UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

CARLOS EDUARDO MENEGHETTI SCHOLLES

DISCURSIVE AND MEDIATIC BATTLES IN THOMAS KING'S *GREEN GRASS, RUNNING WATER*

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Dissertação de Mestrado em Literaturas Estrangeiras Modernas – Litaraturas de Língua Inglesa para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras
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To Nicole and Gabriel, with love.

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EPIGRAPH

Why do we 'read' other cultures?
What do we see when we do, and why are we interested?
What are we looking for?
Is it the exotic Other [...] 'the voice of difference likely to bring us what we can't have' and to divert us from the monotony of sameness?
Or is it, rather, a genuine attempt to share knowledge of who we are as human beings?

Elvira Pulitano

RESUMO

O objetivo desta dissertação é o de investigar as disputas pelo poder subjacentes no texto literário do autor cherokee/canadense Thomas King, mais especificamente em seu romance publicado em 1993 intitulado *Green Grass, Running Water*. Serão destacadas as estratégias performáticas empregadas na desconstrução de representações opressivas de nativo-americanos por discursos ocidentais que compõem um complexo campo de batalha onde vozes em conflito disputam por direitos discursivos nas relações de poder. Se por um lado temos a tradição epistemológica positivista/cartesiana que trabalha há cinco séculos no sentido de exercer controle sobre as representações simbólicas dos nativo-americanos, a fim de que poder executivo e discursivo possa ser exercido sobre eles, por outro lado temos que Thomas King proporciona ao leitor o acesso a uma estrutura cíclica, não hierarquizada da narrativa e do epistêmio nativo-americanos. Esta investigação irá apontar os momentos de conflito entre essas vozes e analisará uma potencial interpretação democrática, de terceira via para esses encontros aparentemente binários. Espera-se ser possível indicar que *Green Grass, Running Water* propicia um privilegiado campo simbólico para que conflitos culturais e epistemológicos possam ocorrer e ser resolvidos com alguma espécie de resolução positiva em relação ao aspecto frequentemente belicoso dos engajamentos nativos e ocidentais.

Para tanto, investigaremos a tradição bíblica e judaico-cristã de hierarquização e como o processo de nomeação de indivíduos e categorias permite que ocorra uma relação de dominação. Discutiremos a estrutura organizacional das comunidades, baseando-nos nas proposições de Zygmunt Bauman, com o intuito de averiguar de que forma o texto literário lida com questões como o pertencimento a grupos que possuem critérios subjetivos de aceitação, permitindo-nos responder se tais critérios permitem uma opção de filiação ou se representam uma demanda coletiva opressiva sobre o indivíduo. Uma análise dos discursos científicos de verdade também será feita, contrastando-os com a construção mítica coletiva das narrativas nativo-americanas como construções alternativas de verdade. Finalmente, teremos um capítulo sobre o poder narrativo da fotografia (mídia presente no romance em diversos momentos), no qual os usos da câmera serão descritos e analisados em seus potenciais de malícia e de narração distorcida.

Palavras-chave: literatura nativo-americana, literatura canadense, Thomas King, estudos pós-coloniais.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate the power struggles underlying the literary text of Canadian/Cherokee author Thomas King in the novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, published in 1993. We will highlight the performative strategies employed in the deconstruction of oppressive representations of the Native American by Western discursive and mediatic voices. The novel offers an interweaved narrative of Native and Western cultural materials that, together, will compose a complex battlefield of contentious voices that, ultimately, weigh on the balance of power relations to claim discursive rights. On the one hand, we have the epistemological tradition of a Positivist/Cartesian logic that has been working for five centuries to hold sway over the symbolic representations of the Native Americans in order to exert executive and discursive power over them; on the other hand, Thomas King provides the reader a glimpse of the cyclical, non-hierarchized structure of Native narrative and episteme. This investigation will point out the moments of conflict between these two voices and attempt to elaborate on the potential democratic/third-way interpretation of these seemingly binary encounters. We hope to be able to indicate that *Green Grass, Running Water* provides a privileged symbolic battleground for cultural and epistemological clashes to occur and be settled with some sort of positive resolution to the long-lasting contentious nature of Native and Western engagements.

In order to accomplish that, we will delve into the biblical and Judeo-Christian tradition of hierachization and how the process of naming of individuals and categories allows for domination to occur. We will elaborate on the structural organization of communities, based on the propositions of Zygmunt Bauman, in order to assess how the literary text handles issues such as belonging to groups that have subjective criteria for acceptance, aiming at answering whether these criteria allow for an option of membership or if they pose as oppressive collective demands over the individual. An analysis of the scientific discourses of truth will also be provided, contrasting them with the collective mythmaking of Native American narratives as alternative constructors of truths. Finally, we will have a chapter on the narrative power of photography (a medium present in the novel at various moments), in which the uses of the camera are described and analyzed in their guileful and (mis)narrating potentials.

Keywords: Native American literature, Canadian literature, Thomas King, post-colonial studies.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Battles rage within the literary text. Conflicts are proposed and settled, sometimes, without the awareness of the incautious reader. Some texts, naturally, are more prone to conflicting interpretations than others, especially those we normally label post-colonial. Native American literary productions that fall into this broad category are no different; most of them are, I believe, even richer with the presence of multiple voices than their contemporary texts. This multiplicity of present voices, many theoreticians have argued, is due to several factors that range from the non-teleological epistemological structure of most Native American cultures, which are open to a myriad of narrative positions, to the historical need to, if not fight for space in the literary canon, establish a literary tradition of its own, which requires either combating already existing power structures, or consciously ignoring them. In any case, such texts are pregnant with the presence of the Other, be it to accede to its position or to fight it. It is within this master framework that I propose the present this work.

I have selected the 1993 novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, by Native American (of Cherokee, Greek and German descent) author Thomas King to elaborate on the issues of how the literary text symbolically handles the presence of mostly conflicting voices and of how authoritative this text may be in denying the narrative position of the Other to privilege its own or how democratic it can be by allowing that presence and sharing the discursive construction. The novel is very rich in conceding to multiple storytellers the possibility of weaving the tale, and the patchwork of various characters' stories it depicts is indicative of the diversity of positions I mentioned above. The main issue investigated in the text will be how a Native American perspective interacts with the Euramerican master discourse that has been depicting, for the last five centuries, the Indian in such a way as to hold sway over its representations and over the institutional structures that produce knowledge and exert power over individuals and their cultural practices. As I see it, Thomas King's novel subverts and attempts to invert this discourse to try and empower a Native American perspective as an alternative epistemological view of the world. The process, however, may not be altogether innocent.

As we look into the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water*, we will see that there is a strongly hybrid locus from which meaning, contestation and hegemony are enacted. I will raise the question as to how authoritarian this locus can be since, if hybridity is to undermine a dominant discourse, it must surely replace it for something else. What is it, then, this something else that installs itself in the place of a previously reigning master discourse? Is this new power the voice that was formerly dominated and now exacts its revenge by demolishing its oppressor's voice, in which case the result would be a simple inversion of the binary pair oppressor/oppressed? Or does this hybrid storytelling help promote a third path that can encompass multiple worldviews and avoid bellicose polarizations?

In order to investigate such elements, I will delve into Judeo-Christian and Native American creation myths. From there I will analyze how the literary text contrasts a highly hierarchized, positivistic worldview with a non-linear episteme to question truth and assumptions of truth, especially those regarding commonplace beliefs on Native American representations. The elaboration on this topic occurs in chapter 1, in which I will refer to several Western canonic literary texts such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, texts whose main characters are also present in *Green Grass, Running Water*, creating an intense intertextuality of Native and Western works. In this chapter we will see evidence of the appropriation of Native American cultural aspects and their use by mass media, which have created and have been reproducing a stagnating view of contemporary individuals and practices. I will attempt to prove that the presentation and subsequent destruction of the perspectives of these Western works are not undertaken simply as totalitarian tools for promoting a Native American perspective as predominant, but to evidence that both Native American and Western discourses are highly intertwined and can interact to the proposition of a middle term that can be authoritarian at times, but that works more for the harmony than for the polarization of different epistemologies.

Chapter 2 will deal with the individual's relationship and responsibility towards the community. Based on Zygmunt Bauman's ideas and concepts on modern group organization, I propose an investigation on whether communities that do not rely on heavy top-down monitoring of their members (as modern nation-states do) really allow individuals to choose to belong or if a light, non-oppressive, lateral system of monitoring

works as well to intensely demand compliance of the few to the norms of the communal body. Since there is a highly active tribal network in the storyline of *Green Grass, Running Water*, we have enough material to elaborate on the implications of the tight definitions of community that Modernity offered versus the loose category allowed by Post-Modernity (or, as Bauman puts it, liquid modernity). We will see that the freer the individual is to choose whether not to belong to a group, the less power that groups has, which triggers a far-reaching network reaction that works to restrict the individual and suggest that he or she accedes to the communal will. The tension between community demands and individual choices raises the question of who/what decides who is a Native American and who is not. Therefore, I trace a connection with chapter 3, in which I will analyze how institutions such as the academia deal with Native American representations and how they appropriate these representations as passive subjects of investigation to exert power over actual living individuals.

The issue of how the academic discourse appropriates culture for investigative purposes is quite delicate, since this very piece of work is a sample of how this is done. I, a white middle-class Brazilian scholar, turned a novel by a Native American/Canadian writer into an object of speculation to try and afford scientific meaning to its symbolic contents. I understand that non-neutral positions are natural to the scholarly praxis, and this work is no exception. I will, though, attempt to accomplish what Arnold Krupat proposed in his *Ethno-criticism*, which is to give voice to the Native American, to let it speak through theory and criticism. I obviously cannot enunciate from a Native locus, which makes this attempt ever the more challenging, but I will try not to treat my object with that will to power described further ahead, in chapter 3, so characteristic of those pretensions of universal truth which I mean to question by writing this paper. Having been born and raised embedded in the category we call Euramerican episteme, it is exactly its precepts of teleological history, Cartesian evidencing and positivistic ethics that I intend to put in check by so heavily relying on post-colonial and minority theorists and critics such as Paula Gunn Allen, Gerald Vizenor and Arnold Krupat. Hopefully, the completion of this paper will aid the reader and myself in taking a critical position in regards to those deeply established knowledge systems, and to see with friendlier eyes systems which are not usual in our academic practice.

Further investigation into the clash of different discourses in *Green Grass, Running Water* will involve the technological narration allowed by photography. Chapter 4 will delve into the potential narrative power that pictographic images give to the photographer/storyteller and their implications in the weaving of the story and in the discursive battle that occurs based on this technology. There are several episodes in the novel in which photography plays a major symbolic role in combating stereotypes related to Native Americans, reinforcing them and granting characters power of representation. I want to point out that whoever has the authority to allow or deny the framing, taking and developing of pictures bears an extreme narrative advantage over those who are submitted to this authority, and that whoever transgresses that sovereignty holds even greater symbolic power. Here, I refer to the practice of employing photography to register an image of Native Americans as primitive and stuck in the past, practice that has been used, willingly or not, for more than a century to manifest a view of these individuals that does not allow them to represent themselves in their cultural particularities without being framed as savages. The text of *Green Grass, Running Water* will serve as evidence of the performatic deconstruction Thomas King enacts in orther to combat and counter those immobilizing views, thus allowing Natives to have a voice of their own and to regain the power of self-representation in the literary text.

Before starting the exposition of those ideas, some brief comments on terminology are necessary. I have so far mentioned three different forms to refer to the peoples who are the object of this work: Native American, Native and Indian. Different critics use distinct terms to refer to the aboriginal peoples of the Americas. Some are more, some are less appropriate (again, depending on the critic), but there is no term that is ultimate or that is not somehow flawed in encompassing these groups. I have chosen Native American (and sometimes the shorter ‘Native’) because it seems to be the most usual term among the top scholars on the subject (Native American Literature). I will, therefore, employ this term to refer to 1) the various tribes and communities present in the territories of the United States of America and Canada which are either governmentally recognized as Native American/Indian/aboriginal (depending on the legislation) or who claim to be a formally established group, e.g. Cherokee, Blackfoot, Chippewa, Cheyenne, etc; 2) the individuals who are or consider themselves to be members of these groups, such as Thomas King

himself; and 3) the collective array of cultural practices subsumed in the problematic and controversial category of Pan-Indianism.

Pan-Indianism, primarily a movement of integration and solidarity among tribes and aboriginal groups of the Americas, can also be taken as a set of practices and beliefs common to most or many of them – not to one specific group, nor to all of them, but as a theoretical category that allows academic investigation to handle far encompassing issues. It is a problematic term because generalizations can sometimes erase cultural particularities that are key to a specific group, and it is controversial because Pan-Indianism is sometimes employed in the decharacterization of individuals who can, then, be treated as part of a homogeneous mass. It is, however, a concept that we have at hand and that must serve for now.

Therefore, Native American will contrast with Indian so that this last refers to those commonplace, derogative and/or stereotypical views commonly seen in western movies, popular jokes and dime novels that depict individuals as savage, primitive, limited, secondary, prone to be shot and killed at the heroes discretion. I hope to be able to leave it clear the contrast between the uses of Native American and Indian clear throughout my writing. Should I fail, let us settle for now that Native American stands as a politically correct and (as far as possible) neutral term, and Indian as the negative term, representative of some view of inferiority or oppression.

The path I have chosen to elaborate on the deconstruction, through the pages of *Green Grass, Running Water*, of the derogative term *Indian* begins with some considerations about the academic and scientific instrument of giving names to investigated subjects and their subsequent organization and cataloguing under restraining concepts that can be employed to exert power over material reality. It is to the dynamics of naming and organizing that I now turn in order to begin my exposition.

1. THE POWER OF NAMING AND ORGANIZING

Naming means leaving a mark. Giving a name is one of the first of many influences that parents will have over a child, a legacy that will accompany that person for (in most cases, at least) their whole lives. Names carry meaning, stories, emotional investment. Though some may choose their offspring's names by flipping randomly the pages of the phonebook or by raffling and mixing parts of famous people's names, they always tell us something about that individual's life story. It is part of our identity to try and find out the origins and ancient meanings of those words people use to refer to us and call us. It is also a major part of one's identity how fiercely one fights to defend him- or herself against demeaning distortions and nicknames, for they seem to posit a threat to a cherished part of ourselves.

This means, therefore, that we can be attacked through a misnomer. Nicknames, aliases and puns are examples of how a person can employ someone else's name(s) in order to disrupt and influence that person's position. Ultimately, naming and misnaming mean exerting power over others.

It is not, however, only through proper names that this power can be exerted. Where these names fit, in what category they go and how appropriate they sound are also questions that call for decisions. Who decides is, as I will attempt to demonstrate further on, the one who is in a superior stance, someone who has classificatory powers and, therefore, has a large amount of control over others. In short, as Zygmunt Bauman posits, "classify[ing] consists in the act of inclusion and exclusion"[1] (BAUMAN, 1999, p. 11). Furthermore, it means "to give the world a structure: to manipulate its probabilities, to make some events more likely than some others; to behave as if events were not random, or to limit or eliminate randomness of events" (BAUMAN, 1999, p. 9). As we are about to see in *Green Grass, Running Water*, this ability to say who belongs to a certain group and who does not demonstrates who holds the discursive power of defining the position of the Other.

The focus here is on the clash between the modern/positivist/Cartesian modes of classification employed in the domination of Natives and Native discourse, and how

[1] All quotations of Zygmunt Bauman were obtained from the texts in Portuguese. They appear here in English with my translations, aided by excerpts from Google Books available in <http://books.google.com/books>.

Thomas King performatively counters these processes in order to demonstrate resistance on the part of the Native towards their aggression. This reassessment of Western mechanisms of domination begins with one of the bases of Western thought: the Christian myth of creation.

1.1 Biblical Reorganizations

> And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."
> Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name.
> So Adam gave names to all the cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.
> And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.
> Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.
> And Adam said:
> "This *is* now bone of my bones
> And flesh of my flesh;
> She shall be called Woman,
> Because she was taken out of Man." (The Holy Bible, Genesis, p. 2)

The gift of classification was granted to Adam by the Lord God Himself. Whatever he named things, thus they were to be called for eternity, vouchsafed by the Almighty. At least, according to the Judeo-Christian myth of creation. At least, until Thomas King offers a retelling of the biblical episodes in the Garden of Eden and reassesses Adam's gift for naming:

> Ahdamn is busy. He is naming everything.
> You are a microwave oven, Ahdamn tells the Elk.
> Nope, says that Elk. Try again.
> You are a garage sale, Ahdamn tells the Bear.
> We got to get you some glasses, says the Bear.
> You are a telephone book, Ahdamn tells the Cedar Tree.
> You're getting closer, says the Cedar Tree.
> You are a cheeseburger, Ahdamn tells Old Coyote.
> It must be time for lunch, says Old Coyote (KING, 1993, p. 41).

At many levels, this passage sets the contentions between the Western epistemological view and the Native perspective King offers us. In the first place, the humor employed in depicting Adam/Ahdamn works to undermine the all-encompassing, one-way, male-dominant power described in the biblical passage. The chain of power is evident, with God granting everything, Adam receiving that power to call 'whatever' he wants 'whatever' he likes, the animals remaining passive throughout the whole process of classification, and Woman, at the last moment, being interspersed in between these last two in importance. This structure is in accordance with the modern knowledge regimes in which knowledge acquisition/construction is linear and hierarchized, history is progressive and telos-oriented and the observer dictates, through discursive monopoly, the status of the other. The fact that, in *Green Grass, Running Water*, the very name of that once powerful biblical figure is reduced to a laughable swearword evidences an attack on this epistemological structure, pointing to an attempt in the storytelling process to question that authority.

A second aspect of the above-mentioned passage that contends two discursive points of view is in the very narrative construction of the two stories. In the Bible, narration occurs monovoicedly, submitted to a single will, harmonious under an organic order. In King's proposition, authority is shared with the simple distribution of voices: the animals and the plants talk back. Instead of passively submitting to Ahdamn's classificatory frenzy, the subjects deny his prerogative and some of them even risk giving advice, in a clear attempt to disallow him and ridicule his efforts. The plurality of voices talking back to Ahdamn overwhelms him even in relation to the extension of sentences. He is limited to a pathetic effort of randomly *guessing* the names of things ('You are a cheeseburger'), while the animals and the Cedar Tree become involved in a pleasant and comic game of mocking ('It must be time for lunch, says Old Coyote').

The aspect of guessing instead of naming points to a third element in King's narrative in which the Western episteme is questioned. In the biblical passage, things practically come into existence as soon as the master names them and agrees to their level of importance (or of comparability to him). Theses concepts are at the base of the modern scientific and historical propositions on the formation of knowledge: things only exist as long as they have been recognized by a scientific authority and given a category by a

Cartesian process of inclusion and exclusion. Truth is attained at the moment of classification, in which the essence of the subject is supposed to have been captured. This truth is adamant, even metaphysical, and any later reconsideration of that subject's status is automatically attributed to a miscalculation in the previous analysis, and the authority is shifted to the new one. In other words, this mechanics of thought preaches that things are not there *and* we give names to them; they are there *because* we name them. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, however, Ahdamn fails in relating with things around him because he ignores their capacity for enunciation, treating them as mere objects subject to his will. The narrative assumes that the animals, for instance, have a complex condition previous to man's discourse about them. The implications of this consideration strike deeply into Western logocentric rationale, for in order to access this condition previous to discourse, one must negotiate meaning instead of attributing it.

One last point that I want to investigate in the passages above is the use of capital letters in the texts. In the Bible, besides proper names, we have Man, Woman and God's variations (Lord, He, His, Him, Almighty, etc) in capitals, and the animals are referred to in lower case. In the novel, on the other hand, Elk, Bear and Old Coyote are promoted to full-scale, individual statuses by having their names capitalized. This small detail demonstrates how the literary text unveils the authoritarian status of man in relation to the other beings in the Christian myth of creation, in contrast with the various Native myths of creation, which demonstrate a much greater recognition of animals and vegetal matter. We cannot, of course, generalize *all* Native American myths, for they are many and extremely diverse in their specificities. We can, nevertheless, analyze how Thomas King offers us many mythic elements in the novel. It is to these elements that I now turn.

1.2 Deeper into biblical parodies: God as a would-be storyteller

The oral characteristics of narration in *Green Grass, Running Water* seem quite evident. We have, for instance, the colloquial word use of the different narrators (so…; I says; I can tell you that, etc) and metanarrative passages like 'that's the way it happens in oral stories, I says' (KING, 1993, p. 391). Though I will not investigate in details here the aspects of storytelling, at this point it is worth briefly mentioning the basic structure of

narration in the novel. The initial sentences already set the tone of the story: 'So. In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water' (KING, 1993, p. 1). This initial storyteller will remain throughout the book as one of the main narrators. He is only one of them because he will share the construction of the tale with many others, including the trickster Coyote and God himself.

Once Coyote and the original narrator are introduced as the ones guiding the developments of the story, Coyote has a dream; a silly dream, in fact. A silly dream that wants to be Coyote. Since that silly dream cannot be Coyote, according to Coyote, he suggests whether that dream would consider being a dog, instead, to which it agrees. That dream is so silly, though, that it gets everything backwards. Rather than becoming dog, that backward dream becomes god. At first, it looks like trouble, but it gets worse, for god-dream does not like being little. It wants to be big, a big god, and it shouts so loud that Coyote ends up conceding to its wish. Thus it finally becomes G O D (written like this in the original, with three interspaced capital letters and smaller font).

Thus God the storyteller is created. He joins the tale and starts wreaking havoc everywhere, to Coyote's enjoyment and the other narrator's demise, since he is telling the story specifically to try and fix the world, not to bring it more trouble.

