it, to note the presence of "surrealistic elements in native cultural identity" and its beliefs in a certain socio-cultural identification (ibidem 43). Monroe proposes, "to save the world", and he not only restored

nineteenth-century Indians landscape paintings, when he worked for museums around the world, but, has also painted Indians 'back into' the paintings and has stolen native bones collected in these museums (*TBW* 131). His idea to steal skulls from museums around the world, has a basis: "Oh," says Monroe, "I stole them from lots of museums. Toronto, New York, Paris, London, Berlin. You name the museum, I've probably been there", is intended to retrieve Indians back to their respective land or to honor cultural identity (*ibidem* 250). By tying red ribbon around each skull, Monroe identifies the missing Indians and executes the ceremony of traditional burial by "putting the bones in the river" (*ibidem* 251). This particular deed is Monroe's attempt to obliterate all colonial symbols from the community. Another feat of Monroe is his grand giveaway festival. He invites the whole town and gives away his possession, and these gifts are symbolical with unique meanings. Each gift has something to relate to the identity of the receiver. For instance, Cassie receives an 'Inuit Sculpture of a woman with a child' on her back which is symbolical of her own past, and Tecumseh receives a Piano which is symbolical of inner comfort and support. Monroe has done all these deeds during the cultural celebration of Indians, because their coming together for the great Indian Days Festivals signifies a cultural unification.

The One about Coyote Going West is a cultural trickster narrative that reaffirms the power of native voices. It defies Euro-centered cultural supremacy and ridicules western literary canon by focusing on the issue of the creation of Indians. The narrative operates on history and myth. Here, Coyote is visiting her relatives, so she could, "tell those stories. Fix this world. Straighten it up" (95). The anonymous narrator 'I' asks Coyote for a good story. Since Coyote has been reading about history of how the Indians were found by various explorers, she relates:

Maybe I tell you the one about Eric the Lucky and the Vikings play hockey for the Old-timers, find us Indians in Newfoundland, she says. Maybe I tell you

the one about Christopher Cartier looking for something good to eat. Find us Indians in a restaurant in Montreal. Maybe I tell you the one about Jacques Columbus come along that river, Indians waiting for him. We all wave and say, here we are, here we are (ibidem 96).

However, the narrator corrects Coyote's old book stories by recounting a native version of how the explores were lost and the Indians help them survive:

Ho, I says. You are trying to bite my toes. Everyone knows who found us Indians. Eric the lucky and that Christopher Cartier and that Jacques Columbus come along later. Those ones get lost. Float about. Walk around. Get mixed up. Ho, ho, ho, ho, those ones cry, we are lost. So we got to find them. Help them out. Feed them. Show them around. Boy, I says. Bad mistake that one (ibidem).

Thus, the native cultural stories continue, and it participates by dismantling historical discourse and western conventional notion of culture. It also parodies colonial history about emergence of native cultural identity. Furthermore, cultural identity in Thomas King's fictional works can be studied under the following sub points:

Traditional Family Relationship

Family Relationship plays a distinguishing role in the formation of cultural identity in King's fiction. It is of great importance to respect the ancestral history, the value of family ties and the elders, as it shapes the lives of individuals in their ethnic cultural community. Evidently seen in *Green Grass Running Water* where Norma, Lionel's Aunt, emphasizes the importance of keeping in touch with roots, like attending the Sun Dance and meeting regularly with family on the reserve. There is, on the other hand, the mythical character

giving importance of one's own family relationship. They insist that there is nothing like having one's family around:

“We got the best,” said Bursum. “Lionel show your uncle the radios. I'm going to show your other relations how The Map works”...

“Ah, they're not really relations,” said Lionel.

“Everyone's related, grandson,” said the Lone Ranger.

“That's right,” said Bursum. “That the way things are with Indians” (330).