The construction of God's character in this particular way gives us a great deal of information on how to read his importance in the plot. First of all, his creation and, by extension, all of the Christian world were a mere accident, a moment of thoughtlessness on the part of Coyote. Second, he has no manners, is bossy and loud and refuses to be talked back into inexistence. Third, as is very common in Native American storytelling structure, once a story has been told, it cannot be called back. Coyote narrated God into existence and he cannot take it back. God's actions, and their consequences, must be fought in the battlefield: at the moment of telling the story. Thus God the narrator and God the character will mingle in the plot and fight to impose their order of things onto the world. On the other hand we will have a plethora of Native characters voicing their points of view and attempting to resist Christian preaching, offering alternatives to those discourses. The dynamics of this narrative process allows the reader to visualize different discursive positions in contention, and that is what we will analyze.

One of the Native characters who helps tell an alternative myth of creation to the Christian one is, in fact, a fourfold character. First/Changing/Thought/Old Woman appears in the mythic passages of the novel and enacts scenes with a highly symbolic charge. She (I will call them all 'she', for they play a similar role and follow one another in the same role) stars a tale in which she inadvertedly falls off the edge of the world and, after ending up landing on grandmother Turtle's back, decides that there should be some land around for people to land on. Thus, together, they collect some mud and put it on grandmother Turtle's back so that it grows big and beautiful all around. From then on, things will be created on that earth and around the water that the turtle was swimming in. Everything is harmonious until Old Coyote suggests: “That is beautiful […] but what we really need is a garden” (KING, 1993, p. 39). Here two myths of creation are intertwined. In contrast with the Christian myth, with its male centrality and authoritativeness over everything, the Native perspective brings a woman as the central creator. This matricentrality is highlighted by scholar and writer Paula Gunn Allen when she refers to a Keres Pueblo theology:

> Central to Keres theology is the basic idea of the Creatrix as She Who Thinks rather than She Who Bears, a woman as creation thinker and female thought as origin of material and nonmaterial reality. In this epistemology, the perception of female power as confined to maternity is a limit on the power inherent in femininity. But "she is the supreme Spirit, … both Mother and Father to all people and to all creatures" (ALLEN, 1992, p. 15).

This gynocentric proposal of *Green Grass, Running Water* has several consequences when contrasted with Western male-centered systems and institutions. For now, it suffices to say that First Woman ends up in that Garden mentioned by Old Coyote, and there she has a chance to confront Adam/Ahdamn and God for authority over the world. After the previously mentioned failure on the part of Ahdamn to classify and, therefore, hold sway over the inhabitants of the garden, we have an episode in which First Woman bumps into God:

> I'm G O D, say G O D. And I am almost as good as Coyote.
> Funny, says First Woman. You remind me of a dog.
> And just so we keep things straight, says that G O D, this is my world and this is my garden.
> Your garden, says First Woman. You must be dreaming. And that one takes a big bite of those nice red apples.
> Don't eat my nice red apples, says that G O D.

> I'll just have a little of this chicken, if I may, says Old Coyote.
> Your apples! says First Woman, and she gives a nice red apple to Ahdamn.
> Yes, says that G O D, and that one waves his hands around. All this stuff is mine. I made it.
> News to me, says First Woman. But there's plenty of good stuff here. We can share it. You want some fried chicken? (KING, 1993, p. 72-73).

The two male characters are either bossy or simply passive. First Woman's willingness to share is contrasted with God's stinginess and self-centeredness. The reenactment of the biblical episode of the apple and the Fall puts Ahdamn in a secondary, passive role. The Fall from Paradise, actually, does not occur; it is replaced by something we might call the Leaving of Paradise, and it goes like this:

> No point in having a grouchy G O D for a neighbor.
> And First Woman and Ahdamn leave the garden.
> All the animals leave the garden.
> […]
> You can't leave my garden, that G O D says to First Woman. You can't leave because I'm kicking you out (KING, 1993, p.74)

They leave willingly, with First Woman leading Ahdamn and the animals away from God's control. Not only does he lose credit for creating the garden, he is devoid of the privileges of omnipotence and knowledge, since he does not even have the information on the ownership of the garden. From the passages above we can perceive King's proposals of depicting the Christian principles in a raw comic perspective and of offering an alternative, more democratic way of sharing mythic representations on the origins of the world. According to Allen, this contrast between different creator deities tells much regarding Western and Native worldviews. She illustrates disparity by referring to yet another Native myth of creation, a Cheyenne tale, in which Maheo, the All Spirit, creates four things out of the void – the water, the light, the sky-air and the peoples of the water. From that point on, he has no more power to make things out of nothing, so he needs the help of the other creatures to further alter and improve the world. Just like First Woman, Maheo cannot do everything by himself and has to share responsibility over creating and maintaining the world. For Allen, he

> […] has limited power as well as a sense of proportion and respect for the powers of the creatures. Contrast this spirit with the Judeo-Christian God, who makes everything and tells everything how it may and may not function if it is to

> gain his respect and blessing and whose commandments make no allowance for change or circumstance. The American Indian universe is based on dynamic self-esteem, while the Christian universe is based on a sense of separation and loss. For the American Indian, the ability of all creatures to share in the process of ongoing creation makes all things sacred (ALLEN, 1992, p. 57).

Though I disagree quite strongly with Allen's essentialist view that for *all* American Indians *all* things are sacred, I believe that her position expresses perfectly the tension underlying the mythic episodes of *Green Grass, Running Water*. Besides symbolically countering the discursive apparatuses of domination employed for colonial purposes, i.e. single-handedly naming and organizing, King's text aims at deconstructing the binary logic of Eurocentric thought in which creature responds to creator in a one-way process. The workings of these apparatuses of domination function primarily with a solid definition of the Other – in this case, the Indian. The symbolic structures described above offer an assessment on the ways a monolithic image of the Indian was created in order for it have a single voice: that of a dying Other.

In order for these strategies to work, all ambivalence must be destroyed. The Indian must be created discursively by a classificatory effort and there must not be any kind of opening for misinterpretation as to who he is. This monolithic representation is, according to Bauman, a paramount step in the application of institutional powers over a certain group. Only once that group's definition has been established and its members identified can executive power be directed towards controlling and influencing it. Therefore, this logic must have

> the monotheistic faiths coupled with Manichean, black-and-white world visions are about the last fortresses of the “mono”: of *one* truth, *one* way, *one* life formula – of adamant and pugnacious *certainty* and *self-confidence*; the last shelters of seekers of clarity, purity and freedom from doubt and indecision (BAUMAN, 2006, p. 147-148).

No ambivalence is allowed in a monotheistic discourse that preaches for organic truths. In order for it to prevail, absolute order must be maintained, which means that no possible diversion from the official classification can be discursively accepted. The order of the day is "'excluding the middle', suppressing or exterminating everything ambiguous, everything that sits astride the barricade and thus compromises the vital distinction between *inside* and *outside*" (BAUMAN, 1999, p. 33). As we will see further in the chapter

dedicated to mediatic representations of the Indian, indigenous characters have been depicted in the last centuries as static either/or individuals – either unassimilated dying savages or assimilated conquered people who lost their connection with the land. No ambivalence, no middle term, no allowance to Natives such as Paula Gunn Allen or Thomas King himself (just to name the two mentioned here) who enjoy highly hybridized positions in the academic as well as in the tribal world. These frontier personifications of what should fall into static classifications are what undermine the monotheistic beliefs mentioned by Bauman. If there are a few Natives who do not conform to the prescribed dying savage or the acculturized assimilated former savage, then there must be a fissure in the classification of Indian, which would allow for a revision in the construction of identity for whole communities that have already been defined as a nuisance and are only expected to perish any time soon.

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, we can perceive the resistance of this anti-ambivalence discourse being torn down by a narrative that considers the Judeo-Christian myth as just one among many possible accounts. The offer of multiple possibilities of chronicling the world is aligned with Arnold Krupat's view on the intersection of different points of view. According to him, "no one narrative will do; stories of homogenization and decline must interact and intersect with stories of invention and emergence, and equivalently for the world, the text, and the critic" (KRUPAT, 1992, p. 121-122). It is interesting that Krupat should mention an interaction of narratives occurring at the level of the text and also for the critic. His proposal of an ethnocritical approach to Native epistemological thinking encompasses a shift from a Western mode of investigating Western and Native texts to a Western *and* Native way of interpreting Western and Native productions. My concern here is to assess whether Thomas King builds such a democratic account of the interweaving of cultures or if he ends up silencing a perspective other than a Native one. In order to do that, we need to further examine the inversions/reassessments proposed in the book. I will do so by elaborating on King's appropriation of white characters who were employed in the past to represent domination over Natives.

1.3 Decolonizing Names

We could comment on an array of characters in literature, cinema and music who represent domination of white male types over Natives. I will focus, however, on some of those which figure in *Green Grass, Running Water* and can offer a general view on the symbolic inversions worked on them. Let us begin with a cowboy story.

1.3.1 Tonto and The Lone Ranger

> Six Texas Rangers rode in the sun;
> Six men of justice rode into an ambush,
> and dead were all but one.
> One lone survivor lay on the trail;
> Found there by Tonto, the brave Injun Tonto,
> he lived to tell the tale.

The epigraph above is part of the opening song for the television series from the 40s and 50s entitled *The Lone Ranger*. As the song goes, one ranger survives an attack by evil outlaws and, thanks to the help of the Injun Tonto, manages to get back on his feet to fight for justice once again. Together, the self-righteous white cowboy and his Indian sidekick set off to correct the world by killing all sorts of useless pariahs, from stagecoach robbers to unyielding savages. The success of the 1936 novel and the television adaptation was such that more than a dozen sequels exist for the original story and versions were produced in animation, TV series and, more recently, videogames. In none of them is Tonto more than an obedient assistant to the cowboy.

The participation of this dynamic duo in *Green Grass, Running Water* occurs in the mythic passages in which First/Changing/Thought/Old Woman floats around the universe interacting with things around her, weaving stories of origin and creation. In one of her voyages with Ahdamn, she ends up being captured by a group of rangers looking for the Indians who were supposed to have killed their friends. Once caught, she cuts some holes in a black piece of cloth and wears it as a mask to simulate the Lone Ranger's disguise (which today would most certainly remind us of Zorro's mask). Having been fooled by her dissimulation, the rangers recognize their comrade and offer to kill that companion of hers,

Ahdamn, who is taken for an Indian and is an obvious nuisance. In order to protect him, First Woman 'disguises' him as her sidekick Tonto:

> [says one of the live rangers,] I'll just shoot this Indian for you.
> No, no, says First Woman. That's my Indian friend. He helped save me from the rangers.
> You mean the Indians, don't you? says those rangers.
> That's right, says First Woman with the mask on. His name is Tonto.
> That's a stupid name, says those rangers. Maybe we should call him Little Beaver or Chingachgook or Blue Duck.
> No, says First Woman, his name is Tonto.
> Yes, says Ahdamn, who is holding his knees from banging together, my name is Tonto.
> Okay, says those rangers, but don't say we didn't try to help. And they gallop off, looking for Indians and buffalo and poor people and other good things to kill (KING, 1993, p. 76).

In the excerpt above Ahdamn demonstrates relief for playing the part of the subaltern companion to the main character. First Woman submits him to personifying the stereotypical Indian aide, and he must abide and be thankful in order to be saved from death at the hands of the keepers of law and order. The signification of names here is paramount. The Indian stereotype is so foolish that even the rangers consider the name Tonto stupid. This ironic tone in the narrative is intensified by a ranger's gullible understanding of Native names: his critical proposal is to drop the unsuiting Tonto for a more *Indian* name like Little Beaver or Blue Duck.

This situation illustrates the strategy of erasing Native individuality through name ridiculing. Platitudes regarding animal references work to distance the actual symbolism of, for instance, beaver and duck and to approximate them with that naturalness inherent, in Western discourse, to aboriginal peoples. Once an individual has been identified by any variation of the formula [adjective + any animal] (e.g. Screeching Eagle, Jumping Otter, Lazy Dog), notwithstanding its positive importance, in this kind of discourse it assumes a level of negativity. Having been denied the positivity of a name, the fake representation (for that is everything that remains) is emptied of power and, as Paula Gunn Allen sentences: "an Indian without a name is powerless indeed" (ALLEN, 1992, p. 142).

The literary inversion enacted by First Woman serves to counter the long-lasting and formerly unquestioned narrative of Tonto's submission to the white master. She puts herself in the dominating position and disempowers Ahdamn and the tradition of

oppression he represents. What is yet more ironic is that Ahdamn is obliged to personify that constructed *dying* Indian in order to *survive*.

Having seen how the heroic Lone Ranger and his partner Tonto have the symbolism of their names reinvented, I now turn to the analysis of another famous fictional character; this time, a literary one.

1.3.2 Friday and Robinson Crusoe

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is an entrepreneur – a vagabond one at that. Not the kind that applies his industry in the manufacture of goods or the intricacies of trade, but one who sets off onto the seas and beyond to seek his fortune. In Defoe's novel, Crusoe is an explorer, a kind of English conquistador, who ends up on the shores of Brazil and settles there to raise an estate as a landowner. The story is, naturally, full of adventures and the overcoming of challenges. The fantastic idea of accidentally washing ashore a new wild land, full of unknown mysteries and potentialities, and dominating it by bringing it into the light of civilization permeates the whole novel. In order to do that it is necessary, obviously, to subjugate some savage.

I say obviously because Robinson Crusoe seems to consider it paramount to dominate a native in order for his success to be attained. Moreover, he accomplishes it with an astounding naturality, as if the power of his presence were enough for the domination to be complete. Let us see how he imagines he will conquer the savage he has spotted:

> I thought in my sleep that he came running into my little thick grove, before my fortification, to hide himself; and that I, seeing him alone and not perceiving that the other sought him that way, showed myself to him, and smiling upon him, encouraged him; that he kneeled down to me, seeming to pray me to assist him; upon which I showed my ladder, made him go up, and carried him into my cave, and he became my servant (DEFOE, 1994, p. 195).

Apparently, nothing could be easier. His simple appearance and gesticulation are enough to make the savage kneel down and pray to him for assistance. The authoritarian verbs Robinson Crusoe employs ('made' him go up; 'carried' him into the cave) are also interesting, for they are not met with the smallest trace of resistance. The reader might, of course, deduce that it is just a dream, that the conqueror is simply fantasizing about how

easy it would be to accomplish his conquest, which is exactly the impression the narrative gives. The description of the dream may be interpreted as a fictional technique to leave the idea in suspension, to let the unveiling of events eventually show whether Crusoe is thus successful or not. When the time actually comes for him to exert his leadership over the savage, things turn out to be as easy, as he dreamed, if not easier:

> I began to speak to him and teach him to speak to me; and first, I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life; I called him so for the memory of the time; I likewise taught him to say "Master," and then let him know that was to be my name; I likewise taught him to say "yes" and "no" and to know the meaning of them; I gave him some milk in an earthen pot and let him see me drink it before and sop my bread in it; and I gave him a cake of bread to do the like, which he quickly complied with, and made signs that it was very good for him (DEFOE, 1994, p. 203).

The docility and passivity of the now named Friday fit perfectly in Crusoe's expectations of his reaction. Notwithstanding the easy communication established at first, no effort is made to try and figure out his real name; for, in that case, domination would not be carried out properly. Crusoe's name is also not given. It remains protected, in his possession, and the alias 'Master' is produced. All things considered, once the first steps have been taken in the direction of civilizing the savage, he complies and agrees that it was good for him.

The beauty and strength of Daniel Defoe's novel are unquestioned. The narrator's storytelling skills offer a delightful and immersing experience, to the point of credence – and this is exactly the most dangerous attribute of the representations contained in the novel. The credibility of the *information* produced in the story is solicited to the reader from the beginning, in an editor's disclaimer, disguised as preface:

> The editor believes the thing to be just a history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it. And however thinks, because all such things are disputed, that the improvement of it, as well to the diversion, as to the instruction of the reader, will be the same; and as such, he thinks, without further compliment to the world, he does them a great service in the publication (DEFOE, 1994, p. 7).

The contents of the story are presented as fact, to the benefit of the reader and of the world. Though it is obvious that the preface has a market appeal composition, a common resource in bibliographical productions, the jeopardy to the representation of Natives is

twofold: the literary/symbolical depiction of Friday is derogatory, and it is presented as empirically verified reality.

To that representation, Thomas King provides an ironic shift. In *Green Grass, Running Water* we have, first of all, a comic denial from the part of the Native (Thought Woman, this time) to be named by Robinson Crusoe:

> So pretty soon Robinson Crusoe comes walking along and that one looks at Thought Woman. And he looks at her again. Thank God! says Robinson Crusoe. It's Friday!
> No, says Thought Woman. It's Wednesday (KING, 1993, p. 325).

She ridicules the immediacy with which the shipwrecked shouts his clamor of possession over the recently encountered Native. Thought Woman, while denying discursive voice to a representative of colonization, keeps to herself the prerogative of naming. She uses this power to play with Crusoe, at first mocking him and, then, inverting roles of domination. The following excerpt poses a counterpoint to the passage in Daniel Defoe's novel in which the main character is making lists about the good and bad points of being shipwrecked alone in a distant island:

> Under the good points, says Robinson Crusoe, the climate is so mild and pleasant, I do not need clothes.
> […]
> Under the bad points, says Robinson Crusoe, as a civilized white man, it has been difficult not having someone of color around whom I could educate and protect.
> What's the good point? says Thought Woman.
> Now, you're here, says Robinson Crusoe.
> […]
> Have you got it straight? says Robinson Crusoe.
> Sure, says Thought Woman, I'll be Robinson Crusoe. You can be Friday.
> But I don't want to be Friday, says Robinson Crusoe.
> No point in being Robinson Crusoe all your life, says Thought Woman. It couldn't be much fun (KING, 1993, p. 325-326).

What King is accomplishing here is to undermine a tradition denounced by Gerald Vizenor in which a Western voice unilaterally catalogues and appropriates the Native. For Vizenor, a fake representation like Friday in Defoe's novel is not more than "an occidental misnomer, an oversees enactment that has no referent to real native cultures or communities" (VIZENOR, 1999, p, vii). He builds his theory around the idea that, since

actual colonialism is over, something else, subtler and less palpable, remains that holds sway over symbolic representations on the Native. This something else would be those *manifest manners*, a set of simulations and cultural patterns built at the discursive and institutional levels to maintain the *status quo* in regards to the various degrees of subalternity that aboriginous peoples are subject to in North America. Vizenor also posits the roles of the artists and thinkers who must be in charge of countering those manifest manners and denouncing their workings through cultural reappropriations and inversions. To them he affords the alias of *postindian warriors*. In his words,

> manifest manners are the simulations of dominance; the notions and misnomers that are read as the authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians. The postindian warriors are new indications of a narrative recreation, the simulations that overcome the manifest manners of dominance (VIZENOR, 1999, p. 5-6).

In this sense, Thomas King can be declared a postindian warrior, for his work locates the simulations of dominance, appropriates them and rewrites them with a new symbolic charge that gives back to the Native the power of self-representation. In the above-mentioned passages, we can see the manifest manners at work in the depictions of Tonto and Friday as absences of authentic Native American material and its substitution for an absence of values and self-determination. By parodying biblical passages, portraying Ahdamn as a subaltern dying Other in the role of Tonto, and ridiculing Robinson Crusoe's endeavor to master Friday, the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* is working for the principles of what Vizenor calls a literature of survivance.

For Vizenor, there is a whole literary tradition of dominance that begins as soon as the first fictionalizations of the Native were produced. This tradition has established a wide variety of canonical concepts that serve to (mis)interpret traditional values. Among them is the notion that oral advances to written literature, in a movement to try and disarticulate the strengthening and healing powers of stories. Also, the discursive practice of the literatures of dominance has produced the simulacra of the possible classifications of the Native, as either the good savage or the dying savage. These elements are the result of an oppressive practice that can be fought, according to Vizenor, with an opposing strategy, i.e., a literature of survivance. As he posits,

> survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy (VIZENOR, 1999, p. vii).

In order to subvert the tradition of dominance and offer a variety of literature of survivance, the literary text first situates the portrayal of the allegorical manifest manners. In the depiction of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, the manifest manners surface in the simulation of the good savage. The element of subordination is in the tradition of stories that depict the white man communing with the Native world, absorbing the qualities of innocence/nakedness/naturalness of the savage and abandoning him to death. The white man, then, returns to his world, now as a superior character for having incorporated the good aspects of both universes. This imagery, present in countless dime novels, TV shows, movies, bureaucratic memos, political speeches, bill propositions and the like, has survived for centuries and has fed all variations of cultural and political enterprises sentencing the imminent death of the Native and its inevitability. *Green Grass, Running Water* challenges, through Thought Woman, the image of Natives having a functionality in the course of imperial domination, being doomed to play the roles of aides to the conquerors and then perishing as soon as their use has expired. Once she has interfered with Crusoe's list making and name giving, Thought Woman goes back to her business: "All things considered, says Thought Woman, I'd rather be floating. And she dives into the ocean and floats away" (KING, 1993, p. 326). The simple fact of turning her back to the shipwrecked and his tiny part in *her* story demonstrates that his role is quite minor; she can go on, leaving him behind, to keep weaving *her* story in *her* fashion.

Thus, we have from the analysis of the participations of Robinson Crusoe and Friday in *Green Grass, Running Water* that they have their former, traditional representations reinvented. Thought Woman positions herself in the dominant part of discourse and symbolically puts Crusoe in the position of minor part in the bigger picture, which is her lead in the narration of a creation story. In this section we also approached Gerald Vizenor's theory on manifest manners and the literatures of dominance and survivance. This theory will aid us in the assessment of yet another influent Western novel

that figures in Thomas King's text investigated here – Herman Melville's masterpiece *Moby Dick*.

1.3.3 The Great Female Black Whale

'Call me Ishmael'. This is the opening sentence for Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, which features Ishmael, an able-bodied seaman, and the tyrannical captain Ahab of the whaler Pequod with his monomaniac pursuit of the great whale who sank his last ship and severed his leg. Ishmael is also the young man who approaches Changing Woman (at this point she goes by this name) aboard the Pequod in *Green Grass, Running Water* and questions her about her name, demanding that she fit in the story:

> Call me Ishamel, says the young man. What's your favorite month?
> They're all fine, says Changing Woman.
> Oh dear, says the young man, looking through a book. Let's try again. What's your name?
> Changing Woman.
> That won't do either, says the young man, and he quickly thumbs through the book again. Here, he says, poking a page with his finger. Queequeg. I'll call you Queequeg. This book has a Queequeg in it, and this story is supposed to have a Queequeg in it, but I've looked all over the ship and there aren't any Queequegs. I hope you don't mind.
> Ishmael is a nice name, says Changing Woman.
> But we already have an Ishmael, says Ishamel. And we do so need a Queequeg.
> Oh, okay, says Changing Woman (KING, 1993, p. 218).

In this literary reference we have a major shift from the performative approach given by King in relation to the previous examples. Here Changing Woman, facing Ishmael's plea for acquiescence, conforms to the classification given to her according to the book he is based on to tell his story. The book, of course, is *Moby Dick*, originally narrated, in most part, by Ishmael himself. However, Changing Woman's acceptance of being named Queequeg is by no means a demonstration of conformity or subjugation to the white narrator. She does, in many levels, resist the symbolic discourse underlying *Moby Dick*'s composition.

Although many layers of interpretation exist for Melville's story, one of its backbones is the allegoric struggle of the Eurocentric logic with the forces of nature and the unknown, the forces that resist human domination. Ahab is the male European conqueror,

obsessed with power and control, who employs all means at his disposal, from technological to human resources, to satisfy his whims. It does not matter if the cost is his ship, his leg, the lives of sailors or his own. If there is a power greater than his own (and greater than the society he represents), it must be broken down and conquered – for the good of mankind and, of course, himself. The challenge posed by the great white male whale is the impetus for Ahab to guide the Pequod and its crew to the vast seas in a metaphoric search for something powerful enough to resist human wits and persistence and, ultimately, to the defeat of this entity. The point here is not to enter into minute details on the symbolism of Melville's book, but to investigate the implications of its possible interpretations in the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water*.

First of all, let us return to Changing Woman's acquiescence to being named Queequeg. It is worth noting that she offers a little resistance before agreeing to the alias, trying to be amiable with Ishmael and complimenting his name. This slight attempt to distort the original story, jeopardized by Ishmael's faithfulness to the written text, demonstrates how Melville's and, by consequence, Western written literature is static. Changing Woman is experiencing how authoritarian this literature is, and the extent to which it resists retelling and reinvention. The contrast between the two narrative modes, written and oral, serves as a reflection on the stagnant aspect of the book text and in face of the dynamics of the storytelling text. Retellings of written texts could be considered an exception but, as soon as their story is retold, they are held static again just like the original. In short, Changing Woman implies that she can take a break from the telling of her dynamic, updated (and, at any time, updateable) story and participate in the inert, passive Western tale while it is told step by step as predicted and postulated.

The power of orality indicated here by Changing Woman is expressed by Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop*, where she claims that this narrative tradition "is vital; it heals itself and the tribal web by adapting to the flow of the present while never relinquishing its connection to the past. Its adaptability has always been required, as many generations have experienced" (ALLEN, 1992, p. 45). The healing and adaptive powers of storytelling described by Allen are offered to Ishmael, who refuses them to privilege the Western written form, thus letting it enact its predicted course of events. Changing Woman

offers a hybrid narration pattern, while Ishmael denies the possibility and sticks stubbornly to the book.

A second aspect of the above-mentioned excerpt that points to a questioning of the narrative of Eurocentric values offered by *Moby Dick* is in regards to the characterization of the savage Queequeg. This is how he first figures in Melville text:

> "Speak-e! tell-ee me who-ee be, or dam-me, I kill-e!" again growled the cannibal, while his horrid flourishings of the tomahawk scattered the hot tobacco ashes about me till I thought my linen would get on fire. But thank heaven, at that moment the landlord came into the room light in hand, and leaping from the bed I ran up to him.
> "Don't be afraid now," said he, grinning again, "Queequeg here wouldn't harm a hair of your head."
> "Stop your grinning," shouted I, "and why didn't you tell me that that infernal harpooneer was a cannibal?"
> "I thought ye know'd it;--didn't I tell ye, he was a peddlin' heads around town?--but turn flukes again and go to sleep. Queequeg, look here--you sabbee me, I sabbee--you this man sleepe you--you sabbee?"
> "Me sabbee plenty"--grunted Queequeg, puffing away at his pipe and sitting up in bed.
> "You gettee in," he added, motioning to me with his tomahawk, and throwing the clothes to one side. He really did this in not only a civil but a really kind and charitable way. I stood looking at him a moment. For all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal. What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself--the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian (Melville, 2008, p. 38-39).

Though the final part of the quotation seems to indicate a quite sympathetic view of the cannibal, the details of the description are astonishingly biased by a stereotypical image of *the savage*. Queequeg *growls, grunts,* flourishes his tomahawk in a *horrid* fashion, poses as an *infernal* harpooner *peddlin' heads* around town and speaks with the characteristic depreciative Tonto talk (e.g. 'me sabbee plenty'). Nonetheless, the compliments given to him in the last lines are considerably condescending, in a clear shift from the depiction of the raging barbarian to the good savage. While allowing herself to be called Queequeg in *Green Grass, Running Water*, Changing Woman does so in order to integrate the tale and tag along the plot. With that strategy, she merges her storytelling ability to that of the Western novelist and creates the hybrid narrative denied before. Her aim is to undermine the tale of male conquest and superiority from within, in the character of Queequeg, the stereotypical simulation of the savage.

Once she joins the account of the hunt for the whale, Changing Woman begins to interfere in it to suit her thwarting intentions. She finds out the objective of the voyage, i.e. killing whales, and questions captain Ahab as to the reasons of such an absurd endeavor, to which he responds: "oil. Perfume, too. There's a big market in dog food, says Ahab. This is a Christian world, you know. We only kill things that are useful or things we don't like" (KING, 1993, p. 219). Now she has definitely joined the storytelling process, interfering directly in its progress. After noticing that the captain and his men are looking all over for a whale to harpoon, she witnesses when they all shout the following line: "blackwhaleblackwhaleblackwhalesbianblackwhalesbianblackwhale" (KING, 1993, p. 220). The subverting effect of the statement is huge and it disrupts the narrative completely. Here is what follows the passage:

> Black whale? Yells Ahab. You mean white whale, don't you? Moby-Dick, the great male white whale?
> That's not a white whale, says Changing Woman. That's a female whale and she's black.
> Nonsense, says Ahab. It's Moby-Dick, the great white whale. You're mistaken, says Changing Woman, I believe that is Moby-Jane, the Great Black Whale (KING, 1993, p. 220).

The major shift in belief systems underlying the clash between *Moby-Dick*'s original text and Changing Woman's experience with a hybrid narration of the same tale is in the focus, in the first case, on a Eurocentric male-dominant discourse and, in the second one, on a female-centered discourse. The text of *Green Grass, Running Water* inverts the representation of the whale and proposes its characterization as incorporating various traits of minority groups. Moby-Jane is a female, lesbian and black whale, all qualities contrasting with Moby-Dick. The focus on a female archetype points to the matrifocality described by Paula Gunn Allen in her theoretical work. That kind of approach will certainly raise controversies as to the representations of women in theory. Allen's propositions contrast in some levels with, for instance, Theresa de Lauretis' claim for the deconstruction of the essentialising theorization on woman. For de Lauretis, theory must escape from definitions of an archetypical essence of the female. Allen, on the other hand, insists that the essence of woman be asserted and become dominant in the social order. For her,

> Some distinguishing features of a woman-centered social system include free and easy sexuality and wide latitude in personal style. This latitude means that a diversity of people, including gay males and lesbians, are not denied and are in fact likely to be accorded honor. Also likely to be prominent in such systems are nurturing, pacifist, and passive males (as defined by western minds) and self-defining, assertive, decisive women (ALLEN, 1992, p. 2).

Allen's position is towards a positivity of the feminine essence, in the place of a negativity of the derogative aspects attributed by Western societies to that essence, as is the case of de Lauretis and Julia Kristeva, for instance. I believe it is to that positivity that the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* points. The narrative of Changing Woman subverting the white male dominant discourse (through misnaming, mainly) and installing a black lesbian female as protagonist of a tale is indicative of that. It contrasts diametrally with what the tale of Moby-Dick represents in the social order, as expressed in *Off the Reservation*: "a spiritual system based on dominance, status, exclusion of most members of the community, pettiness, vengefulness, or jealousy [that] is not likely to yield the magnificent spiritual benefits that so many seek" (ALLEN, 1998, p. 86). Thus, we have an opposition of the patriarchal mode of thinking expressed in Melville's novel by what Allen calls a matrifocal or gynocratic rule in cultural representation. The female Native deity takes over the course storytelling and makes it predominantly hers. She, therefore, liberates the once oppressive charge of the Western tale and weaves the patterns of a literature of survivance.

Here we must raise the question as to whether King's novel allows some room for the traditional discourse presented in *Moby-Dick* or if he obliterates it completely. My first hypothesis is that it does blight that discourse. There seem to be very few elements of the original voices of Ishmael and Ahab in their depictions in *Green Grass, Running Water*, for their participation in the tale works only to bring up some aspects of Eurocentric thinking, those that are to be dissected and criticized in the native text. They are not granted a voice of their own; they seem to issue their lines from a unilateral narrative force, one aligned with Thought Woman's needs for her to enact her subversion. The centralized discourse, again, turns western representations into passive literary material. Looking back into this chapter we can see that every single allusion to western referents analyzed have been turned from main to accessory roles. God, Ahdamn, the Lone Ranger, Robinson Crusoe, Ishmael and Ahab all incorporate strategic positions whose fate it is to be performatively

demolished, and their characters are discarded as soon as the subversion of western principles has been ultimately accomplished. Their participations in the story are interrupted abruptly and there is no form of follow-up or closure to most of them. Let us take Ishmael and Ahab as an example. Following the blackwhalesbian episode quoted above, Thought Woman swims over to Moby-Jane to have a chat with her and, before they can go on talking, the whale charges towards the Pequod, hits it and it sinks. Then, she says:

> There […] That should take care of that.
> That was very clever of you, says Changing Woman as she watches the ship sink. What happens to Ahab?
> We do that every year, says Moby-Jane. He'll be back. He always comes back (KING, 1993, p. 221).

And that is the end of the sailors' participation in the story. The cyclical aspect referred to by Moby-Jane reinforces the accessory roles of the crew of the Pequod. Having said that in the following years the whaler and the sailors will be back to be destroyed again, she leaves it clear that their only use is to serve as an example of the futility of fighting her and what she represents. They can be persistent, stubborn, but to no avail – the effort will be utterly useless, over and over again, nullified by the great black lesbian whale's power.

I offer this episode as a sample of the authoritarian potential of the depiction of western cultural material in *Green Grass, Running Water*. My concern here is to weigh both forces working in the symbolic representations in the novel: one attempting to deconstruct an oppressive tradition, and another, passive but widely permeating the book, representative of this tradition. For now, we have seen that King's novel inverts western productions that depict native material as less valuable, secondary, submissive to the dominant Eurocentric discourse. In so doing, the literary text brings down that dominating force and demonstrates how it was built upon a cultural tradition dedicated, knowingly or not, to portraying the other as subaltern. Furthermore, those performative strategies depicted in the novel question Judeo-Christian logic and belief and propose alternative ways of weaving mythic stories of creation and morality.

Some questions, however, arise from this analysis that deserve attention here. Is it possible for a literary discourse to shatter to pieces a previously hegemonic episteme and flatten the cultural landscape so that nothing stands above anything else? If an oppressed tradition arises to install itself as another possible enunciation, to what extent can it allow that which oppresses it any room to keep enacting its authority? Can there be any room left at all, or must the Eurocentric models be dislodged to a secondary role in cultural representations? These are, certainly, not easy questions to answer. I will, therefore, attempt to elaborate on how those inversions present in *Green Grass, Running Water* weigh in the struggle of the forces contending in its lines – those forces that allowed for these questions to be made.

I want to raise some possibilities before advancing the discussion. It seems that, so far, I have demonstrated that King's novel destroys western paradigms for the benefit of a Native perspective. Another possible position in regards to his symbolic inversions is present in the work of Arnold Davidson, Priscilla Walton and Jennifer Andrews. In their book *Border Crossings: Thomas King's cultural inversions*, they approach King's work (all of his fictional books) in a way that also demonstrates how subversive his writing can be. They analyze the multi-medial scope of his narratives and constantly praise the ingenious questionings they propose. For most of their approach, they consider that King's fiction is considerably democratic in its representations in regards to the clash between western and Native cultures. They posit that, "although it is difficult for Native culture, as it finds voice in King's text, to parry the European assaults because it refuses to posit a counternorm to offset the thrust of the European norm, Native society nonetheless manifests an alternative ideology" (DAVIDSON, WALTON, ANDREWS, 2003, p. 85). We have the impression that the manifestation of an alternative ideology can be absolutely exempt of any aggression towards the questioned ideology. Although I agree King's text provides that alterna(rra)tive, I do not believe it can be innocent. The excerpts depicting Changing Woman and Moby-Jane deconstructing Herman Melville's authoritarian novel certainly affect reader's evaluation of it. I, for instance, have reassessed my personal interrogation of *Moby-Dick* after witnessing that deconstruction. The refusal to posit a counternorm, as expressed above, is suspicious once we take into consideration the aggressive stance an oppressed discourse must take in order to install itself as an alternative.

All these elements point to the position I want to propose. If a literary enunciation offers a perspective in which the previously hegemonic discourse is dislodged and presented as one among many other possibilities, it must, ultimately, recognize the validity of that discourse in the symbolic playing field. Likewise, if it is to install a different point of view in relation to a predominant one, it must first combat its predecessor for some territory from which to enunciate. This interaction is, invariably, aggressive in the interplay of voices. The result of these considerations is a third alternative of interpretation of the inversions provided by *Green Grass, Running Water*. Let us, for a moment, reassess the appearance in the novel of western referents depicted above in the light of this new hypothesis.

1.4 The power of renaming and reorganizing

Post-colonial theoretical approaches of literary texts seem to have the tendency of considering post-colonial productions as democratic in their symbolic representations. From the excerpts and questions above, however, we can see that, in the case of the Thomas King's novel analyzed here, it may not be the case. Let us look further into western cultural material portrayed in the novel.

I want to reassess, for a critical purpose, my position expressed above regarding the possibility of King's text blighting the voices of western referents pictured in *Green Grass, Running Water*. I said that none of the original voices of, for instance, Ishamel, Ahab or Adam are present in the book. The assertion can prove to be unreal once we take into consideration the necessary strategies employed in the process of decolonizing a dominant discourse. If we consider that this is exactly what King's novel is attempting by outlining such powerful pillars of western thinking as the Bible and one the most canonic literary texts, we have also to concede that some margin is given for the discourses of those works to enunciate from the novel we are investigating. I say some margin because, for obvious reasons, it would be impossible for King to, for instance, reproduce the text of the Bible or the entire lines of *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moby-Dick* in his book. What must be performed, thus, is what I want to call the *summoning* of a previous discourse into the present one so that both can contend for locus. In the case of *Green Grass, Running Water*, although the

selection of biblical passages is surely biased by the author's intention of questioning Judeo-Christian myths and beliefs, and that the excerpts from Defoe's and Melville's novels were chosen specifically to question the traditional cultural apparatus responsible for false simulations of the Native, it does not mean that those voices are absent in the novel. The narrative force is centered on depicting them as flawed, but not utterly silent.

Some samples of how western material is summoned into the novel as part of the symbolic play of different perspectives will provide a stronger idea of what I just posited. Since I started with references to the Bible, let us see how biblical views are summoned into the book. The follow-up of the mythical garden's episode occurs as following:

> Wait a minute, says that God. That's my garden. That's my stuff.
> "Don't talk to me", I says. "You better talk to First Woman."
> You bet I will, says that God.
> […]
> Oh, oh, says First Woman when she sees that God land in her garden. Just when we were getting things organized (KING, 1993, p. 42).

The last line is an example of how First Woman summons a Judeo-Christian view into the story. Although the setting has already been prepared for a comic questioning of that view, the narrative nonetheless brings up the foundation of the logical-positivist thinking, alluded to in the Bible, so dear to western societies. The line 'just when we were getting things organized', added to what we have already seen as Adam/Ahdamn's classificatory attempts, points the reader to that worldview in which the universe is logically structured from top to bottom of an ordered hierarchy always already given and metaphysically immutable. That view implies the potential of the rational organizing efforts in the creation of order. Therefore, without so much as quoting the Bible, the text of *Green Grass, Running Water* is requesting that the reader bring to mind what it represents, what it stands for in regards to a broad critical understanding of the world. Only once that has been accomplished can the novel begin to enact its subversive/inverting propositions. If it fails in summoning the biblical discourse and its symbolic power into the narrative, it cannot perform any sort of discursive struggle with it. If we consider that the novel succeeds in offering the attentive reader room for considering the previously hegemonic locus, and allows him/her to weigh the contending forces, we can also take this interplay as a fairly democratic performatic procedure. Otherwise, structural interpretations of symbolic value

of the contention would not be valid or even possible. In order to further the analysis of the clash between a Native perspective and a western positivist one, and to reinforce the ideas proposed, we must investigate what underlies those lines quoted above.

On the one hand, we have the ordering principle, expressed by references to ordering and organizing, as elaborated on by Zygmunt Bauman, in *Modernidade Líquida*:

> 'Order', let me explain, means monotony, regularity, repetitiveness and predictability; we call a setting 'orderly' if and only if some events are considerably more likely to happen in it than their alternatives, while some other events are highly unlikely to occur or are altogether out of question. This means by the same token that someone somewhere (a personal or impersonal Supreme Being) must interfere with the probabilities, manipulate them and load the dice, seeing to it that events do not occur at random (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 66).

What Bauman is alluding to here is exactly that logic represented by Ahdamn and God in *Green Grass, Running Water*, the logic summoned by indirect reference and which is indicative of the western episteme. Contrasting with it there is Paula Gunn Allen's position stating that "absolute order means absolute death. Chaos, on the other hand, means the enormous vibration of energies; so, the more wilderness, the more something is just dancing in such a way that it doesn't have a pattern that we can perceive. That's one kind of balance" (ALLEN, 1998, p. 63). Those are *two* kinds of balance. Both theoreticians are exposing contrastive world perspectives, and both of them are present in our novel. What is paramount here is that we can refer to them, to the presence of those voices by their mere invocation.

The same reference occurs for the other episodes depicted above. In the passages related to the Lone Ranger and Tonto, a worldview that is questioned by summoning, not by direct allusion, is one in which Indians are considered beforehand as outlaws and evildoers. Here is how this is brought to the story:

> Say, they says, Who killed those dead rangers? Who killed our friends?
> Beats me, Says First Woman. Maybe it was Coyote.
> […]
> It looks like the work of Indians, says those live rangers. Yes, they all say together. It looks just like the work of Indians. And those rangers look at First Woman and Ahdamn.
> Definitely Indians, says one of the rangers, and the live rangers point their guns at First Woman and Ahdamn (KING, 1993, p. 75).

The rangers are the keepers of order, the representatives of law and justice. They also bear the concepts and prejudices formed around the Indian by the society they represent. The passage above alludes to a recurrent form of pre-judgment. If something 'looks just like the work of Indians', it is certainly something bad. Besides, it is quite easy to find who is to blame – you just have to send some agent of the law (any ranger will do) to look around and, at the blink of an eye, decide who is more Indian-like. It does not matter who 'killed those dead rangers'; First Woman and Ahdamn are considered guilty because they *look* Indian. If the reader is unaware of this sort of prejudice, the passage above functions to put it into consideration. Once this has been accomplished, the comic sequence works to denounce that concept and offer a cathartic moment of reflection. Thus, the voice of the Lone Ranger and the society it stands for is presented, questioned and put in perspective.

A similar summoning of western paradigms occurs in the chapters figuring Robinson Crusoe. This is a sample of how it is performed:

> So Thought Woman floats along and pretty soon she hits an island. Not too hard. With her head.
> Ouch! says that Island. Look where you are going.
> Sorry, says Thought Woman. I was just floating.
> Say, says that cranky Island, I'll bet you've come to visit Robinson Crusoe, the famous shipwrecked writer.
> Does he write novels? says Thought Woman.
> No, says that Island. He writes lists (KING, 1993, p. 324).

The reference to Crusoe's list making reinforces the above-mentioned comment of Bauman on the western necessity for order and organization. The confrontation between order and chaos in *Green Grass, Running Water* is made possible by the allusion to the bookkeeping procedures so viscerally rooted in bureaucratic societies. Although the use of bureaucracy and governmental/official policies for colonial and destructive purposes will be deeper analyzed in the following chapter, for now it suffices to say that Crusoe's record keeping expresses the Cartesian logic employed throughout modernity to catalogue all sorts of experiences. Among them are all those records (filmic, photographic, ethnographic, literary, etc.) depicting the Indian as a vanishing race. If Native-Americans, as Thomas King himself posited in his essay 'Godzilla Vs. Post-colonial', "in addition to the usable past that the concurrence of oral literature and traditional history provide [them] with, [they]

also have an active present marked by cultural tenacity and a viable future which may well organize itself around major revivals of language, philosophy, and spiritualism" (KING, 1990, p. 4), the vanishing agenda proposed for them is unviable. The contrast between the oral and the written praxes (so strongly present in the novel we are investigating) alluded to by King can be analyzed because the discourse of Daniel Defoe's work has been conjured up in lines, like the ones quoted above, displaying the positivist method of listing and cataloguing. With Robinson Crusoe's voice present, the subverting work can begin, demonstrating alternatives to the master narrative he stands for.