Primarily, King's story knits the web of identity and native cultural kinship through family and cultural lineage. The characters in *Green Grass Running Water* and *Medicine River* frequently remind each other to 'mind your relations'. This perception of 'minding your relations', connects with Paula Gunn Allen's statement of “concept-in-relation” (43). That if you 'mind your relations', you have the autonomous responsibility of thinking both for yourself and for your cultural community at the same time. The Blackfoot idea of autonomy is a sense of self which accrue only within the context of a cultural community, a “nativistic” understanding of autonomy which is an “individualized” not “individualistic” sense of self (*Borders* 314). The concepts of 'minding your relations' in King's fiction means, looking after the relationship shared between all living and non-living beings. It would offend native values to transpose or overthrow anyone or anything. So in it, Lionel, the protagonist, is identified as someone who is “more than a friend, he's family”, a partaker in the native cultural kinship (*GGRW* 44). It examines the entire range of social beliefs, institutions and communicative practices, for “culture is the study of perfection” conceived through harmonious order, which is development of all sides of humanity (Arnold 11). In *Medicine River*, we find native characters repeatedly saying, “Nothing more important than the family”, and that being related was more important than some small differences of opinion (26). The native idiom: “You are acting as if you have no relations”, works as a kind of

moralizing agent to preserve the sanctity of one's name in societal configuration (*GGRW* 73). It is also this fear of losing face within the family, which helps maintain one's decency in a society. For instance, the protagonist in *Medicine River* often makes a list of professions to create his absent father. On one occasion, he told his co-passenger on an airplane that his father was "a senior engineer with Petro Canada", then sometimes, a Pilot, a Career Diplomat, a Photographer, a doctor, a lawyer, and so forth (75). Yet, he is fearful of being caught and does not want to embarrass himself and his relations. Again, when Will's mother married the white man, the blame is laid over the native relation, George, who has introduced the couple. Granny Pete blamed George for the marriage because he got them together: "Damn bottle Indian," she said. "Just got to show off his relations to whites. No more sense than a horseshoe" (*ibidem* 7). Granny Pete's blame words are symbolically a method of managing bad times within the native family.

Community and the Function of Elders

Native cultural identity comes from community. It is a factual concept for native peoples, that their tribe is an important source of identity. A culture takes its shape on ideas of humanity, where relations are vital and the symbolical bondage of being within the community, is attached to those communications with the nature and landscapes. In *Medicine River*, Harlen's symbolic reference to 'Chief Mountain' is to encourage Will to move from Toronto to Medicine River. He showed the bondage between an Indian and the landscape when he tells Will: "You could see Chief Mountain clearly, its top chiseled back at a slant, its sides rising straight off the prairie floor" (15). Ninastiko or Chief Mountain is a spiritual centre of the Blackfoot confederacy, and so, he further notes, "You see over there... Ninastiko...Chief Mountain. That is how we know where we are. When we can see the

mountain, we know we're home" (ibidem 90). Will must identify himself as part of the community, and his eventual acceptance sets off the native concept of home and the importance of cultural identity. Community 'elders' play an important role. Elders need to invite misplaced natives and initiate them into the community. Hence, the elder Lionel does his job by introducing Will into the close-knit native society: "You... were raised up in Calgary, so maybe you don't know everyone. Maybe you should greet everyone, so you know the people" (ibidem 199). Will's alienation and isolation, indeed, had been great. The absence of a father has created a sense of rejection in Will. He remembers negotiating his hatred for his father, perhaps, because of sheer want of having a father. He admits:

I did not miss him. I did not even think about him. I had never known the man.

So, I began to invent him...

Sometimes I'd sit in my apartment and try to think up new professions for my father (ibidem 76).