The same occurs in the allusions to *Moby-Dick* and what its discourse represents. Before Changing Woman can ridicule Ahab and his attempts to seek and destroy the great whale, the text of *Green Grass, Running Water* must situate the captain's locus as a killer, a conqueror of the natural world. In order to do that, King offers references that establish within the novel the voices of Ishmael and Ahab, where they come from and what their role is. Again, in one excerpt we can perceive the contention of that discourse with a Native one:

> says Ahab. It's Moby-Dick, the great white whale.
> You're mistaken, says Changing Woman, I believe that is Moby-Jane, the Great Black Whale.
> "She means Moby-Dick," says Coyote. "I read the book. It's Moby-Dick, the great white whale who destroys the *Pequod*."
> "You haven't been reading your history," I tell Coyote. "It's English colonists who destroy the Pequots."
> But there isn't any Moby-Jane."
> Sure there is," I says, "Just look over there. What do you see?"
> "Well… I'll be," says Coyote (KING, 1993, p. 220).

What this passage displays is that there are two allegories, representatives of different worldviews. Coyote is explicit in referring to an actual book which summons *Moby-Dick*'s symbolism and installs it within the narrative. The narrator even provides further reflection on the colonialist aspect of the western novel with a comment on the sound similarity between Ahab's ship and the Pequot tribe, vanquished by New England colonists in the 17th century. For the criticism on that colonial aspect to be enacted, the original discourse present in Melville's novel must be, at least indirectly, allegorically, there.

Thus, we have that the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* inverts and subverts western principles, but it also bears in between its lines the symbolic traces of those principles. As mentioned before, this process can be seen as a simple one-way destruction of one perspective for the benefit of another; it can also be interpreted, as it usually is when it comes to a post-colonial theoretical approach, as a leveling procedure of the cultural playing field in which no perspective, Native or western, is privileged and no hostile stance is taken towards the Other; or it might be understood as a mixture of both views.

I do not believe that King's work is authoritarian to the point of denying western voices any room from which to enunciate. But I also do not think it is absolutely innocent in its performative demolition of those enunciations. Let us try and see it as a middle term possibility. Take, for instance, Davidson et al.'s position on King's literary work. They say that, "by rewriting and resituating these authoritative narratives […] King strategically inverts traditional binaries, and makes a pointed statement about the adverse impact of this dominant discourse" (DAVIDSON et al., 2003, p. 93). If in the previous quotation of their work they were leaning towards the second stance proposed above, in these lines they are pointing to the first stance, claiming that King 'inverts traditional binaries', situating Native as the positive pole of the pair Western/Native. I attribute this confusion to a difficulty of seeing literature of survivance as having any level of authority or aggressiveness. While they concede that his literature *inverts* the binary poles (not *proposes* a supplementary term), Davidson et al. accredit this inversion to 'making a pointed statement', not obliterating the previously dominant pole, as is the case when we talk about binaries of any sort. They, and other critics too, are probably afraid that they will assign to that traditionally oppressed literature the perverse aspects of a literature of dominance. Can we, therefore, state that that oppressed voice has some level of authoritativeness while also maintaining its proposed democratic overview of multiple epistemological possibilities? My hint is that it can.

In all of the excerpts analyzed above, both from *Green Grass, Running Water* and from the various western cultural productions evoked so far, we have seen the alternate presence of multiple discourses that were, if not diametrically opposite, frequently contentious and mutually interrogating in their stances towards one another. It certainly

means that, in order for the text to enact any form of subversive tactic, it must first situate its target, the idea it aims at deconstructing. This is the point in which the oppressed discourse concedes room for the dominating one to show its face, to manifest its usual power. Then the interplay can happen, but not without a large amount of conflict and struggle. The narrative of First/Thought/Changing/Old Woman is not utterly authoritarian, and neither is it democratic altogether – for one, it allows the presence of the Lone Ranger's, Robinson Crusoe's and Ahab's voices, and still the narrative sets for her, beforehand, the grounds on which she will perform her subversion, having been granted ample advantage in relation to those voices. The conclusion we can reach from this analysis is that, yes, Thomas King's writing is produced from a border perspective, allowing some space for conflicting views, but its alleged all-pervasive democratic stance does not stand when we take into consideration the large amount of aggression towards the other, that other to the Native that permeates the above-mentioned passages.

Ultimately, if once we had that the discourse bearing the power to name and organize held utmost sway over representations under its scope, we now have that the oppressed discourse resituates the axis of power by, first, literarily summoning those voices which previously bore primacy and, then, *re*naming and *re*organizing their symbolic structure to its ends, thus proposing a new shape for the power relations implicated. Additionally, we must concede that this 're-' is not innocent in accomplishing its task, and that, depending on the reader's position, the process can mean either liberation from authority or reallocation of primacy.

Following the exposition of the mythic passages in *Green Grass, Running Water* in which multiple discourses struggle for space and preeminence in the symbolic battlefield, let us now turn to another focus in the novel where there is also contention between perspectives; only this time the struggle is not for discursive power, but for power to define identity.

2. IDENTITY IN QUESTION: WHO DECIDES WHO IS WHO

Who is an Indian? Who can be an Indian? Who can stop being an Indian? These questions, although extremely pertinent, are very far from my power to answer. They are, however, exceptionally relevant to introduce the issue I want to focus on in this chapter. The question of how to define Indian/Native/Aboriginal has been discussed for the last few hundred years, and it is not the aim here to attempt to answer it, but to investigate how these issues manifest themselves in the literary text, how identity is narratively constructed and who/what holds the power to symbolically give this answer. Again, different and contrasting perspectives will be given, with the hope to further the discussion on how literary productions can shed light on these issues even in extra-literary fields, such a sociology, politics and law, just to name some.

There have been many different ways to define Indian at the governmental level – some very objective, some quite imprecise; a number of them a little curious, and many absolutely pernicious. Thomas King, in *The Truth About Stories*, exposes a series of different treatments of the definitions of Indian by the governments of the United States and Canada during the 19th and the 20th centuries. He makes reference to blood quantum laws, assimilation policies, termination attempts, urbanization movements, Native products commerce regulation, treaty renegotiation (KING, 2003, p. 121-151); most of them attempting to reduce Native power, influence and access to resources, and all of them succeeding in doing exactly that. One example of a particular piece of legislation, the 1876 Indian Act passed by the Canadian congress, ruled that some achievements that could certainly be considered an individual's personal progress, such as obtaining a university degree of joining the military forces, immediately disqualified that individual to being an Indian. In King's words, "get a degree and, poof, you're no longer an Indian. Serve in the military and, abracadabra, you're no longer an Indian. Become a clergyman or a lawyer and, presto, no more Indian. Legislative magic" (KING, 2003, p. 132). His criticism to legislation aiming at ruling the Indian out of existence is explicit, as we can see in the following excerpt: "[…] legislation, in relation to Native people, has had two basic goals. One, to relieve us of our land, and two, to legalize us out of existence" (KING, 2003, p. 130). Although it is not the aim here to investigate the contents and nuances of legislative

texts, these passages were quoted to illustrate the insertion of these questions in the text of *Green Grass, Running Water*. They will be analyzed in the following sections.

The approach of legislative, governmental and academic discourses in the representations of the Native are manifestations of a dominant perspective exerting power over individuals subject to its jurisdiction. A whole discursive apparatus on the Native *by* the Native, however, is also present in the novel. Characters representative of tribal customs, beliefs and myths display a wide range of material for interpretation on self-representation and construction of group identity. These characters will allow us to delineate the complex network of individual relations that allows them to bind together postulated communities in face of the apparent impossibility of unitary representations of these groups. Before proposing an assessment of the official discourses exposed in the previous paragraph, let us first investigate how this network of identity construction works.

2.1 Panopticon Vs. Synopticon

Freud demonstrated to us that we are not, and never were, in charge of our own selves. The breakthrough he offered in the understanding of the self is that there is something beyond our control that determines in large extent our behavior, actions, thoughts. This internal mechanism, influenced and affected by several external factors, is always distant from the totalizing grasp of objective analysis, and we may never have the key to its absolute comprehension. We behave, therefore, based on a sum of nearly infinite influences to which we can rarely pay homage, so multiple (and most of the times obscure) they are.

Interpersonal relationships and institutional policing certainly comprise some of these influences that affect human conventions and help shape social codes and habits. They, too, work within the individual to determine his/her behavior and beliefs. Although several models exist that can account for how they function in the social body, here I will present two of them.

2.1.1 Panopticon

Modern nation-states were formed based on tightly constructed written constitutions used as reference for the administration of the most varied stances of life, from high-importance government decisions to, in a downward spiral, the pettiest of every day's pecuniary exchange. The logic of modern administration implies that institutions exist to compose and modify the rules to be followed by citizens, to verify if the rules are being obeyed and by whom, to prescribe punishment to those who escape the norm, and to see that punishments are accurately applied, to the satisfaction of the normalized majority and to the benefit of good customs. These institutions, in their turn, request that citizens recognize their normalization powers and cooperate for the good of the whole system. Cooperation, however, requires surveillance.

Regulation and control are two of the most important powers of modern nation-states. A structured and far-reaching system of surveillance is required so that the unity of the group can be maintained and reinforced. One of these systems is the panopticon. Zygmunt Bauman, in his works *Modernidade Líquida* and *Vida Líquida*, contrasts Thomas Mathiesen's models of the panopticon and the synopticon apparatuses (this last one will be explored in the next sub-chapter) to elaborate on modern and post-modern strategies for attaining social compliance to communal norms. Bauman refers to the panopticon as that privileged structure (see pictures below) which, rising above the individuals, is meant to observe, and gives the observers an all-encompassing overview of those being watched.

Picture 1: The 'Vigiâmbulo Caolho' panopticon

Source: http://vigilambulocaolho.blogspot.com/2007/03/o-sr-caolho-ii.html

Picture 2: A modern sample of panopticon

Source: http://www.thinkingshop.com/AIP/ethics/reiman-bentham.htm

The benefits of the structure are, according to Bauman, that "the surveillants' facility and expediency of movement was the warrant of their domination; the inmates' 'fixedness to the place' was the most secure and the hardest to break or loosen of the manifold bonds of their subordination" (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 17). Therefore, those responsible for maintaining compliance, order and the *status quo* are granted a privileged position in order to fulfill their policing responsibilities. This privilege, however, provides the observers some level of limitation. The task performed in the panopticon structure "tied the 'routinizers' to the place within which the objects of time routinization had been confined. The routinizers were not fully free to move: the option of 'absentee landlord' was, practically, out of the question" (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 17). Thus we have the metaphoric description of the heavy hand of the modern state in its role as the ultimate stance of communal unity – a solid power positioned above everything else, responsible for maintaining order and conformity, but which is static, stuck in place because, if it moves, it loses its grip on its subjects' bodies.

When we transport the concept to literature and artistic representations, we can visualize how narrative structures and character depictions may be given within the boundaries of the panopticon logic. This logic, evidently, has been elaborated and developed within the limits of western logocentrism, and carries with it the principles of an Apollonian thought, positivistic and Cartesian in its very base; therefore, when it comes to

something as abstract as artistic products, this approach can be very problematic. It is possible, for instance, to investigate how the fixing aspect of the panopticon view tries to hold the Indian and its cultural representations in place, so that it can be easily identified and controlled. The procedure is rarely explicit – it is manifested in the discourse of a range of materials, from literary texts to TV advertisements; from children's cartoons to legislative bills. These products carry a heavily charged content of a fixating representation of the Indian. They still display the influence of outdated real referents, and through diligence and observation have kept the indian (with lower case 'i', as Gerald Vizenor uses it to refer to the discursively fabricated Indian) in the past to facilitate executive actions towards this *thing of yore*. Further ahead, I will attempt to demonstrate how this procedure functions in the text of *Green Grass, Running Water*, and how a different system, the synopticon, also operates behind some characters' voices to try and install an alternative approach to communal unity and identity representations. For that, nonetheless, we have to present the basic concept of the synopticon and investigate how it relates to the panopticon in the symbolic structure of the novel.

2.1.2 Synopticon

As I mentioned before, Zygmunt Bauman contrasts the procedures of the panopticon power to those of the synopticon. Borrowed from Thomas Mathiesen, the term is treated by Bauman as a major shift from the solid modern society to the post-modern liquid world of the cybernetic era. Where in the first power system we have a heavily structured apparatus, in which a few individuals watch the majority, used by those on the top of the pyramid to demand compliance to the norm of those at its base, in the second system we have that a great many individuals watch a few. The compliance to the norm, according to Bauman, "tends to be achieved nowadays through temptation enticement and seduction rather than by coercion – and appears under the disguise of free will, rather than revealing itself as an external force" (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 101). A great number of people incorporate the duty of policing their neighbors' behavior and silently demanding that they behave accordingly. The observatory scope needed for performing the tasks is attained, as

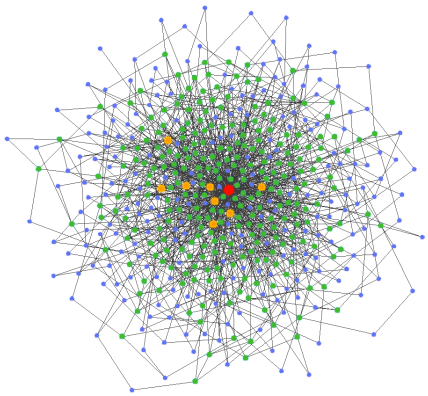
Bauman puts it, by the vast access to electronic and mediatic networks that connect individuals far apart under the same *virtual community*.

If we are to compare the panopticon and the synopticon structures, some illustrations on this last one may come in handy. However, while for the former concept we had a physical structure that could provide a clear visual analogy to it, in the latter concept there is no such physical metaphor. I provide the reader, therefore, with two pictures I believe to be somehow representative of the implications and possible visualization of the synopticon.

Figure 3: Suggestion 1 of synoptic interconnectivity

Source: http://brianholmes.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/choreography-trisha-brown.jpg?w=311&h=305

Figure 4: Suggestion 2 of synoptic interconnectivity



Source: http://www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/06/images/060807.networks-2.jpg

Bauman proceeds to attribute to these networks many of the interpersonal problems and social crises of post-modern times. I will, however, focus specifically on the policing aspect of the system and its workings in the efforts to sustain communities, therefore employing the concept of the synopticon only partially. This is especially true because I will propose a slightly different approach of the literary text based on the system. When Bauman deals with it, he concentrates on the cybernetic structure necessary to allow the widespread interconnectivity of the synoptic apparatus. I will not deal with the electronic aspects, but will center on his proposal of a social unity being attained through mutual individual demands and exchanges. Having briefly exposed the concepts of panopticon and synopticon, it is time to visualize their workings in the lines of *Green Grass, Running Water* and their implications.

2.2 Postulated communities and shifting identities

So far, I have been dealing exclusively with the mythic/magical passages of *Green Grass, Running Water*, whose main characters have been First/Thought/Changing/Old Woman and representatives of western cultures and thought summoned into the story for symbolic purposes. In this chapter I will deal mainly with the *real* passages of the novel, those that depict contemporary life and contemporary Native issues in the United States and in Canada.

Most of the story takes place in Toronto, Blossom, Calgary and Edmonton, in Canada, although some characters' reminiscences refer to Los Angeles and Hollywood, in the USA. The plot is so diverse in time, space and character presentation that it utterly resists summarization. There are dozens of characters, Native and white, who seem to lead individual stories apart from each other, both in time and space, for most of the novel. They follow independent paths until the day of the yearly celebration of the Sun Dance, which most of them are required to attend. Two of the characters who participate in the celebration are Lionel and Norma, nephew and aunt, on whom I will focus next; the remaining characters will revolve, in my approach, around them.

Lionel Red Dog, who bears in his very name the indianness the narrative attributes to him, through the reference to the color red, leaves the reservation early in life to go live in Toronto. Although he has big plans for his future in the *white world*, he keeps postponing any serious decisions and ends up working as a television salesperson at Bill Bursum's electronics store. On the verge of turning forty years old, Lionel demonstrates some anxiety as to the direction his life has taken and considers some alternatives for a change. The possibilities, he decides, are many: proposing marriage to his date Alberta and dropping his underpaid job to try and get back to college for an academic carrier, like his uncle Eli Stands Alone did, are his immediate choices. The problem, however, is that Lionel is stuck in-between worlds, with very few choices up to him. Most of his possibilities are heavily influenced by other characters and the situation he ended up in. Alberta does not want marriage, and she certainly does not want to provide for an underemployed man. Going back to school is no longer an alternative. In the past, the Blackfoot tribe reservation Lionel belonged to had plenty of money to finance Indian youths who wished to obtain a college degree, but not anymore. If he wants to enter a university, he must keep working as a television salesman for much longer to save up some money and cover the expenses. He has, he realizes, lost his opportunities. This is how he feels:

> Life, Lionel mused as he felt his chest slide on top of his stomach, had become embarrassing. His job was embarrassing. His gold blazer was embarrassing. Norma was right. Alberta wasn't going to marry an embarrassment. […] Happy birthday. Forty years old. Lionel padded his way to the bathroom. He had gotten into the habit of not turning the bathroom light on in the mornings. It hurt his eyes, but mostly he did not want to look at what he had become – middle aged, overweight, unsuccessful. But today he flicked out a hand like a whip and snapped the light on. The effect was startling and much worse than he had imagined (KING, 1993, p. 263-264).

Although it is quite clear why he feels that way, I would like to point to a detail in the passage above that may help better understand his state of mind – the fact that 'Norma was right'. Throughout the whole novel, Norma acts as a kind of collective conscience for the Blackfoot, giving advice, reproaching inappropriate behavior, suggesting courses of action, reminding the scattered members of the tribe of their traditions and roles within the Blackfoot community. She interacts with many different characters, bringing news back

and forth, spreading information, questioning family and tribe members as to their doings and plans. In one word, Norma represents the norm. She makes it clear again and again that she expects members to behave in certain ways, and the pressure of her demands is especially heavy on Lionel. They have several conversations in which Norma demands of him that he straighten up his life and start behaving in the proper Indian way, to which he strongly resists. He complains that "everybody wanted to run his life for him, as if he couldn't do it himself" (KING, 1993, p. 242). It is understandable that he feels this way, having people coming to him constantly to give advice and guide his actions, and the pressure he feels comes in many ways – from the white boss he works for and from his fellow Blackfoot; from direct suggestions to subtle hints; from the panoptic pressure on him and from the synoptic one. Lionel is obliged to manage this psychical bombardment in order to settle with himself who he is and what he can do with his life from this point on – and it is in this personal, internal battle that the search for identity and self-determination takes place.

First, let us look into how the panoptic structure, represented by Lionel's boss Bill Bursum, operates to exert pressure over the Native. Bursum is a small entrepreneur in the electronics business who has employed Native-Americans as salespersons (including Lionel's cousin, Charlie Looking Bear, who turned out to be a successful lawyer working for a big corporation) as a means of trying to help them better understand the real workings of the world and how to succeed in life. He has some peculiar views on the role of work, such as considering that to "make money [is] the only effective way to keep from going insane in a changing world" (KING, 1993, p. 210). In order to pass his wisdom on to the naïve Indians under his supervision, Bursum attempts to imbue them with some basic Western principles: "Lionel, at Bursum's insistence, had read *The Prince*, and so had Charlie Looking Bear for that matter" (KING, 1993, p. 140). The results, however, are not exactly the ones he expected:

> […] but Bursum was sure neither of them had understood the central axiom. Power and control – the essences of effective advertising – were, Bursum had decided years before, outside the range of Indian imagination, though Charlie had made great strides in trying to master this fundamental cultural tenet (KING, 1993, p. 141).

Noticing the words he uses to refer to Indians and Western cultural tenets, we can perceive evidence of what I described above as the panoptic discourse. Besides 'power' and 'control', words that are obviously highlighted in the excerpt, there are references to solid and immobilizing aspects in Bursum's thoughts, such as 'central axiom', 'essences', 'fundamental' and 'tenet'. All of them allude to hard concepts of positivist modernity. 'Central axiom', for instance, is a clear allusion to the ordering pretense of rationalism and its need to propose a rigid frame of reference around which most concepts will revolve. As to 'essence' and the remarks on fundaments and tenets, they point to that logic already investigated in the first chapter that sees objects as the immanent manifestation of something generic, quintessential and/or metaphysical that has always been there and that can be reached through method and scientific investigation and classification. In short, Bursum manifests his wish to instruct the Indians in his doctrine of effectiveness and technique mastering. In his opinion, the most successful and capable Indian is Charlie, clearly because he was able to work for a big law corporation that fights against tribal interests in the courts of law.

Operating in this discursive frame, Bursum is in the position to exert panoptic pressure over Lionel, manifesting the solidifying and immobilizing forces he represents. His views on what an Indian is are quite characteristic of that. If, in the passage above, he considers, in a sort of eugenic fashion, that Indians possess a distinguished range of imagination (a limited one), in the following lines he even considers Lionel and Charlie as not being Indians at all:

> And you couldn't call them Indians. You had to remember their tribes, as if that made any difference, and when some smart college professor did come up with a really good name like Amerindian, the Indians didn't like it. Even Lionel and Charlie could get testy every so often, and they weren't really Indians anymore (KING, 1993, p. 210).

Bursum's static view on what an Indian is prevents him from seeing his subordinates as 'real' Native-Americans. His view is similar to the one in which Indians are seen only as those who live in teepees, wear moccasins and feathers and chant rain and war songs while dancing semi-naked around a bonfire with their bodies painted in various colors. He refuses to see a television salesman and a lawyer who drives an expensive sports car as Indians,

and manifests his wish that they could be defined in an inert term such as Amerindian. Again, we have that panoptic discourse of will to power attempting to fix, to fence up real individuals in an objective classification academically conceived. It would be, for Bursum and the logic he represents, much more practical and effective (just to use a word employed by him above) to deal with those subjects in the terms of Amerindian, and not Blackfoot, Cherokee, Cheyenne or Anishinaabe. This means that generalizations work for the best results when it comes to categorizing individuals, while expecting and demanding that they conform to the definitions and act accordingly.

The narrative pressure exercised over Lionel's position, be it of the dislodged Native in the white man's world or of the Native who has lost his way and is trying to find it again, is only part of the symbolic forces operating through his character. With Norma, we have an alternative narrative power demanding that he take stance. This power, as opposed to the rigid panopticon, is lighter and comes in different clothing. It appears between the lines, in words as well as in actions, and it can hardly be pinpointed at an exact location. If Bursum's locus can be precisely situated in the Cartesian Eurocentric principles, the discourse that aunt Norma stands for is widespread and constantly shifting.

The influence she exerts comes mainly from the network of relationships and responsibilities she maintains. Being in contact with many different members of the Blackfoot society who live in distinct places, Norma displays a far-reaching scope of action. Let us trace the narrative path used to empower her speech. First of all, Norma must set the environment in which she is to operate to demand of Lionel a position in regards to his nativeness. In order to bring up the topic, when he is driving, she says: "Your uncle wanted to be a white man. Just like you" (KING, 1993, p. 36). With that, she opens up the grounds for Lionel to manifest his ideas on identity. His strategy, at first, is of keeping distance from the issue – he ignores her completely: "Lionel could see the sun and he could see the road and he could see the steering wheel. Norma was talking to someone. He could hear her voice. It sounded very warm and very far away" (KING, 1993, p. 36). Warm, but *very* far away is how her normalizing voice sounded to him, demonstrating that his performative strategy is to ignore the subject altogether. Norma, however, does not give up easily. She brings up the story of her brother Eli Stands Alone, Lionel's uncle, to reiterate her insinuation. She mentions that Eli, after having left his people to live like a white man,

ended up returning home to where he belonged, making it clear that returning is what saved him: "Coming to the Sun Dance is what did it. Straightened him right out and he came home" (KING, 1993, p. 67). The allusion to the traditional ceremony of the Sun Dance implies that she expects Lionel to rethink his choices and take the same route as Eli did. He counterattacks by exposing Norma's distortion of the story: " He went back to Toronto. He went back to Toronto after the Sun Dance. He came home after Granny died. That's all that happened. And he came home then because he had retired" (KING, 1993, p. 67).

The struggle goes on with Norma insisting that what really mattered is that Eli finally came back home, but this also does not make any impression on Lionel. What we are seeing here is Norma trying to situate him in the network of relationships and responsibilities of their community. She is attempting to imbue him with the thought that there are "good ways to live a life and not so good ways" (KING, 1993, p. 460), and that the good way is to live the traditional way close to the community. In order to do that, she starts composing the interconnectivity pictured in figures 3 and 4 above, linking members one by one in a web of responsibility. She mentions that he should be more like his sister Latisha who, in her view, is much more linked to the family and the tribe: "Latisha goes to see Martha. Ought to pay attention to your sister" (KING, 1993, p. 32). Norma begins hinting that Lionel should take models of behavior on which to base his decisions and receive advice, and his sister would present a good model. Again, his reaction is keeping distance from any deeper conversation that might lead to any decision-making point. He simply changes the subject.

Norma, then, prepares the next part of her strategy of spreading the synoptic network. She says: "Listen, nephew, maybe you should talk with Eli or your father, get yourself straightened out" (KING, 1993, p. 84). While the sentence has no more effect than the previous attempts at influencing her nephew, it opens up the path for her to link another member to the web of relationships – later on in the novel, she goes to Eli to activate his part in it.

By the time she gets to him, Eli is living at his deceased mother's cabin where he is the only obstacle for the construction of the Great Baleen Dam, a hydropower plant that is supposed to bring progress to that area belonging to the Blackfoot tribe. In an act of resistance, Eli refuses to leave the area his mother lived in and where she built the cabin

with her our hands and raised the kids all by herself. Staying in the course where the water flow was supposed to be after the construction of the dam is a powerful enough act of preserving the memory and history of the tribe, and Norma intends on rallying Eli to her cause uniting the Blackfoot. She approaches her brother and raises his awareness as to Lionel's precarious economic, spiritual and moral situation, raising the issue of his responsibility in the drama: "He's your nephew. You got responsibilities, you know. Look at what he's become" (KING, 1993, p. 84). What he's become is, in short, a white man. Knowing that Eli faced the same questions in his youth, having moved out of the reservation to get a PhD and teach American Literature at the university, Norma passes on to him his share of the duty of taking care of Lionel.

The allusion to his responsibilities as an uncle unleashes a chain-reaction of considerations in Eli's mind that is quite unsettling to him; it is, however, exactly what Norma seemed to have wanted to accomplish. In the following passage, Eli is remembering the time when he had just moved into the place he now lives. In this memory scene, brother and sister are at their mother's cabin, talking about the possibility of his living there permanently:

> Eli could no longer remember what he had in mind when he moved into the cabin, could remember only the emotion he felt when Sifton told him that they were going to tear the cabin down.
> "Don't have to stay home if you don't want to," said Norma.
> "I'm not going to stay."
> "Probably don't have all the fancy things here you have in Toronto."
> "I just came back to see the place."
> "Of course, being as you are the oldest, you can stay as long as you like."
> "It's just a visit."
> "Everybody should have a home."
> "Probably stay a month or two."
> "Even old fools."
> Looking Back, Eli could see that he had never made a conscious decision to stay. And looking back, he knew it was the only decision he could have made (KING, 1993, p. 289-290).

If we take a closer look at the level of definitiveness with which Eli expresses his past decisions, we can perceive that his choices were, and still seem to be, made by some force beyond him, even without his recognizance. He could not remember exactly why he had *chosen* to stay at his mother's cabin and give sequence to family presence there; although, looking back, he realizes he did not really decide to stay but, having stayed

anyway, concedes that there was no other option left to him. Now, between these two moments of considering reminiscences, Eli's thoughts are interspersed with some sort of unconnected, chaotic dialogue between him and his sister Norma. In it I believe is the key to understand his seemingly unconscious choices in regards to his responsibilities of keeping family present in that place.

As we have seen, Norma works as a sort of bond for the Blackfoot community. Inclusion in it, as can be perceived from the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water*, is a matter that involves several factors, from personal self-recognition as Blackfoot to group integration; from family relation to the practice of cultural rituals. Though I am not acquainted with the present requisites for an individual to be considered a Blackfoot (both from the group itself and from the governmental agencies responsible for the bureaucratic classifications of Natives), this is not the focus I want to give in the issue of community. My approach here is to how symbolic depictions in the novel work to form a communitarian sense for the Natives involved and what forces operate to give unity to it and to give shape to its representations.

Since we have been employing Zygmunt Bauman's concepts to interpret discourses on interpersonal relationships, I will also bring up his ideas on community so that we can better perceive the narrative structures related to it in *Green Grass, Running Water*. For him, as expressed in *Modernidade Líquida*, "communities come in many colours and sizes, but if plotted on the Weberian axis stretching from "light cloak" to "iron cage", they all come remarkably close to the first pole" (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 194). Reassessing our theoretical material so far, we can deduce that a homogenizing panoptic structure would be indicative of a community in the shape of an iron cage. This is the case of most modern nation-states, which have specific rules, regulations and intense and heavy monitoring of who belongs to the national community and who is an outsider. Contrasting with them there are the groups united by mutual acceptance or rejection, interconnectivity and interpersonal monitoring that comprise a society in the format of a light cloak. These latter associations must rely on constant activity on the part of members in the sense of watching each other for purposes of unity. This means that conforming to the collective view is a requisite for belonging, and the negotiations are regular and never-ending.

Once we transport these concepts to the passages in *Green Grass, Running Water* we have been investigating, we can deduce that Norma's actions do not fit into the norms of the panoptic vigilance on the group. There is no formal institution, legal technicality or physical restriction to exert influence over individual behavior. Although there are governmental institutions responsible for the objective identification of Native citizens, when we look into the novel they are not present in any way that may determine characters' positions in regards to belonging or not to the Blackfoot tribe. What we actually have is the intangible web of forces that comprise the synopticon system as defined above. Therefore, we can now look at the conversation of brother and sister, above, having this concept in mind.

The dialogue described between Eli Stands Alone's first thought of staying at his mother's cabin and his realization that he had not decided consciously on the subject points to the workings of Norma's strategy. The light cloak she expresses in her words ends up exercising its effect of demanding a position of the individual. In her words, Eli does not *have* to stay and carry on the family presence but, him being the oldest, *of course*, he *can stay*; especially since he does not seem to have a home in Toronto, and the cabin would fulfill that need. Her subterfuge ends up being enough for Eli to be imbued with the sense of duty of choosing to stay. It is that sense which remains for him in the sequence of his role in the narrative, as we can see from the following passage:

> What was he supposed to tell Lionel? Happy birthday. That's about all he could tell him. About all he wanted to tell him. But Norma expected more. In the old days, an uncle was obligated to counsel his sister's son, tell him how to live a good life, show him how to be generous, teach him how to be courageous.
> "You're a teacher," Norma told him. "So teach" (KING, 1993, p. 292).

He feels he must fulfill his role in the family, but he is not quite sure how. Norma's role here, again, is very present. After awakening in him the feeling of duty in relation to his problematic nephew, she charges once more with the argument she needs him to employ: "We need the young people to stay home, Eli. Figured you could tell him about that" (KING, 1993, p. 318). With these sentences, Norma completes the activation of the network that is about to act over Lionel to demand of him that he take a stance in regards to the Blackfoot community. Having been torn between two worlds, Lionel does not seem to

be able to handle his life well in either of them. The pressure will come over him in the sense that he has reached a point where he must make choices, take a position, choose sides.

Caught in the middle of the two symbolic powers described above, Lionel postpones his decisions as much as he can. Most of the novel revolves around his trying to build up a sense of location, trying to figure what side to pick. His allegorical position is, nonetheless, extremely powerful. Being neither white (as Bill Bursum leaves it clear due to his lack of adaptability) nor Indian (as he is constantly told in the various moments he is compared with John Wayne, the famous Indian killer), Lionel is in a strong space of negotiation, in some sort of indefiniteness that empowers him – he can choose whether to belong or not. When we take a look at the modern concepts of postulated communities, such those described by Patrick Imbert and Zygmunt Bauman, we can better understand why Lionel's situation is so powerful. In *Converging Disensus,* Imbert elaborates on the idea that the place of the individual in the collective depends on an active discursive experience of taking a place, instead of having a place in an organic and natural fashion. For him, "location is relational, it is based on discursive practices that transform themselves depending on other discursive practices with which they are in contact" (IMBERT, 2006, p. 17). Adaptability and negotiation are, therefore, paramount for those engaged in the act of *taking* their place in the community.

Aligned with that idea, we must take into consideration Bauman's view on communal life when he says that "all communities are postulated; projects rather than realities, something that comes after, not before individual choice" (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 194). As projects under construction, communities depend heavily on individual adhesion to be constructed. Once members have been incorporated, however, while once there were organic groups that stayed bonded for a long time, now, Bauman shows us, they are no longer this enduring. We have, therefore, a situation in which the individual has been given an extraordinary amount of power that may be seen as dangerous. If, on the one hand, the group can be augmented, expanded, improved by the incorporation of new cells to its ranks, on the other hand we have that those same individuals might threaten the collective by their possibility to leave at any time. This identity malleability is what empowers Lionel's

positing in relation to his Blackfoot fellows – he is free to pick sides, while they are already defined, already located.

We can interpret these structures in two distinct ways. We can see the web construction of communal identity in *Green Grass, Running Water* as a complex modern strategy to attain unity. Seen this way, Norma's efforts are justified by the need of the Blackfoot to affirm their presence and compose a unified social body that draws strength from its numbers. Also, her actions may be interpreted as a form of resistance to the modern institutional powers that have, and still do, oppressed Native-American peoples along the past five centuries. A communal identity formed by a tight network of interpersonal relationships might pose as an alternative to the static technocratic structure of Western nation-states and sciences. If, on the one hand, there are institutional quota and blood quantum laws to objectively catalogue and segregate human beings, on the other hand there is a process of self-determination that might work to legitimate an identity position crafted from the inside, from the very community seeking that determination. In this sense, the symbolic collective construction we have been analyzing would align with Bauman's idea of the focus on 'us' as a form of self-protection. He borrows the thought from Richard Sennet to then question the possible uses of the wish for a collective unity. In *Modernidade Líquida*, he mentions that the

> […] fluid modern environment may – and will favour a variety of survival strategies. "We", as Richard Sennett posits, "is nowadays an act of self-protection. The desire for community is defensive… To be sure, it is always a universal law that "we" can be used as a defense against confusion and dislocation (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 205).

As a form of legitimate self-protection, then, the strategy of tight membership selection through collective surveillance is a valid course of action. Bauman, however, calls our attention to the potential danger of this kind of enterprise when it is taken too seriously or to the extreme. If the selection process is undertaken in a model of exclusion of the unfit instead of the inclusion of the different, the diverse, there is the risk of the self-determination act becoming more draconian than democratic, which directs us to the possible interpretation that the collective demands for individual positioning may be aggressive and somehow authoritarian.

In *Vida Líquida*, Bauman, while expressing his thoughts on the post-panoptic power of the modern states, says that this kind of power can work for inclusion as well as for exclusion, claiming it is more recurrent and comfortable to act on the latter form. If we look into the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* with that idea in mind, we may witness not some sort of welcoming self-determination in the representations of the community when it demands from an individual that he or she chooses whether to belong or not, but a process of pre-requisite conformation that, if not met faithfully, will annul the possibility of acceptance. In this sense, the construction of 'us' poses as an oppressive form of demand, for the person targeted by the surveillance web must either conform or step away. Therefore, as Bauman has expressed, "an "inclusive community" would be a contradiction in terms" (BAUMAN, 2000, p. 198), since inclusion is no longer a matter of being accepted by the larger group, but a question of negotiating to what extent one should give in to that group's demands so that acceptance can be granted – unilateral negotiation, in fact, because after all it is the community which decides on the requisite traits for fitting in, and the individual's only real choice is to accede or not.

We have, for instance, character depictions that make the selective process suspicious, due to the apparent lack of criteria for accepting people into the Blackfoot group. Let us now look into two characters' situations to compare the levels of adaptability to community demands. We have already looked into Lionel's position; let us, then, investigate his sister Latisha for a moment to, finally, propose some conclusions on the either democratic or authoritarian procedures of building communal unity through interpersonal networking.

2.3 The Dead Dog Café and Bill Bursum's Home Entertainment Barn

I titled this section after the names of two business establishments depicted in *Green Grass, Running Water*. The Dead Dog Café is the restaurant where Latisha, Lionel Red Dog's sister, works, while Bill Bursum's Home Entertainment Barn is the electronics store where Lionel works. I will use them as evidence to elaborate on the above-mentioned conflicts regarding the criteria for symbolic membership in the Blackfoot community. Through the representations of both places, I will attempt to demonstrate these possible

subjective criteria impersonated by Norma and how Lionel handles the psychic pressure of having to *take* a place (as posited by Patrick Imbert, above) and what are the implications in our interpretation of the concept of community.

The Dead Dog Café is a successful business owned and run by Latisha, Norma's niece. It became famous not because of its good food, but for the tourist trap concept of allegedly selling dog meat. Some of the dishes served include Dog du Jour, Houndburgers and Puppy Potpourri, among other which give the impression that the customer is eating a traditional Blackfoot dish. Though nobody says it is traditional food, obviously, nobody denies it for the sake of maintaining the fame of the establishment. The strategy, in Latisha's words, is very simple: ""How about Old Agency Puppy Stew?" said Cynthia. […] Every day Rita cooked up the same beef stew, and every day Rita or Billy or Cynthia or Latisha thought up a name for it" (KING, 1993, p. 116). She involves all of her employees in the task of coming up with stereotypical names for the day's special, every now and then mocking tourists' capacity for seeing the farce. In her opinion, "it wasn't cheating. Everybody in town and on the reserve who came to the Dead Dog Café to eat knew that the special rarely changed, and all the tourists who came through never knew it didn't" (KING, 1993, p. 116). Basically, it is ok if those who know the truth do not care and those who do not know it never find out. It is not my intention here to discuss the validity of Native-Americans (or any other minority group) exploring the stereotypes formed about them in a way that will give something in return. My interest is to analyze the importance of these actions in the symbolic constructions of identity, both individual and communal.

Although Latisha demonstrates that the farce does not make her content about what she does, she confesses that the idea, which was not hers, is quite good. She wished she had thought it up herself:

> Latisha would like to have been able to take all the credit for transforming the Dead Dog from a nice local establishment with a loyal but small clientele to a nice local establishment with a loyal but small clientele *and* a tourist trap. But, in fact, it had been her auntie's idea.
> "Tell them it's dog meat," Norma had said. "Tourists like that kind of stuff" (KING, 1993, p. 117).

In fact, it had all been Norma's idea from the beginning. Here we have one incongruity that will have to be assessed later on, the fact the she constantly insists that the

Blackfoot act traditional, but concedes to an international farce (after all, people come from all over the world to eat there; tourists come from Germany, Japan, Italy, Russia, Brazil, England, France, and *even* Toronto) that mocks Blackfoot culture and reinforces stereotypes. Norma actually ignores criticism to her position of accepting and defending Latisha's enterprise. It does not seem to matter to her that the restaurant is a disfavor to outsiders' comprehension of her tribe. In a conversation with Lionel, she makes that absolutely clear. First, she expresses her disdain for his present situation: "What you need is a job." "I've got a job," [says Lionel.] "Selling televisions is not a job for a grown man" (KING, 1993, p. 59). In order to reinforce her argument that Lionel is not doing anything good with his life, Norma brings up Latisha's situation as a model of successful entrepreneurship. Lionel, seeing the opportunity of countering his aunt's attack, focuses on the lack of traditionalism of his sister's work:

> "The Blackfoot didn't eat dog."
> "It's for the tourists."
> "In the old days, dogs guarded the camp. They made sure we were safe."
> "Latisha has time to come out to the reserve and visit us, too. Always helps with the food for the Sun Dance. Helps out with other things, too."
> "Traditional Blackfoot only ate things like elk and moose and buffalo. They didn't even eat fish."
> "Music to my ears to hear you talking traditional, nephew" (KING, 1993, p. 59-60).

In their discussion, one of the most important elements at stake is the question of acting traditional or not. If behaving according to the usual cultural customs of a people is one of the requisites for belonging, in this case neither Lionel nor Latisha would fulfill it. That is not, however, what is actually at work here. The argument of tradition is being used indiscriminately as a means to either counter offensive affirmations or to demand the address to certain personal issues, not as a pillar for societal institution. If we pay attention to Norma's arguments, we can perceive that, for her, selling fake dog meat is admissible, as long as you commit to visiting family, but selling televisions is not, especially if you do not commit to the community.

All these evidences point to the potential oppressive characteristic of this sort of network construction of communities. The demands for positioning are constant, and the individual responsibilities towards the collective can be quite taxing. In *Turn to the Native*,

Arnold Krupat elaborates on the characteristics of these societies and how they contrast with Western social formatting. He mentions that, "as Deloria and Lyle make clear, "traditional Indian society understands itself as a complex of responsibilities and duties", in contradistinction to "modern" Euramerican societies in which specific rights written into law stand protectively between the people and the state of government" (KRUPAT, 1996, p. 13). Since there is no written code of laws, the structuring of society must be attained by a set of principles carried on with each individual. Furthermore, each one must understand their places in the group and demand that the others also understand theirs, and there resides the real issue in our investigation of *Green Grass, Running Water*. Eli Stands Alone, for instance, had several doubts as to his role in moving into his deceased mother's cabin after she passed away, and so does Lionel in his choices of going back to school and trying to become successful in the Western world he is immersed in, or reassessing his options and starting to rescue part of the Blackfoot in him. The choices are clearly not easy ones, and the possibilities of refusing ones role, attributed by others, are at least problematic.

On this issue, Arnold Krupat evolves his arguments on the structure of Native societies by invoking examples both of himself and of accounts of tribes other than Native-American ones. In the chapter 'A Nice Jewish Boy among the Indians', Krupat tells us about Albert Memmi's impressions on tribal life, quoting the following:

> I discovered tribal life and learned to hate it… This atmosphere of wrangling at home, the pettiness of our tribal community, its futile arguments and treacherous or even friendly gossip, … with everybody watched by everyone else, … all of it certainly contributed a lot to the feeling of being stifled that soon overcame me at home (KRUPAT, 1996, p. 97).

There is the feeling expressed by Lionel in the passage above where he complains that people wanted to run his life for him. This excerpt summarizes the whole oppressive characteristics of the synoptic network, with everybody watched by everyone else and friendly gossip employed as means of communication. All of those characteristics are represented by Norma, and it is to them that Lionel must performatively react if he is to present any action, either of resistance or of conformation, to the demands of that normative force.