Amusingly, his list of professions for his father ran out, and instead of discontinuing, he began to imagine long and elaborate stories that he could retell adding to those ones, as he went along. Will's thoughts of his father becomes so real that he imagines his physical appearance and starts building stories around him, thereby, creating a sense of having a complete family. It is now replaced by a very satisfying and ideal father, because most of all, Will likes to point out that his father loved his family, and that he, "was getting postcards and letters with pictures of him standing against some famous place or helping women and children take sacks of rice off the back of trucks" (ibidem 80). His imaginary father is always helping some people, thereby most of the time belonging to the side of the 'privileged'. Considering the privileged group to be the whites, once again, one cannot help feeling that Will wants to be with the privileged group. Disowned by the father and outcasted by the mother's community, left Will alienated and full of dejection. Thus, alienation followed by

isolation, became a part of Will's life. He is indifferent towards identity, and has no passion to be a member, neither with the native community nor with the non-native community. Will is almost a non-entity for the community of Medicine River, though we get some glimpses of a hidden wish. He is consciously and unconsciously, pushed back into non-existence, but the strong cultural tenacity of native community keeps Will going until, both, he and the community, accepts each other. King communicates that in a native society, it is the elders, who guide back the drifted native person. The denoted meaning is reached when Floyd's grandmother invites Will to join in the family photo. She has adopted Will, and it is a symbolic gesture of Will's final compliance to native community. The elders in King's stories are attributed with special functions; they preserve cultural knowledge and acts as harbinger of native stories to younger members of the native society. For example, Lionel James is a famous storyteller, who goes all over the world to relate stories. His stories are mostly Indians stories of how they live, their past and present, to the curious audience. He is also a respected elder of the reserve, who tries himself to cope up with the changing Modern world while, at the same time, aims to preserve the native cultural stories. Lionel James wanted to have a credit card, which would allow him to be "a modern Indian" and help him travel all over the place (ibidem 164). While in his own heart he felt unnecessary to have a credit card because he loves to stay back at home and tell stories to his grandchildren that will help them gain cultural knowledge, there is the need to travel to promote native stories. King presented a personal belief that it is the elders of the community who possess a true perception of native cultural identity.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, elders have a dual role of protecting the native community from the destruction of White man's governmental projects on native lands. They need to 'fix up the world' in order to allow the continual flow of native cultural river, which is a source of native pride and a reservoir of native cultural rituals of 'Sun Dance'. The elders

also need to 'fix up' fragmented personal lives. Lionel is a mediocre television salesman, he is indecisive about his goals on the eve of his fortieth birthday. Alberta lives in Calgary and works as a teacher. She does not intend to make a marriage commitment to either Lionel or Charlie. However, she wants a child and is prepared to go out and sleep with a stranger in order to get pregnant. Her reason for not desiring a father for her child is because she feels that men are not to be relied on or to be trusted. Lionel and Charlie are only in the way, always demanding and wanting. She too has cruel experiences from her childhood. Her father who was a drunkard disappeared one night, never to return. Charlie is another character who is working as a lawyer to the advantage of white people against natives. His values lie in money and prestige, as is shown by his negative and arrogant attitude towards Alberta's work as a teacher and Lionel's work as a television salesman. Charlie's father is a famous western movie actor living in Hollywood, but Charlie is embarrassed to be recognized because of his resemblance to his father, or his father's occupation which requires him to wear a fake nose in the movies to indicate his native origin. Charlie has difficulty in identifying himself with his native values and background. Hence, to solve it all to a native advantage, the 'Four old Indians', who are also the elders in *Green Grass Running Water* guide Lionel in his decision to attain University degree, which will also assist him to serve the native community. He obtains the position of his uncle Eli, as the protector of traditional native cultures. As for Alberta, she gets an immaculate conception. She gets impregnated through symbolic water, as the trickster 'Coyote' dances and sings around. With Charlie, he is finally able to connect with his father in Los Angeles, for he has no future work with white man. In *Green Grass Running Water*, the elders have trickster roles, together with their human sides and godly sides. The trickster's earthquake shattered the spillway hydroelectric dam. Coyote's flood and earthquake sequence, provided a natural course to the obstructed river, and the native community gets back their traditional river, where they can continue their cultural 'Sun

Dance' rituals. Like several other trickster creator tales, the trickster characters of King's stories serve the human world with a promise of equilibrium.

In King's *Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre*, though a whiteman, Joe is a supportive elder of the native community. The fictionist King is a good delineator of community lives and he gives importance to the community, right from the beginning of the story, by saying, "Joe the painter knew almost everyone in town and everyone knew Joe" (97). In this manner, Joe mingles with the crowd, representing an ideal human being. He is an honest man full of civic spirit: "He'd even stand when they played the National Anthem" (ibidem 100). Motivated by this civic spirit, Joe decides to stage a pageant in the competition that was to be a part of the centennial celebration of their town. He says, "I live here. And it's going to have a birthday, you know.... This is my town", which is a reason enough for him to stage the pageant (ibidem 102). After a lot of running about which includes, getting an approval from the Mayor, collecting historical data, writing a script, gathering a group of thirty to forty Indians, Joe finally stages the pageant in a highly appealing manner. After making his actors enact the blood-spattered event, boldly and truthfully, Joe soliloquizes about the hypocrisy of the white man, Larson. Impersonating Larson, he says: "I abhor taking of a human life, but civilization needs a strong arm to open the frontier. Farewell, Redman" (ibidem 116). Along with the Mayor, the audience is abashed by Joe's pageant. This was not what they had expected. It had mentioned something which was deemed unmentionable, indicative of Joe's usual habit. The Mayor does not definitely accept Joe's pageant. Joe does not win the coveted prize because he sees to it that the historical event presented, does not lose its truthfulness.

King conveys some major ideas through the character of Joe. Joe, the painter, is an honest white man whose white skin does not stop him from admitting the true face of community history: "You cannot muck around with history. It is not always the way we'd

like it to be but there it is. Can't change it" (ibidem 106). He is fully aware that it is a native issue and decides to present it as the same. He does not care if his pageant very openly showed the treachery of Matthew Larson and his brothers who 'encroached' on the lands of the natives living there. He also presented very clearly a scene, where the Indian Redbird invites Larson to his camp, offered him gifts of skins and got iron kettles and a *Bible*, in return, from Larson. He did not hesitate to perform the scene where Larson started claiming the land from the native instead of sharing it. Very honestly, Joe makes the narrator say in his monologue to the audience, "The white man takes more than he needs. He is greedy like a bear in the spring" (ibidem 113). Echoing a hypocritical justification of the whites, with Joe himself playing the role of Larson, he made his accomplices forcibly win the island: "spread out and let none escape. It's God's work... there'll be no peace with Redbird and his people for there can be no peace between Christians and heathens. Steel your hearts to the cries of the Indians... Who goes with me to bring the light of civilization to this dark land" (ibidem 115). With this, Joe has his actors perform an enactment of the massacre. Joe, thus, in his own way re-creates history and in the process, reminds his audience of the community tradition of dancing, wearing long hair, in particular. Another feature presented here, is the Indian community's appreciation of honesty, even if it concerned a white man. The story begins with an emphasis on the friendship between the Whiteman Joe and the Indian narrator. And it also ends with "all the people who knew Joe as well as I knew Joe didn't like him. I like Joe" (ibidem 118). The real reason for liking Joe is because Joe was an honest man. Just as Joe appreciates Indian cultural community and insists on calling the narrator 'Chief', so does the narrator appreciate Joe's honesty. He does not romanticize the slaughtered Indians. He deals with it as simply a fact, just like blowing his nose. He does not feel any pious guilt, either. He lays the actions out in the open and lets them speak for themselves. However, for these very reasons many people do not like Joe, as "most people can't manage honesty"

(ibidem 98). Thus, in King's stories, the elders are ingenuous and decent figures who function, chiefly, as upholders of all communal truths. In the process, they are not scared of any consequences as long as it protects the community they intend to defend. Joe, the elder of Deer Island, is a conscientious man, who firmly holds the belief that all humans, whether white or Indians, have the same blood and are equal, as long as they reside on Deer Island. It promotes general benevolence, and King's narrative offers an attempt to revive and retell a tradition with a hope to help the native society to identify and reconnect with their community roots. It has universal truths concerning both natives and non-natives relationship in a communal world.