Having worked for several years for the prejudiced Bill Bursum in what is considered by many characters a degrading job for a forty-year-old man (as many characters seem to think), Lionel is the perfect target for the rescue efforts of Norma's network. He represents the classic Indian who could not go home, trapped in-between worlds, unable to find his way in a foreign world or to go back to the organic safety of a postulated community. His job represents much of his degraded situation, and it is through the depictions of his daily work that we get most of the information of his present issues. He was employed to substitute his cousin Charlie Looking Bear as the 'Indian salesman' of the store because Bursum discovered Indians sell more to Indians. Lionel is, therefore, being used as advertisement material for profit. The ridiculous gold blazer he wears for work becomes his most distinguishing feature: it is ugly, old-fashioned, and worn out at the elbows. Summarizing, his life is a total mess.

In order to try and help him get out of his embarrassing situation, a group of four old Indians will join in an effort of obliging Lionel to finally pick sides in the symbolic play of belonging we have been investigating. For that, they will join forces with Norma and, in a sense, will compete with her own efforts of demanding a reaction from him. To make a long story short, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, Hawkeye and the Lone Ranger, four centenary mystical elders (whose names could not be more suggestive), offer to fix his life as the beginning of a bigger plan – a plan of fixing the world. For a modest start, they offer him a leather jacket as a birthday gift that is supposed to make him feel good about himself. Though Lionel does not understand how the jacket can make things any better, he agrees to wear it for a while. This gesture represents an allegorical act of dressing up in his community role, and I want to point it out as a major symbolic shift in the discourses of belonging we have been seeing so far. Through the gesture of wearing the elders' jacket we can reassess many of the concepts proposed so far. I want to propose that idea, in the next section, as a form of wrapping up the issues on Norma's role (and what she represents) for group cohesion, on the positive aspects of the synoptic network, and on Lionel's importance as a model of communal construction through acting on the individual.

2.4 Dressing up in values

The jacket, originally, belongs to George Morningstar, a white American who used to be married to Latisha but, having abused her physically, disappeared for a long time (the character of George will be further investigated in chapter 4, in the section on photography). The symbolism of the jacket can be interpreted in many different ways. Some critics say it is a reference to General Custer, some say it refers to John Wayne, while others focus on the meanings it carries for Lionel himself – awkwardness, feeling of oppression, heaviness. I do not want to enter into speculations on the cross-references the jacket may point to, but to its effects on the narrative and on the characters. This is how Lionel feels about it when the four elders give it to him:

> "How's the jacket, grandson?" said Ishamel.
> Lionel rolled his shoulders around in the jacket. "Look, it's very nice. I mean, I like leather. And the fringe is … elegant. But I really can't keep it."
> "It looks a little tight."
> "It looks hot, too," said Robinson Crusoe.
> In fact, Lionel felt as if the jacket was suffocating him. Worse, the jacket had begun to smell. A stale, sweet smell, like old aftershave or rotting fruit (KING, 1993, p. 421-422).

At first, the jacket does not seem to have had any effect on Lionel. But, as the old Indians start to suggest possible feelings it might be evoking in him, he starts feeling different. He goes from dissimulated indifference in relation to it to a gradual realization of the suffocating power it exerts. Worse, it had begun to bother him, to grow around him in an unpleasant form. When he is beginning to get acquainted and to become aware of that presence wrapped around him, Lionel must return the jacket to the elders – and it is only through that gesture that we can fully comprehend to whole episode involving it.

As I mentioned, the jacket belonged to George Morningstar, who happens to be back in town and goes visit Latisha at the Sun Dance, the traditional event held every year to which all the Blackfoot in the novel attend. George is really back because he wants to take pictures of the ceremony to sell to the printed media, and he tries to do it in disguise, knowing he is not allowed to do so. When they suspect George is taking pictures, the four elders call Lionel and hint that he may be able to help. Lionel closes in on George and demands that he stop taking photographs and hand back the film he has used. This is the

culminating scene of the novel in which all the Blackfoot are present in the same place. More importantly, the group is able to witness when Lionel advances to the intruder of the sacred ceremony and forces him to produce the *stolen* images of his community. The scene closes with George leaving without the forbidden photographs, but with his jacket back, and Lionel as a sort of small hero of that episode. With that much said, let us interpret these happenings.

To the interests of our interpretations here, the jacket stands for the light cloak of communal responsibility offered to him by the elders, the mythic representatives of the Blackfoot. The heaviness felt by Lionel is the weight of the individual responsibilities he is initially unwilling to accept, but that gradually overtakes him as the community closes in to both demand a position from him and to make it clear that they, too, depend on him. The oppression he feels in natural, since the task of integrating a larger group and being responsible for it, acting on behalf of its interests, defending it against offenders from the outside can be taxing and somewhat frightening. Zygmunt Bauman has expressed this problematic question, claiming that the distancing of the individual can provide a privileged observation point from which he can assess the situation of a group, but that engagement is a necessary act of belonging, once one has decided upon a stance within that group. Lionel, then, finally decides on a position to *take* (always remembering Patrick Imbert's idea of the possibility of one choosing a place to belong) within the Blackfoot. The choice he makes of holding ground against an outside offender in a way justifies the collective demands deposited on him. It gives Lionel a role in the communal web of identity; it also sheds light on Norma's behavior and the workings of the synoptic network in the struggle for group unit and identity.

Looking at the conclusion of the episode with the jacket allows us to appraise with more details the concepts I presented in this chapter. This is how the scene closes, after the exchange of the jacket for the usurping photographic film:

> "Well, grandson," said the Lone Ranger, "that's about as much as we can do for you. How do you feel?"
> Lionel jammed his hands into his pockets. "I feel fine."
> "Fixing up the world is hard work," Said Ishmael.
> "Even fixing up the little things is tough," said Robinson Crusoe.
> "Try not to mess up your life again," said Hawkeye (KING, 1993, p. 428).

Lionel clearly does not understand how his life could have been fixed with such a simple gesture as standing up for his friends and relatives. After all, his troubles are, he considers, much more serious than guileful snapshot-takers attempting to capture sacred tribal moments that must be kept within the group. He feels, nonetheless, fine. It is the first moment in the whole novel (notice that at this point we are on page 428 of 469) that it can be said he is genuinely expressing some sort of relief from his troubled life. However, seeing that he is a little confused as to what really changed in his life, the elders offer him some explanation:

> "This is how you help me fix up my life?"
> "Pretty exciting, isn't it?" said Ishmael.
> "Have I missed something?"
> "In the years to come," said Robinson Crusoe, "you'll be able to tell your children and grandchildren about this."
> "You do this a lot?" said Lionel.
> "You don't have to thank us, grandson," said Hawkeye (KING, 1993, p. 428).

In short, what changed is that his actions integrated him to the larger body of the Blackfoot. He is now part of the tribe's history and of its future – his very yet-to-come descendents are evoked as a sign that his role in the community has been established and that now he must abide to it and rely on that for identification, for the building of his identity as a Native-American of the Blackfoot tribe.

With this idea in mind and looking back at Norma's efforts of spreading the network of responsibilities to all the possible members of the tribe, we can now deduce that her focus was not on demanding that the individuals act traditionally. In fact, tradition is not what is supposed to bond together a society composed of members living physically far apart, who have the most varied backgrounds, schooling levels and life objectives. Tradition might, actually, hinder the process of democratic group integration by limiting the scope of adhesion through somewhat hardened concepts. This idea has been defended by theorist Arnold Krupat, in *Turn to the Native*, when referring to a similar position of ethnographer Franz Boas, claiming:

> I can't deny that I share [Franz Boas'] view that freedom from "automatic adhesion[s]" is a good thing, that "tradition" can and often does "shackle," and that "in-group" moralities that do not find a way to include "all humanity" are likely to produce […] horrors […]. So far as we may be called on to choose

> between *Einheit* (oneness, unity) and *Freiheit* (freedom), I would, with Boas, choose the latter (KRUPAT, 1996, p. 104).

Freedom of choice over a tradition that shackles. This is the new light I want to shed over Norma's discourse. What is at stake here is not the static values of past customs, but the ever-changing, renewing aspect of community dynamics. When Norma expressed, as I mentioned before, that what the tribe needs is that "the young people stay home", she is manifesting the need of renewal, of the *fresh blood* the young generations bring. This explains why Latisha's deviation from acting traditional is absolutely accepted, because she manages to find the time to integrate with the tribe, to help her relatives and fellow Blackfoot, to be a part of the network. Lionel, on the other hand, is judged not simply because his job is ridiculous, but for the fact that he does not dedicate any attention to those actions – not until, of course, he finds himself, in the jacket scene, in a situation in which he can demonstrate cohesion with the interests of the larger group, finally realizing his role in the bigger picture.

The forces working in the literary text, as we have been seeing in the lines of *Green Grass, Running Water*, are representative of contemporary movements taking place at this very moment in relation to various Native-American communities. Vast criticism has been produced trying to assess the issues of belonging, identity and self-representation of these groups – and my proposal of applying the concepts of the synopticon and the panopticon is just one among many possibilities of looking at these subjects. Through them, I hope it can be evidenced that there are outside forces working to influence and determine symbolic representations of the Native, of Native literature and of tribal material. These immobilizing procedures, discursively manifested through the panoptic power, have been acting upon cultural representations for centuries now, and their denunciation and deconstruction are, in my perspective, the main roles of literary productions such as Thomas King's and of the literary criticism on them.

After all, by now there is no doubt that Native Americans have survived (as opposed to what many discursive practices have attempted to prove) the acculturating and disempowering processes employed against them for generations; it is not a matter anymore of being concerned about Native survival – but survivance, as posited by Gerald Vizenor, is paramount in the contemporary works of critics and theoreticians, as well as of writers. As

mentioned before in the words of King, through the excerpt of the essay 'Godzilla Vs. Post-colonial', the 'active present' and the 'viable future' of Native life and culture are the real concern, and not any actions of recovering or rescuing an organic pre-European-contact reality. As a privileged forum for allegorical investigations and meanings, the literary text encompasses these questions in a very vivid and open way through which we can grasp significations and elaborate solutions. It is also the text that points to critical paths to be followed, and here our novel is pointing to the elements that can be used to counter, to annul, to revert those appropriating discourses that hold sway over Native interpretations. I refer to the performative practice that works in a distinct way from the immobilizing power of the panoptic procedures. Academic, scientific and governmental discourses, among others, are present in Native literary material depicting the ways tribal societies and the individuals composing them are oppressed. My attempt at bringing the considerations on the synoptic network serves as a form of situating one of the possible strategies that can be employed in the deconstruction task I have been talking about. By means of it, we witness in the voice of characters such a Norma the search for a non-Cartesian way of representation or, better still, of self-representation, once we have that a Native discourse is engaging in the construction of its own identity, of its own locus of enunciation in a liberating effort from outside forces.

The need for the elaboration of such a locus is due to, evidently, the aggressive constructions functioning to prevent a Native voice from gaining status and establishment. These constructions are explored in many levels in King's *Green Grass, Running Water* – some of them have already been exposed and examined in chapter 1; others will be addressed in the following chapters, in which I will attempt to delve into *official*, established discourses that exert pressure over concepts such as Native (and the variations Indian, Aboriginal, Amerindian, First Nations' citizen, etc.). Further evidences of these discourses will be provided in the sections dedicated to demonstrating how the different media, from photography to motion picture to literature, depict Native material with the dominating will of power characteristic of the Eurocentric principles of division and conquest of allegedly primitive peoples and things. From the exposure of these mediatic procedures, I will try and uncover the forms of resistance offered by Thomas King's text, as a way to demonstrate that the novel in question here fights at a multi-medial level the forces

that oppress the Native and maintain the tradition that constructed the Native as a dying nuisance who, through its resistance, accomplishes nothing more than setting back Western development and progress. It is to those representations that I now turn.

3. INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES ON THE NATIVE

Paula Gunn Allen, in *Sacred Hoop*, says that "Americans divide Indians into two categories: the noble savage and the howling savage. The noble savage is seen as the appealing but doomed victim of the inevitable evolution of humanity from primitive to postindustrial social orders" (ALLEN, 1992, p.4). Allen is very bellicose in her opinions about established discourses on the Indian, but she is voicing a quite common rhetoric that has been institutionalized along the past few centuries in regards to Native-American peoples and individuals. Although she mentions a division made by Americans, what Allen probably means is a division made by those academic, governmental, scientific approaches that characterize the Western epistemological thinking already analyzed in chapters 1 and 2, above, and that permeate not only America and the Americans, but the whole Western world and its cultural products. Allen could have used in the place of Americans, for instance, Euramerica, as some critics have done before, but this is not actually the point. The question is that there are official and non-official discourses working to build the image of the doomed savage who needs help from his state of primitiveness and who needs to be modernized and brought to the arms of progress, to the comforts and benefits of a civilized life.

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, Thomas King incorporates many of these elements and, through the voices of multiple characters, Native and white, questions their validity, raises readers' awareness of them, employs different strategies aiming at annulling their negative influence. The procedure used for these purposes involves weaving the narrative, which is extremely nonlinear, in the patterns characteristic of the discourses the author wants to question. In academic settings, for instance, King gives his characters some traits peculiar to the academia, demonstrating that the subversion offered by the literary text comes from within the parameters that built oppressive enunciations.

Other subversive moments deal with the construction of the hyper-real dying savage concept, without any referent in the material world, by medical, scientific, governmental representatives who utter their judgments and sentences based on biological and segregational arguments that always seem to have political reasons hidden, masqueraded by utilitarianism and modernity. Also, through the same institutionalized speeches we can

perceive the fabrication of the Native as dangerous to good citizens, to the government and, finally, to the Natives themselves. One of the powers of King's novel is to deconstruct each and every one of these oppressive attempts. In the next sections, I will propose readings as to how this is accomplished, starting with an area well known by King himself, (his being a university professor) the academia.

3.1 The Academia

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, there are two Blackfoot who are academics, one who considers following the career, and a fourth who praises the academic achievements of one of the first two. There is a whole section taking place at a university class in which Alberta Frank (a character already mentioned above, whom Lionel wants to marry), professor of Native history and culture, lectures about a critical historical episode of conflict between the United States government and several Native-American tribes. In this section of the novel we can perceive the use of academic language as a means to give more or less credibility to chronicled events, such as those from history books.

In the excerpt below we can see Alberta talking about the Red River War of 1874 in which the U.S. government unleashed a military campaign to remove the Comanche, Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes from the Southern Plains where they lived to reinforce the reservation system planned to regulate Native land, activities and access to resources. The results were fierce battles and the eventual imprisonment of many of the survivors from the conflict. This is how Professor Frank exposes the historical episodes to her students:

> Alberta Frank leaned on the podium and watched Henry Dawes fall asleep.
> "In 1874, the U.S. Army began a campaign of *destruction* aimed at *forcing* the southern Plains tribes onto reservations. The army *systematically* went from village to village burning houses, killing horses, and destroying food supplies. They pursued the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and the Arapaho *relentlessly* into one of the worst winters of the decade. Starvation and freezing conditions finally *forced* the tribes to surrender" (KING, 1993, p. 14-15, my highlights).

Although she is reporting a historical fact, there are many subtleties in Alberta's lecture that alter the listeners' perception of the episode. She is using a very common

narrative strategy to reinforce her own impressions on the subject; through the use of words like the ones I highlighted in the passage, she is imprinting a reinforced aggressive quality to the ways of the U.S. Army operations. The subverting logic of the professor's speech can be made obvious if we test the same passage with a different word choice. Many possibilities could be tested – I propose the following substitutions: 'destruction' for 'removal'; 'forcing' for 'leading'; 'systematically' for 'occasionally'; 'relentlessly' for 'persistently'; and 'forced' for 'convinced'. There, we now have the same fact, but the sympathy is redirected to the brave army that rid the region of the non-conformed troublemakers who resisted being transported to the welfare of the reservation system prepared for them.

Actually, what Alberta does is to employ the language commonly used to refer to Natives. Anybody who watches the Indians depicted in Hollywood movies, TV cartoons, novels of the western category or best-sellers is acquainted with the traditional language use. The Indians depicted in these media are immediately taken as primitive, limited. Dealing with them requires that white characters sink to their level in order to interact, employ simplified language and resort to the usual knowledge the savage has of the 'spiritual world'. The condescending treatment given to white voices when faced with Indians is exactly what is being criticized in Alberta's lines – there is no condescendence to the slaughtering army, guided by destructive bureaucrats, employing relentless and systematic force onto people who did not agree to the system proposed for them, and who were not listened to in the decision-making process. The academic speech also questions the potential veracity of historical 'facts', once it is made clear that the narrator can imprint a misleading tone to the tale, depending on his or her interests.

The forum Alberta speaks in has been traditionally occupied by those who determine policies, verify facts, and write history. The positions in the academic world have been, naturally, occupied by scholars aligned with the mainstream storyline, who were institutionally required to conform to the official narrative, the narrative that justified the actions of national, patriotic actors such as soldiers, generals and statesmen. Alberta, however, represents a shift in this logic. She comes from the party whose voice has been ignored in the historical event narrated above (the Indians did not have any choice or vote before the military removal action began) and she does not need to pay homage to the

scientific tradition that allowed history to be told that specific way. She is able, in fact, to use its tools to revert from within some of the possibly misleading ways facts have been told concerning Native-Americans. This idea is aligned with Michel Foulcault's position that, since knowledge and power walk hand in hand, once minority groups start claiming discursive voices in the institutions that generate knowledge, they also generate power conflicts that open the path for new battlefields in which representation rights are challenged and potentially redistributed. Before Alberta claims a position in this battlefield, what the academia offers is either an imperial subject-object relation, with the Native's voice silent in the binary power construction of us-them, or a condescending, sympathetic approach of the objectified Native, whose voice is silenced by the artificially crafted them-us in which 'them' (or Natives) is constructed based on a victimized image, on the presupposition that they *must* be symbolically defined in generalized terms that can be academically contrasted. This appropriation of academic representations is denounced by Arnold Krupat when he says that

> to perpetuate a well-documented imperial tradition in which Indians, women or the "colored body" serve as symbols, and symbolically to appropriate such persons for the purposes of generalizations useful to "us", is to practice a form of "sympathy" these people might well reject (KRUPAT, 1992, p. 108).

The narration of the Red River War of 1874 may represent three distinct appropriations of the same historical fact. Two possibilities are as follows; the third one comes further ahead: 1) we (the narrators of the story in official history books) tell the story in which they (the non-conformist savages) had it coming when they decided not to accede to the U.S. government's sovereign decision of removal; 2) in the procedure described above by Krupat, we (the narrators of the story in official history books who understand the offence caused to the 'removed') tell the story in which they (the poor little Indians who could not see it coming, since they were not really asked to issue an opinion on the removal act) suffer a major injustice and must now be taken care of with tax discharges, special gaming rights and free federal boarding schools for the youths. Alberta's narrative, however, escapes from these storytelling structures while providing a third form of giving an account of the Red River War. She incorporates the official storyline *and* its assertive, definitive tone, not to draw commiseration onto the oppressed Comanche, Kiowa,

Cheyenne and Arapaho, but to symbolically stand ground for her right to narrate a part of the history involving Native-Americans. Naturally, her depiction of the events causes some sort of sympathetic reaction over her students, and I am not saying that it should not or it is wrong that it does. What I specifically want to point to is the importance of Alberta's position when employing academic tools and forum to mingle her storytelling power with official history.

The significance of the professor's actions is expressed in *Border Crossings*, when Arnold Davidson et. al comment that "the writing of a nation's history – the narration of its existence through rhetorical forms – becomes an important political and cultural act. Such records are a tangible reflection of the power of the imagination to create and sustain a distinct national [or tribal] identity" (p. 125). The account of the Red River War helps to tell the story of the Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne and Arapaho, and national story of the United States of America. The story reflects efforts from all the parts involved to 'imagine' their position in that historical period, and Alberta's narration works to partially construct (or create, or sustain) distinct national and tribal identities.

The fact that Professor Alberta Frank employs several academic technologies points to the privileged power position she finds herself in in which she can better generate a positive image of the episode narrated. I explain 'positive' further ahead, but before I want to attend to the subtleties in the novel that indicate her privileged position. She climbs the university podium to speak, which grants her institutional, scientific and academic authority. She shows slides as factual evidences of the point she wants to make. Alberta also uses her prerogative of grading students to force them into focusing on her arguments, threatening them with possible bad grades in the test. Finally and less evident is the professor's liberty to deny answering questions she deems unnecessary to address, such as in the following passage:

> "Professor Frank, what was that date?"
> "Eighteen seventy-four."
> "Who were the tribes again?"
> " The Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche, and Arapaho."
> "How do you spell Arapaho?"
> "Look it up in your book. Now, as the tribes came in, the army […]" (KING, 1993, p. 14).