Ceremonial Events and Native Festivity

Ceremonial events and native festivity connote historical events and continuity in cultures. Specifically in King's stories, he describes the Blackfoot traditions. The Blackfoot carry on many cultural traditions of the past and hope to extend their ancestor's tradition to their coming generations. One of the biggest cultural celebrations that King talks about, is the North American Indian Days lasting four days. His novel, *Truth and Bright Water*, offers an involved reading of such native festivity. It has many activities which occupy native minds and keep them away from all other interests. When it comes to Indian Days celebration, the Blackfoot community mingles together to display their vibrant strengths and cultures. For instance, Lum, the narrator's cousin, is preparing hard for a race competition which is to take place during Indian Days, and Monroe Swimmer organizes a 'giveaway' event during the Indian Days. The narrator, Tecumseh recounts that 'Indian Days' are the happiest times where you get to see all sorts of people from over the world. He remarks that, when Indian Days came around the crowds of tourists were everywhere. Tecumseh likes to see the gaiety

of tourists, especially the Germans who were “so keen on dressing up like Indians (25). He relates how ‘Indian Days’ are always great, that it is a time of building new friendship. He talks about an event of how his dog, Soldier, goes over to extend friendship to the three German guys dressed up as Indians. Tourists prefer to dress up as Indians when they arrive at the booth, because they wanted to show solidarity as they participate in Indian cultural rituals. Tourists get almost anything they want, and it is more of a cultural exchange event, where artists take part in unison:

Other artists come in from places like Red Deer, Medicine River, Hobbema, or from across the line, Browning, Missoula, Flathead Lake. Some of them rent the booths that the band puts up just below the big tent, and some of them sell off the back of their pickup trucks. A few just spread their blankets on the grass and wait for the tourists to wander around (ibidem 209).

The activities of the Indian Days have depictions of active participation of characters:

Fenton Bull Runner and his wife Maureen make dream catchers out of willow shoots and fishing line. Edna Baton runs a fry bread stand. Lucille Rain and her sister Teresa do bead work. Jimmy Hunt and his family sell cassettes of old-time powwow songs (ibidem 209).

Monroe’s input in the festival is more of a symbolic kind. He relinquishes his entire wealth and presented it as gifts to the people of Bright Water Reserve. The narrator says of Monroe:

Monroe begins passing out all the stuff, and I help him. Skee gets a really nice painting of a woman on a beach for his café. Lucy gets a poster of Marilyn Monroe, and Lucille and Teresa get one of the big rugs. Monroe gives my grandmother a Navajo rug, and he lets Sherman and Wilfred and Eddie pick out turquoise and silver rings from a carved wooden box. Wally gets one of the two suits of Japanese armor, and Gabriel Tucker gets the other (ibidem 244).

All of these gifts have something to relate to the life of the receiver and Monroe, as a mouthpiece of King's cultural stories, promotes the native norms of cooperative sharing. It identifies native cultural society, from the rest of other cultural worldview.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, King describes the 'Sun Dance' event, which lasts for eight days. The Blackfoot natives observe this festival as a time for prayers, dancing, singing, and offerings to honour the creator. They will set up "tepees and lodges" and will camp for days until the completion of all rituals (ibidem 228). King's native character, Eli Stands Alone, could trace his mother's lodge easily because it "had always been on the eastern side of the circle" (ibidem). Eli is also aware of the sanctity entailing native 'Sun Dance' rituals, and prohibits his white wife, Karen, to take cameras; he warns her that photos are strictly forbidden. A conversation is noted between Karen and her parents:

"Did you get any pictures?" said Karen's mother.

"Mom" said Karen, "they don't allow photographs."

"That's probably wise," said her mother.

"Sounds like one hell of a vacation," said her father (ibidem 291).

All native sacred ceremonies and festivity provide an opportunity for the Blackfoot to get together and share views and ideas with each other. King also relates these native cultural ceremonies, realistically, through the experience of Eli and his participation in the 'Sun Dance'. While Eli was growing up, his mother would close the cabin every July and move the family to the Sun Dance. They would ride horses and chase each other across the prairies, their freedom interrupted only by the ceremonies of Sun Dance. Eli liked the men's dancing best of all. He describes how the women would dance for four days and then there would be a day of rest and the men would begin. Each afternoon, towards evening, the men would dance and just before sunset, one of the dancers would pick up a rifle and lead the other men to the

edge of the camp, where the children waited. Then, there will be a communal feasting. Varieties of foodstuffs, bread, macaroni, canned soup, sardines, coffee, etc, piled around the flagpole, will be distributed and shared. The food sharing is symbolic of harmony and cultural oneness. In *Green Grass Running Water*, Latisha implicates the role of cultural sharing. She said, “I take food out for the dancers and their families every year” (395). Latisha worked her way as she distributes food with relatives and friends. She will often stay for coffee and conversation while passing along. She loved to watch people set their chairs and blankets in a circle, getting ready for the dancers. The gathering people charmed her, and it was beautiful to watch it all.

To summarize the discussion, it is inspiring to point out that Thomas King’s fictional works are remarkable in promoting native voices. The multiplicity of names for native people flows out of the efforts of writers like King to crack open the monolithic experience of the native, to deconstruct white European’s racist image of the ‘Indian’ which has dominated Western culture since Columbus’ discovery. King is trying to reclaim native people’s right to name themselves, to define their own voice, rights and images from within their own culture, communities and traditions. In *Truth and Bright Water*, King’s reclamation of native voice is directed through the character of Monroe Swimmer; an artist who brings back native remains collected in museums around the world and had also painted Indians ‘back into’ the paintings to its original form. His claims of “going to save the world”, echoes King’s noted view that Indians will be back in their own place, though uprooted by white man’s imperialism (131). In *Green Grass Running Water*, there is a modern native character, Eli Stands Alone, who uses the knowledge he gained in the ‘white world’ to strengthen his position as the ‘anti-stereotype.’ Eli stands for the connection between the traditional and the modern. He defends his modern lifestyle and intellectual career in the conversations with his offensively traditional sister, Norma: “Nothing wrong with getting away from the reserve.” “We’ve been

here thousands of years.” “Tourist talk, Norma.” (318) On the other hand, Eli stands up for his Native roots whenever he talks to Clifford Sifton. He argues that being native does not prevent anyone from getting an education: “That’s my profession. Being Indian is not a profession.” (ibidem 155). Although Eli dies in the end, the family tradition of living in the log cabin is kept alive, as Norma begins to rebuild the cabin and announces that she is going to live in it. In *Medicine River*, King’s characters pave a way for more representation of Indian in the outside world. Joe Bigbear has been to many places, showing Indian ways to people, and he laughs at Will who “shakes hands like a damn Indian” (141). There is Lionel James, an elder on the Reserve, who visited Will to ask his help in getting a credit card for his regular visits all over: “Boy hard to keep track of this world.... So I figure I better get a credit card, be a modern Indian” (ibidem 164). He exemplifies as to how a native has to blend into the modern world, while preserving their past. He says. “So, I go all over the world now, and talk about Indian ways and how my grandparents lived, and sometimes I sing a little. I used to dance too.... Most of the time I tell stories” (ibidem 162-63). Through Lionel James, a realization draws that the world is getting more and more curious about, and interested in Indian ways of life. Lionel seems to be satisfied as a native storyteller. Surely, as he shares with the world, the stories of Coyote and Raven, the mythological world of the Indian is gaining ground. He is pleased that the art of native storytelling, which had no place in the white world, is gaining due recognition. On the other hand, Lionel says that he did not wish to continue his travels for he had another very important job to do, that is, to tell his grandchildren those stories and teach them to understand those stories as their own, and not as distant fairy tales. Here, King touches a significant fact, of the arrival of a new native generation with its changing modern worldviews, of superficial views of outsiders, and the need to remind themselves of their past experience, as much as the rest of world. That there is

the need to define their experience, now, and the need for a better understanding of natives, through their voices, which is the pertinent approach.

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