Alberta uses her discursive privilege to choose which questions and issues are important to be addressed and which are not. When the student insists in a normative technicality, the direction of the lecture is abruptly guided to what really matters for the storyteller in the podium, the slaughtering of the Native-American tribes. The reason she denies answering certain questions is because the strategy of reassessment of the circulation of knowledge and power going on in this academic setting depends on focusing on a positive agenda of asserting a different sort of truth. She assumes the academic place not to deny any part of history or of the traditional discourse employed to depict the Native as a non-conformist nuisance. Alberta is not at the podium to say no to any previously established oppressive narrative practice. The strategy is not of negativity, but of reformulated positivity. After all, as Michel Foucault posits in *Microfísica do Poder*,

> If power were only repressive, if it did nothing more than to say "no", do you really think that it would be obeyed? What gives power its effect, its acceptance, is simply that it not only has weight as a force that says "no", but it really puts itself across, it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourses (FOUCALT, 2004, p. 8).[2]

Several Native scholars and artists have employed before the tactics of denial – denial of Western interpretative keys, of Eurocentric literary conceptions, of Judeo-Christian mythical structuring of the universe. I do not want to question the validity or the effects of the projects of refusing epistemological material utilized in the processes of obliteration of Native voices. I do want to indicate that Alberta's strategy is quite different and ensues a distinguished system of power relations. She incorporates Foucault's idea that for power to be accepted and maintained it must be productive, creative, positive, and not necessarily destructive, oppressive, negative. The implications of the affirmative aspect of the professor's narrative are at the core of the generative force of knowledge referred to by Foucault. Also in *Microfísica do Poder*, he claims that the role of the intellectual is not to combat prevalent ideologies, but to try and institute a new politics of truth (FOUCAULT, 2004, p. 14). This truth, according to him, is attained through circular systems of power that produce and support knowledge which, in its turn, feeds back such power in a continuous retrofeeding spiral. Alberta's speech, thus, empowers her to enact this form of subversion to

[2] The translation of this excerpt is mine.

the mainstream story told along the century following the Red River War. That kind of performance is what Edward Said calls a productive power, in the place of a unilaterally inhibiting one (SAID, 2003, p. 14). In *Orientalism*, he posits that "knowledge gives power, power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (SAID, 2003, p. 36). This means that Alberta is using a system usually employed for the domination of the representations of the Native, only she does so in order to make her academic position count to weigh in the scale of power relations. She uses her privileged status to generate knowledge that will eventually feed her power back by forming intellectuals aligned with her storytelling and not the official one.

In order to give her speech academic credibility, Alberta also uses language that leaves open the reliability of history textbooks. This is how her class goes on after the passage presented before:

> Now, as the tribes came in, the army separated out certain individuals who *were considered* to be dangerous. Some were troublemakers *in the eyes of the army*. Some *were thought* to have been involved in raids. Others were *simply* leaders opposed to the reservation system.
> The army identified seventy-two such individuals, and when the rest of the people were sent to reservations, these Indians were chained to wagons and taken to Fort Sill in what is now Oklahoma. There they were put on a train and sent to Florida (KING, 1993, p. 15, my highlights).

If before we had that the narrative shifted listeners' identification from a potential sympathy for the U.S. Army to the slaughtered tribes, here we have a shift from what could have been the description of a bureaucratic procedure of removing prisoners to a suspicious process of judgment, prejudice, simplification and brutality. Alberta is masterfully playing the game of the colonizer, manipulating information, twisting language for the purpose of strengthening her stance, inverting the logic of history textbooks that constructed a narrative of immobilization of ideas about Native-Americans.

The official chronicles she is combating are those that Edward Said described in *Orientalism*. In this study he denounced a whole set of discursive practices that worked for centuries to construct a hyper-real representation of what an oriental is. The representation, eventually, substituted the material reality it originally referred to for a metaphysical, organic image of monolithic culture, history and geography. In Said's words, these discursive practices represent "[…] a positive twist: since one cannot ontologically

obliterate the Orient […], one does have the means to capture it, treat it, describe it, improve it, radically alter it" (SAID, 2003, p. 95). In the analysis I am proposing here, we can perfectly substitute Orient, in the quote, for Native. This way we can allude to the fact that, since Native-Americans could not be obliterated, vanquished, completely suppressed, they could be captured, treated, described improved, radically altered – or, at least, their hyper-real simulations could. That is the kind of practice Alberta's storytelling denounces and attempts to deconstruct. The highlights I chose for the excerpt above of the text of *Green Grass, Running Water* demonstrate how her choice of words functions for that subverting purpose. Once those words were employed to represent the lack of trust we can have in history textbooks, the second paragraph of the excerpt is narrated with a greater level of certainty, since what is certain (according to that specific part) is exactly the brutal way in which the action of removal was undertaken.

Although the academic setting is where Professor Alberta Frank enacted her alternative, subversive storytelling, there are other scenarios in which that can be done. A clinic, a hospital or any other health institution is also prone to the discursive hyper-real representations that can influence power relations and exert pressure over depictions of the Native. It is to the passages in *Green Grass, Running Water* that portray medical institutional views on the characterization of the Native that I now turn, in an attempt to demonstrate how Thomas King's text appropriates ongoing generalizations and stereotypes and how we can find evidences of a literary construction that attempts to undo the stagnant representations these views offer.

3.2 Scientific and Medical Voices

The physician Joseph Hovaugh figures in the sections of the novel in which the four Indian elders, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, Hawkeye and the Lone Ranger, are either imprisoned in the doctor's hospital or on the road, roaming the world while trying to fix it. Dr. Hovaugh seems to me to be the greatest *victim* of the performative deconstruction enacted by Thomas King's text. I say victim because he seems to be perfectly aware that there is something awkward going on with the world, and that he will soon be involved and play a part in the episodes to come.

Dr. Hovaugh is depicted as quite arrogant, impersonal and bossy. He sometimes rephrases his requests so that they sound more authoritative (soon after having said "I shall probably need John, Mary", he corrects the sentence by saying, shortly after realizing he had made a polite request, "Find me John" (KING, 1993, p. 14). His arrogance manifests when he needs cooperation from other people but, instead of resorting to diplomacy, he simply blurts "I'm a doctor" (KING, 1993, p. 447) and expects to get whatever he wants because of that. These are the most obvious traits of the character, but there are some subtleties that can allow us a deeper comprehension of him and of the analogy I want to make of his figure with the medical and scientific fields we can say he represents. At a broad level, Dr. Hovaugh's speech can be seen as representative of the scientific discourses, especially those of the biological and medical areas, that deal with objective descriptions and treatments of human beings. Through his words the reader can distinctly perceive the authoritative aspect usually attributed to exact sciences and the implicit will of truth they carry in their systematic, logical, mathematical methods. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, this sort of authoritative language operates to depict Natives in those simulations, so frequent in mass media productions and popular belief, of dying people and of eugenically categorized primitives.

The stereotypical image of the Native is explicitly referred to at specific passages of the novel. One of them expresses that "Indians run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes. Indians don't talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies. These are all Indian gifts, says Nasty Bumppo[3]" (KING, 1993, p. 434). This particular passage has a comic tone to it and poses as a strategy of ridiculing the stereotype of the Indian as having a special connection with nature, at once incorporating animal traits, such as keen senses and dexterity, and acting as an unsocial, secluded being. The ridiculing process is enhanced by the contrast of Indian gifts with those of the white people: "Whites are patient. Whites are spiritual. Whites are cognitive. Whites are philosophical. Whites are sophisticated. Whites are sensitive. These are all white gifts, says Nasty Bumppo" (KING, 1993, p. 434). In this section of the novel, the character of Nathaniel Bumppo, a.k.a. Nasty Bumppo, is teaching Old Woman about the hierarchical relationship between whites and

[3] A caricature of Natty Bumppo, protagonist frontiersman of James Fenimore Cooper's tale *The Deerslayer, or the First Warpath*, from 1841, who plays the civilized white man among the scalp-taking savages.

Indians and about what kinds of positive attributes these latter have that can justify his being friends to one of them. Indian gifts are, after all, inferior but useful if you are white and have an Indian friend whom you can use should you need any of those abilities.

The passages above refer to a tradition of converting popular impressions into common knowledge and using them to hierarchically structure communities and their members. This tradition, when introduced in scientific terms and proved with empirical evidence, can be used for the most varied forms of aggression. It is to that aggression that I want to point to when referring to Dr. Joseph Hovaugh's voice as the representative of institutional views on what is portrayed as an inferior dying race.

The narrative construction of Natives as imminently vanishing due to their primitiveness occurs gradually and indirectly in the words of Hovaugh. Being in charge of the hospital where the four elders are being held (the reason, though, is not specified in the novel), he is frustrated when the extremely old Indians not only do not die, but escape the health institution and disappear without leaving any traces. This is the first blow on the solid normative power of science: they inexplicably vanish from a locked room and ignore the restraining authority of the expert doctor. Angry at the outcome of the episode, Dr. Hovaugh summons Dr. John Eliot (whose position is also not specified, but who is probably the coroner) and requests that he sign the death certificates for the elders so that he can have a formal document proving they really died. In face of Eliot's refusal to sign any certificates without having dead bodies to assure him the Indians are not coming back, Dr. Hovaugh demands acquiescence with the following words: "Sign the certificates, John. You've been expecting them to die for years. You said yourself they couldn't live much longer" (KING, 1993, p. 48). Both doctors are discussing with the implicit understanding that what is left for the Indians to perish is that time passes. 'They', in the excerpt, does not necessarily correspond to the four elders; 'they' can be seen as referring to each and all of the First Nations of the Americas. If we interpret it that way, we will have an allusion to the whole subtext of the novel, that which is in the very title of the book – 'green grass, running water' implying the negotiated duration of the treaties signed between Native-American tribes and the national governments of the United States and Canada. It is often said that these documents were signed to last for as long as the grass is green and the waters run, particularly because the American and Canadian authorities who endorsed them were

absolutely sure Natives would not survive long enough to claim their part of the deal. It can also be affirmed with certainty that, in order to assure the disappearance of the Native parties that could demand the fulfillment of those contracts, hostile action was taken on the part of the national governments.

The conversation between the two doctors offers the reader more evidence of the offensive tradition in relation to Natives. The dialogue reproduced above continues in the sense of trying to find a way of, if not materially, at least legally making sure the elders were killed:

> "[…] They should have died… a long time ago."
> "If you believe the stories."
> "If you believe the stories. But they haven't, and I can't sign a death certificate until they do die."
> "They're dead," said Dr. Hovaugh. "I can feel it. All four of them. We just need the certificates. Heart attack, cancer, old age. I don't care. Be creative" (KING, 1993, p. 48-49).

The idea that the Natives should have died already permeates in great measure historical, cultural and theoretical discussions going on even today. From the theories and criticism I have already exposed above we can perceive that the idea is very present. The very need for Gerald Vizenor to coin a term such as survivance, in contrast with survival, is indicative that the subject must be addressed, and addressed epistemologically more then physically. I have also quoted Thomas King's essay 'Godzilla Vs. Post-colonial' with the passage where he mentions the active present and the viable future of Native-American tribal communities, also in an attempt to focus on the aspect of continuance and not of survival, as it was necessary to do in the past.

The evidences that there is an underlying presence of the issue of survival is scattered throughout the lines of *Green Grass, Running Water*. For instance, when Charlie Looking Bear is signing up for a car rental, the clerk who attends him offers several advertisement materials containing the tourist options for the town of Blossom. One piece of advertisement indicates as attractive sites the "old Indian ruins and the remains of dinosaurs just to the north of town and a real Indian reserve to the west" (KING, 1993, p. 164). What is worth noticing in this passage is that whatever it is that 'Indian ruins' stand for, it is placed side by side in importance with 'the remains of dinosaurs' as a tourist

attraction, in an obvious enough insinuation that Indians are as extinct as the reptiles who lived 65 million years ago. Furthermore, the advertisement alludes to a 'real Indian reserve'. I see the use of 'real' as possibly having two meanings: either there are unreal (or fake or fraudulent) Indian reservations somewhere, or to find a genuine, concrete, real reservation is a true accomplishment worthy of note. Either way, this sort of propaganda bears between its lines the very issue of survival and of the multifaceted constructions of the perishing Native.

Crafted that way, the representation of the Native in advertisement follows the same pattern as the one described above inspired by biological science; both allude to an idea of the Native, a discursive simulation that does not allow, as Edward Said referred to in *Orientalism*, the possibility of resistance on the part of the group represented (p. 7), the Native, in this case (again, while Said is talking about the Orient, I am borrowing his ideas and using them in regards to Native-Americans). If this construction functions at the narrative level, it is only natural that the most effective way of fighting them is in the same battlefield. The frustration suffered by Dr. Joseph Hovaugh that the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* portrays points to a potential interpretation of King's text as an attempt to combat these hostile representations and counterattack their effects.

Although Dr. Hovaugh does not interact with any of the Blackfoot along the story (the contact he had with the elders is taken to have occurred before the beginning of the narration), his character ends up incorporating many of the elements we can identify as Thomas King's operation of dismounting the workings of the forces described above. The way we can identity this operation is through the doctor's frustrated attempts to regain control over the Indians and their destinies. In his first appearance, Hovaugh is described as being unsettled because of the rootedness and permanency of things around him. The depiction of his feelings only seems to be relevant to the story if we relate them to the elders and the possibility that their actions are having an effect upon the doctor. This is how the reader has access to an analogy of his distress with rooted and permanent things: "Dr. Hovaugh turned away from the window. Perhaps he should move the desk out and get another that didn't seem so rooted and permanent" (KING, 1993, p. 14). The desk he is referring to is a massive piece of wood carved in a colonial style. The significance of the episode resides in the fact that he sits by his desk for some time, every day, and each day

for a longer period, staring at the hospital's yard in full bloom; full of life, fruit, colors and scents – and of greens (KING, 1993, p. 13). At this point of the novel the reader already has some clues as to the symbolism of the color green through the constant repetition of the word, either alone or as a prefix or suffix of other words. Throughout the book, the word 'green' appears thirty-nine times, and in a single paragraph depicting Dr. Hovaugh's impressions of the yard we have words such as 'evergreens', lilacs 'greening' up nicely and swans swimming in the 'blue-green' pond. Yet, these are only clues for the reader – until the doctor comes up with a more direct reference to the unsettling life that surrounds him: "It's spring again. Garden looks good, uh? Everything's green. Everything's alive" (KING, 1993, p. 14).

This reference to green as representing blossoming, life, cyclic renewal in the words of the spokesman of the scientific oppression of the Native is exactly what is being announced in this chapter of the novel and that will be enacted at its end. From this point on, after the doctor has realized that as long as the grass is green the elders will resist his institutional attempts at locking and controlling them, he departs on a journey in a final, desperate endeavor to locate the four escapees and recapture them. His quest will involve his capacities for logical deduction, calculation and a slight dose of irrational creed that the elders may represent something mythical, magical and powerful enough to revolutionize the world he believes he knows all too well. Since the morning the elders disappeared, the world in which everything is in place, ordered, controlled begins to look strange to him. That massive desk that can be seen to represent the permanence of what was believed to be dying (or *who* was believed to be dying) starts to disturb him, to emanate something disruptive: "Dr. Hovaugh seemed to shrink behind the desk as though it were growing, slowly and imperceptibly enveloping the man" (KING, 1993, p. 14). This presence oppresses him, reminding him of his impotence to order and control the everlasting force the four elders represent. Notwithstanding his efforts to lock them or see that they are dead, the Indians are free to roam the world and, in Dr. John Eliot's very words, "[…] they'll be back. They always come back" (KING, 1993, p. 47).

Dr. Hovaugh's journey in search for the Indians acquires a modern epic aspect when he drafts Babo Jones, an African-American who works in the same hospital, as side-kick to help him figure out what role they are to play in the elders' scheme to fix the world. The

descriptions of his journey appear, throughout the novel, interspersed between the more than a hundred chapters/sub-chapters dedicated to the several other characters. In the end, although there are not more than a couple dozen sections focusing on him, these sections manage to reach the very end of the narrative. This sort of narrative strategy gives the reader the impression that Hovaugh's quest attains an epic length, culminating in a grandiose episode. This grandiosity is comparable, as I will explore further on, to the majestic failure of Eurocentric epistemology and positivistic progress to get rid of the Native in its wake of modernization and science.

Dr. Hovaugh's progress in his quest is quite erratic, and his logical attempts at finding a reliable path appear to be utterly useless. His Cartesian rationale seems even pathetic and desperate in King's depiction. This is a sample of how he tries and finds his way after the elders:

> Dr. Hovaugh sat in his hotel room in a sea of maps and brochures and travel guides. The book was lying open on top of the pile, and he hummed to himself as he consulted the book and then a map, the book and then a brochure, the book and then a travel guide. […] All the while, he plotted occurrences and probabilities and directions and deviations on a pad of graph paper, turning the chart as he went, literal, allegorical, tropological, anagogic.
> Slowly and with great self-assurance, Dr. Hovaugh took out a purple marker and drew a deliberate circle around Parliament Lake (KING, 1993, p. 430).

The feeling of desperation is latent in this passage. The repetition of 'and' eleven times gives a frenetic flow to the doctor's actions as he looks from one item to the other, does this and that at the same time. We also have a clear reference to instruments of measurement and description, of objectification and calculation, which indicate the use of those procedures of organization and control I exposed in chapters 1 and 2. All these elements, added to some esoteric interpretations of graphs and charts, mount up to compose the tone of Dr. Hovaugh's quest for logical answers to a seemingly supernatural occurrence, namely the vanishing of the Indians and the discovery of evidence that they might be several hundred years old. The narrative is about to reach the point in which the rational and scientific proposal of the doctor's character fails to make sense of the mythic significance of the events occurring around the elders. If Dr. Hovaugh succeeds in reaching the spot where the apotheosis of the novel is going to take place, he is absolutely impotent to do anything but watch the unfolding of events, in an analogy, as I see it, to the incapacity

of Eurocentric logic to apprehend Native-American mythic material and its importance for the continuance not only of tribal communities but of life itself. I am referring here to the ultimate symbolism of water in the novel, the very episode that closes Dr. Hovaugh's participation in the plot.

As mentioned before, the Great Baleen Dam is built on Blackfoot land after the promise of bringing progress to the tribe by paying tributes in the form of taxes. However, since Eli Stands Alone refuses to leave his family's cabin that stands right in the middle of where the water flow would be should the dam be operational, nobody is profiting from the situation. There are several references along the novel of the dam being harmful to the land and its surroundings. It might even be destructive enough to kill the river and destroy life around it. Its full significance is, however, that it prevents water from running. As I mentioned before in regards to the 'running water' of the title of the novel, the symbolism of water flowing forever is representative of the permanence and continuance of Native-American tribal communities against the long-lasting process of extermination they have been suffering along the past five centuries. The dam can be said, therefore, to represent the strangulation of the fluidity of water, the interruption of the ancient running of the river, the breach of the many contracts valid for as long as the grass is green and the waters run – ultimately, the victory of those who signed the treaties certain that Natives would eventually disappear.

The narrative destruction of the symbolism of the dam and of Dr. Hovaugh's fruitless journey to try and impede Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, Hawkeye and the Lone Ranger from fixing the world is weaved in a pattern that defies explanation. What matters for the analysis we are carrying out here is that, along the novel, three cars vanish into thin air with only a puddle of water remaining in their places. These cars, a Pinto, a Nissan and a Karmann-Guia (one of them is Dr. Hovaugh's), are a subtle phonetic reference to Christopher Columbus' ships, the Pinto, Nina and Santa Maria, on which he sailed to 'discover' America. These vehicles end up, as the doctor approaches the Great Baleen Dam, floating along the leveed river and smashing the solid concrete walls that have been preventing the water from running its natural course. The dam is finally destroyed and the river resumes its flow.

Thus we come to the closure of Dr. Joseph Hovaugh's quest, with some elements still needing an analysis. He set off to try and figure out the meaning of the four elders' voyages in time and space and their invariable return. He does so by employing instrumental and Cartesian logic to gradually discover that these procedures will not give him any answers. He finally reaches the spot where he was supposed to find these answers, but, in their place, finds himself simply witnessing a mythic episode in which the world is set right by powers beyond his comprehension and, by extension, beyond the comprehension of the traditional Eurocentric logic that objectively created the image of the Native as the dying Other. Thomas King's novel offers a conclusion for Christopher Columbus' enterprise that brought to the Americas what Leslie Marmon Silko described in her work *Ceremony* as some sort of overseas curse, when referring to the Europeans' arrival as a misguided, mistold story weaved by a witch. If in Silko's story, once whites have been created and brought to the world by some kind of evil narrative, the harmful effects they bring must be painstakingly endured and combated, in King's *Green Grass, Running Water* there is a literary performative response to the offense originated in the discovery of the New World. The images of the three Columbus' ships are exactly the tools that finally destroy the solid structure built to prevent and control the flow of water. It is those exact tools that, once destroyed themselves, will set the world right: "Below, in the valley, the water rolled on as it had for eternity" (KING, 1993, p. 455).

The tone of continuance at the end of the novel also works to eliminate the discursive constructions on the dying Native that permeate the story from the beginning. Looking at the several references of things ending well and of a potential good future, we can interpret the novel's outcome as refusing (among other elements) to recognize voices such as Dr. Joseph Hovaugh's and Bill Bursum's, voices that attempt to unilaterally, authoritatively hold sway over symbolic and scientific representations of the Native and to, through them, exert power that is often, if not always, used in detriment of those individuals who have their self-representation denied by these very practices. A suitable evidence of this denial is subtly demonstrated in the passage in which he is about to take a bus to the dam and manifests his wish to arrive early and "[…] to get good seats. […] At the front. So we can see everything" (KING, 1993, p. 441). The doctor's intention to see everything, a wish only paralleled to scientific teleological propositions of all-

encompassing knowledge through objective investigation, cataloguing, rationalization and instrumentalization, utterly fails him; it grants him, though, a very good front seat where he can watch the mythic destruction of a Western instrumental symbol of progress by Western symbols of domination and oppression.

Green Grass Running Water offers further material we can investigate in order to understand Thomas King's deconstruction of oppressive Western symbols through the very tools that allowed this oppression to take place. I refer to the various mediatic elements contained in the novel that have been traditionally employed in the construction of images on the Native. In the following and final chapter, I will analyze how King's text subverts mediatic representations to empower the narrative of the novel in yet another level.

4. MEDIATIC REPRESENTATIONS: PHOTOGRAPHY

Several media help compose the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water*. From the previous chapters we have seen that intense literary interchange occurs between the novel and several canonic works. We have also seen that filmic references are brought into the story, especially those of John Wayne and the Lone Ranger and Tonto, in order to summon into it the mass culture elements, regarding Native Americans, Thomas King proposes to criticize and reassess. Another medium that plays a significant part in the novel is the focus of this last chapter: photography.

Thomas King himself has had experiences with photography. He has undertaken a photographic project he called Medicine River Photographic Expedition, which he colorfully describes in *The Truth About Stories*. King compares this enterprise with Edward Sheriff Curtis' own project, around 1900, of photographing Native Americans before they perished entirely. King, however, does not propose to *register* a vanishing way of life, but to offer a perspective into the lives of contemporary, live Indians. I say a perspective over register because King does not see photography as mere image recording, but as a creative activity. According to him, "what the camera allows you to do is to invent, to create. That's really what photographs are. Not records of moments, but rather imaginative acts" (KING, 2003, p. 43). As an imaginative act, the crafting of a photograph naturally depends heavily on the photographer's intentions. Being aware of that, King refers to Curtis' process of authenticating pictures of Indians:

> I know that Curtis paid Indians to shave away any facial hair. I know he talked them into wearing wigs. I know that he would provide one tribe of Indians with clothing from another tribe because the clothing looked more "Indian". So his photographs would look authentic (KING, 2003, p. 36).

Therefore, King acknowledges that the use of the camera implies a great responsibility and has immense power of representation. These aspects were incorporated in the Narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* and will be analyzed further on in this chapter.

Another display of King's awareness of the camera's potential and his willingness to include it in storytelling is his previous novel, *Medicine River*, which also contains as a

central element the power of photography, mainly that of community healing through the unification of the elements contained in a single shot. For that, the photographer Will Horse Capture, after returning to the community he formerly belonged to, engages in a series of relationships that question identity issues, putting in check his ideas on belonging to that community. Will's experience with photography is employed in *Green Grass, Running Water* in the episode in which Latisha commissions fake pictures for her restaurant menu. The power and the potential of the photographic enterprise as a discursive practice must first be addressed before we can elaborate on its specific uses by the characters in King's novel and its possible implications. The power of the camera is, therefore, the central topic of this next section.

4.1 The Power of the Camera

On a visit to the Louvre Museum more than ten years ago, my father was told that taking pictures was forbidden while inside the building. Considering that he had traveled dozen of hours and waited for a couple more in line just to get to one of the most famous museums in the world, he thought it would be too great a waste not to record his passage by that place. When there was no one looking, he drew his camera and took a couple of shots before the museum police came and made him leave. I am not sure if people are allowed to use cameras nowadays, but the 'stolen' pictures are to this day in a family album of trip mementos as proof of the forbidden act.

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Once, I was on vacation in Chile and there was this llama whelp beside its owner, who was charging a few dollars for the privilege of allowing tourists to take pictures with the beast. While I paid so that my wife could pose with the cute little animal, some other tourists sneaked up behind her and took several shots with their cameras. They rushed away when the owner of the animal chased after them to charge the money. It was too late; they had already crossed the street and were far out of reach of the angry businessman. The tourist guide said that he, every now and then, took his wife with him so that she could take

care of the llama while he chased after smart tourists who took the photographs and walked away without paying.

***

When I was calling real estate brokers to advertise my apartment for sale, there was this one time in which they came in a group of four to evaluate market price and select angles to photograph the rooms that would appear in the website and be available for possible buyers to see. At that same time, I had my Persian cat's fur trimmed so that it would not suffer so much from the heat of the summer, as its fur was long and heavy. The brokers, at the sight of the odd creature with a big furry head and slender, scraggy body that ended with a fluffy tail, immediately stopped doing their work to photograph each and every angle of the bizarre creature. It took some minutes before I lost my patience and angrily ordered them around to finish the business and leave. To this day I do not know what became of the pictures. They never appeared on the brokers' website as an advertisement of my apartment.

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I mentioned these three little stories from my personal life (I have many more that involve picture-taking) as an introduction, an illustration of the aspects involved in the photographic enterprise. These stories comprise issues such as photographic rights, business and pecuniary rules, guile, breach of decorum, premeditation, invasion and offense, individual rights, stealing, etc. Although they are quite prosaic in nature, all three examples I bring here end in a negative tone, with either somebody angry, offended or deceived. As we are about to see, the employment of the camera is very often considered to be aggressive and intrusive. Though it may not be always so in every situation, the moments in which photography plays a major role in King's novel can be said to be mostly negative or aggressive in nature. Therefore before entering the specificities of how photography operates in the text of *Green Grass, Running Water*, I want to elaborate some ideas on the general aspects of this art form.

"There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera", Susan Sontag says in her *On Photography* (1990, p. 7). This aggression seems to be implicit in the very vocabulary employed in this art form: shot, mug shot, picturesque, shutter, negatives, to shoot, to frame, to capture all seem to be nouns and verbs that indicate some sort of offense, invasion or violation. My father broke a museum rule that could send him to jail, the tourists in Chile robbed the llama's owner of his work earnings, and the brokers invaded my privacy by registering private images of my deformed pet – all of this with a simple click of the camera. This simplicity in picture taking seems to me to be one of its most powerful aspects. When you suddenly realize someone if photographing something, it has already been done. But why is it that a moment recorded without consent can be so bothersome and invasive? I will heavily rely on Sontag's work to try and offer some elaboration on that question before inspecting its impact on King's novel.

One of the most important aspects of photographing is objectification. Any occurrence, object or situation captured becomes an object that can be owned, possessed, taken, lost – in short, symbolic moments become subject to mercantile rules and the laws of property and can, therefore, be treated as products. This idea can be easily illustrated by any of the above-mentioned stories. Although the museums claim that constant flashes may eventually damage the works of art displayed, preventing visitors from 'acquiring' paintings and sculptures works to preserve the exclusivity of the collection, therefore maintaining and prolonging its value as an attraction. The llama story is even more evident, since the product the man was selling was exactly the image of the beautiful exotic animal. Acquiring the image without paying means (at least as far as the salesman is concerned) stealing a product. The same occurs with the apartment pictures. After realizing the sale, I could still live in it for a couple of months before having to hand the keys to the new owner. In this period, the images were still on the internet, available for anyone to check the registered mess of my living room; but what really bothered me was that, without any updates on the website, my sold apartment was still for sale, at public disposal and universal accessibility, and the calls kept coming in to negotiate a visual product I no longer possessed.

Naturally, not every picture taken is meant for commercial purposes. Most, I believe, are meant for personal, small-scale consumption, which is the case of travel

mementoes and the record of animal and plant life. Even these, however, exert different sorts of power depending on the context they are being employed. As Sontag suggests, the same image will have different interpretations and purposes if it is displayed "on a contact sheet, in a gallery, in a political demonstration, in a police file, in a photographic magazine, in a general news magazine, in a book, on a living-room wall" (SONTAG, 1990, p. 106). Let us take, as an example, the picture of a Cherokee ceremonial spear. In a gallery, it would probably be considered as an artistic picture; in a political demonstration, perhaps it could be taken as the symbol of a group or of a certain demand; in a police file, it could be the evidence of a murder weapon, etc. What Sontag proposes is that none of those places of exposition are capable of revealing the contents of a photograph, but that the content is *given* based on the use of that medium. She reminds us of photographer Ansel Adams' urge "that we stop saying we "take" pictures and always say we "make" one" (SONTAG, 1990, p. 123).

The confection of the contents of a picture may be undertaken at many different moments, not only at the moment of shooting. The choices range from the time before the event (planning what equipment to use, at what time (thus choosing the lighting) and what object to target), to the actual shot (choosing angle and shutter speed, for instance), and finally to the development (with the potential digital alterations) and display or consumption (at the place that is supposed to frame the image). Notwithstanding the choices made, Sontag claims that every single act of photographing is invasive, for "in deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects" (1990, p. 6). Furthermore, these choices grant the photographer the power to modify people, "to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (SONTAG, 1990, p.14). Possession of people and moments and subsequent classification of those objects – this is what I want to propose the photographic enterprise to be about. Once the object has been appropriated, all the consequences mentioned in chapter 1 about classification are manifested by the simple effort of naming a photograph or an event, which affords extra power to the photographer.

This aspect is also approached by Gerald Vizenor in relation to the photographing of Native American experiences. In *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor elaborates on the employment of the camera as a narrative tool to reinforce Native American disappearance. He claims that

> the camera captures others, not the experiences of the photographer; the presence of the other is discovered in a single shot, the material reduction of a pose, the vanishing pose, and then reinvented once more in a collection of pictures. The simulation of a tribe in photographs (VIZENOR, 1999, p. 129).

Besides the discrepancy in the views of both theoreticians in regards to the actual role of the photographer (while for Susan Sontag the capturer means to hold sway over the thing captured, for Vizenor this act is accomplished notwithstanding any will behind the camera), their positions coincide in proposing that photography has as much narrative potential (if not more) as writing. This potential, both claim, can be used, among other things, to reinforce the presence of the object portrayed or to deny its presence by allowing the picture to be the real referent, more real than the object. Such distortions fit perfectly, when it comes to Native American portrayals, with Vizenor's concept of manifest manners, when he posits that framed images and representations of tribal material can work to distort the presence of the object depicted. Using again the ceremonial spear mentioned above, both the actual spear, if displayed in a museum, or its picture, at, for instance, an art gallery, might be taken as a historical record of the past or of a cultural practice worth saving due to its disappearance. The same would most certainly be true even if the spear were actually still used in religious practices – the frame of the object would provide it a meaning that would surpass the real referent.

So that this comment does not pose as mere speculation of what something *might* be considered, I provide a personal example that substitutes the spear for a doll. When I was about to visit Texas in 2003, my friend asked me to purchase a Hopi Kachina Doll, which she said was very common there. After a great deal of effort, I finally managed to find one, at the Texas University Museum. Actually, there were many of them protected within glass cases and several pictures of different varieties of wood carved dolls of the Hopi tribe. However, there were none to be purchased, so I came home with pictures of dolls and pictures of pictures of dolls. Only later I found out those works of art could be bought from

street vendors or through the internet. The fact that they were museum pieces made me believe they could not be sold at the museum (information corroborated by the lady at the gift shop) and were only to be found on a craftsman cabin of a Hopi member. The framing of the dolls in the museum is what framed my view of them – they were displayed in the same section of war hatchets, hunting bows, arrow heads, ragged fur shorts, feather furnishings, tepee samples, dream catchers, fishing spears, weaved baskets. Most of these objects were described as having been collected decades earlier, and were arranged in the section as to indicate they were from the *past*. In short, historical tools, religious symbols *and* modern woodcarving art were displayed together as if forming some sort of unity of representation, of a monolithic past accessed through the glass cases and pictures at the visitors' disposal.

The fact that all those pieces were classified under the same category (that of a far past) was made possible through the employment (deliberate or not) of some cataloguing tactics. First, the material was selected to represent customs and cultures already disappeared; or, through manifest manners, material that could *pass* as disappeared. Although Hopi Kachina Dolls are modern artistic products that are also used as income means for several artists, they can pass as long gone pieces of craftsmanship when sided with war hatchets and fishing spears. This strategy stands for the reinvention through a collection of images mentioned in the quote of Vizenor's, above.

The second tactic involved in the misleading museum classification of images (here, I refer to images as either photographs or case-framed displays) is that of naming. This procedure, described by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*, functions to restrict viewers' perception of the object to a certain pre-decided limit, stipulated by those in charge of the selection of images. According to her,

> though an event has come to mean, precisely, something worth photographing, it is still ideology (in the broadest sense) that determines what constitutes an event. There can be no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named and characterized. And it is never photographic evidence which can construct – more properly, identify – events; the contribution of photography always follows the naming of the event (SONTAG, 1990, p. 18-19).

In the museum display analyzed here, the naming of the photographs and cases involves not only titling them, but also dating them (as part of the title). A spear titled "hunting instrument, 1854" frames viewers' perception of it in an immensely diverse form from a title such as "festive ornament, 2003", even if the spear is more than a hundred years old and now used as an accessory for a costume. The first example offers a view of a practice that is no longer part of most Native American communities; although some still practice hunting, the object displayed that way is indicative of a long gone custom, whereas the second example points to the positivity of a present that might represent a celebration, or simply art. This versatility in the categorization of objects corroborates the power attributed to the camera by Sontag and Vizenor, and indicates that the picture-taker and the expositor have a privileged power to influence, restrict and distort whatever it is that is targeted by the camera.

It is based on these aspects of photography that I now turn to the exploration of how they function in the text of *Green Grass, Running Water*. The focus here is on three different episodes: one in which Native American characters employ photography to exploit the misleading stereotype of dog eating to fool tourists: and a second in which a white character attempts to sneak into the Sun Dance to reveal ceremonial practices to the great public; and a third one in which Native Americans and whites fight for the right over a photographic film, thus demonstrating a certain power in the camera that no side is willing to part with.

4.2 The Uses of the Camera in *Green Grass, Running Water*

4.2.1 Dog du Jour, Houndburgers, Puppy Potporri and other Delicacies

As previously mentioned, Latisha owns the restaurant called Dead Dog Café. Over the years, she has transformed the place from, in her words, 'a nice local establishment with a loyal but small clientele to a nice local establishment with a loyal but small clientele *and* a tourist trap' (KING, 1993, p. 117). Her strategy is to inform the customers and spread the information that the menu at the Dead Dog is full of traditional Indian dishes whose main ingredient is dog meat. Thus, she composed the menu to feature such items as Dog du Jour,

Houndburgers, Puppy Potpourry, Hot Dogs, Saint Bernard Swiss Melts, with Doggy Doos and Deep-Fried Puppy Whatnots for appetizers' (KING, 1993, p. 117). Since the printed menu might not be enough to convince tourists of the veracity of the traditional ingredient (some tourists even question its legality), Latisha resorts to a truth-fabrication technology: the camera.

She uses the same strategy employed by explorers and hunters who, having found a long lost ruin or having shot down a thousand-pound buffalo, cannot prove their feats by simply telling people they have done so; unable to take their boon along they capture the image of the accomplishment and are free to abandon it and carry forever the proof of the deed. For the Dead Dog Café, Latisha orders some shots by a local Native American, Will Horse Capture, which can serve as evidence of the use of such a *traditional* food that is now available for the consumption of the larger public. This is how she commissions and uses the pictures:

> She got Will Horse Capture over in Medicine River to make up a bunch of photographs like those you see in the hunting and fishing magazines where a couple of white guys are standing over an elephant or holding up a lion's head or stretching out a long stringer of fish or hoisting a brace of ducks in each hand. Only in these photographs, it was Indians and dogs. Latisha's favorite was a photograph of four Indians on their buffalo runners chasing down a herd of Great Danes.
> Latisha had some of the better photographs made into postcards that she sold along with the menus (KING, 1993, p. 117).

Literally employing the verb mentioned on the quote above on Adams, the pictures for the menu are not 'taken' but 'made'. Although Adams probably meant that even by taking a picture we are fabricating its content, Latisha and Will go a step further – they validate with artificial evidences an artificial belief on an artificial past of Native American peoples that has been taken as truth by commonplace, stereotypical knowledge: the belief that Indians eat dogs. This enterprise is quite surprising in a text that aims at deconstructing pernicious stereotypes towards Native Americans. The characters seem to be reinforcing a belief that can only be defined as manifest manners, such as posited by Gerald Vizenor. However, the conclusion may not be that simple.

As mentioned above, Thomas King is considerably aware of the power of the camera, having expressed his disapproval of its use in ways that back up manifest manners

practices such as Edward Sheriff Curtis' project of registering Native Americans. What the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* appears to be accomplishing is the inversion of the practical purposes of artificial poses for pictures. According to King's description of Curtis' work in *The Truth About Stories*, this latter would request Native Americans to 'act Indian' for the camera so that the resulting images could appear to be credible, real, legitimate even if, at the same time, they held the pictoric representation of those individuals stuck in time. Like museum pieces, images such as Curtis' play a major role in maintaining the stereotype of the Native American as savage and stuck in the past. Latisha's and Will's performatic fraud with the dog pictures may be seen at first glance to be doing exactly the same. There is, however, a significant difference in their strategy.

While Curtis appropriates Native American material to fabricate his collection of immobilizing manifest manners, Latisha's collection does not. When commissioning fake dog hunt pictures she is actually appropriating Western material and converting it into an active present that brings benefits to present Native Americans such as herself and her employees. I say 'Western' because the stereotypical belief in dog meat dishes is already commonplace and, since she does not employ her resources in altering this belief, she profits from it. Therefore, Latisha's tourist trap does not aim at fighting against the false creations of images through manifest manners strategies, but to confiscate those images built along the centuries and enact her own discursive mischief. This process is certainly not innocent. In order for it to be accomplished, Latisha must ignore her role in reinforcing negative stereotypes and focus in the practicality the strategy contains, i.e., using already existing discourses and, by usurping them and making them her own, transforming them into practical and symbolic power. The cost is evident: even those tourists who venture into the Dead Dog Café and question the veracity of the menu have their opinion influenced towards believing it, which results in the perpetuation of a fabricated belief.

On the other hand, as mentioned Latisha claims the right to incorporate into her discourse an artificially constructed fact and, from there, enact some sort of counter-manifest manners, of usurpation of the Other's episteme in order to establish her own truth, from her particular locus. This power enables her to invert the discursive practice underlying negative stereotypical representations of the Native American, thus installing her voice as subversively predominant over Western cultural creations such as the dog-

eating Indian. Ultimately, Latisha is able to accomplish this inversion at the cost of incautious tourists from "Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy, Brazil, England, France, Toronto […], [e]verybody [that] comes to the Dead Dog" (KING, 1993, p. 59). Her discourse can be said to be, therefore, bellicose towards those Western epistemological practices she confiscates in order to enact her subversion.

From the analysis above, although it appears that the narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* only displays Native American appropriation of oppressive cultural material over an opposite logic, there occurs an episode in which White tourists are allowed to sneak away from a Sun Dance in possession of negatives of the event. The offensive potential of this act and the importance given to the stealing of images of the ceremony is the focus of the next section.

4.2.2 Stray Tourists at the Sun Dance

Eli Stands Alone is one of the characters of the novel whose maturity and psychological complexity evolve greatly from beginning to end of the narrative, and this takes place through several passages of reminiscences and nostalgic remembrances of his life as a young adult and situations in which he learned valuable lessons about himself and the Blackfoot. One of these reminiscences describes one of the several Sun Dances Eli attended when he was young in which the importance of photography is highlighted and seriously considered.

Eli remembers an episode in which a group of stray tourists stumbled upon the site of the Sun Dance and, from a distance, called the attention of the performers and participants of the event. A man from Michigan, on vacation with his family, stops by the road, climbs his car and begins taking pictures of the dance. Once he realizes what is going on, Eli, then just a fourteen-year-old boy, calls his relatives to handle the situation. They gather around the car and demand that the film be returned. Taken aback by the extreme importance afforded to the pictures, the man realizes they must be valuable and decides not to return them. After some negotiation and a couple of threats, Eli's uncle, Orville, manages to convince the man to give him the undeveloped film with the promise of mailing him any pictures that were really his, but none of the Sun Dance. A heavy tension is present in the

whole episode, and threats of violence come from both sides. While the man starts the engine and leaves clear his intention of running over anyone who tries to prevent him from leaving with the film, Orville's brother Leroy grabs his rifle and raises it above his head as a sign of his serious intentions. The escalation ceases with the man handing over a film from his camera with the comment that "there are some very important pictures in that roll" (KING, 1993, p. 154), to which Orville, in his turn, answers that "yes, there are" (KING, 1993, p. 154).

While for the Michigan tourist the importance of the roll meant that he cherished its value for the importance attributed to it by the Sun Dance goers, for Orville and for the people who crowded around the car to demand the right of keeping the images of the ceremony to themselves the film had the standing of a threat. The risk of allowing the pictures to be developed by an outsider and used as he pleases is due to those same reasons elaborated above. The 'narrator' of the images would possess too great a power of (mis)representation of the meanings and symbolisms of the dance. Not that witnessing the dance is forbidden to outsiders – the episode starts with a consideration on the presence of tourists:

> Every year or so, a tourist would wander into the camp. Sometimes they were invited. Other times they just saw the camp from the road and were curious. Most of the time they were friendly, and no one seemed to mind them. Occasionally there was trouble (KING, 1993, p. 151).

Watching the Sun Dance is not the issue; what really matters is who has the narrative power over its meanings. There are plenty of references along the novel of misinterpretations of the ceremony. Even Eli's white wife, Karen, utters a commonplace offensive comment on the ceremony – when attending one she says: "it's like going back in time, Eli. It's incredible" (KING, 1993, p. 228). It is incredible because, for Karen, the teepees, the painting and the drums are like visions of the past, a privileged insight on a disappeared culture, not a current practice of contemporary individuals celebrating a ritual that is not static, but ever shifting, always evolving and being adapted by community members who choose to be involved with it. Therefore, the right to keep the practice of the Sun Dance from being misrepresented by outsiders, especially through the employment of photographic 'proof', is the real issue in this episode.

This right is corroborated by theoreticians such as Arnold Krupat and Paula Gunn Allen. For Krupat, for instance, denying uncontrolled access to ritual knowledge is a legitimate exercise of sovereignty. When elaborating on the question of ceremonial versus written cultural manifestations, he posits that

> in the case of ritual and ceremonial knowledge, "culture" is not […] written; nor is it produced. Rather, it is transmitted. Although traditional culture does not remain static, the changes in it and the circulation of it are so organized as to remain relatively fixed. To wrench such knowledge from its prescribed transmissional circuits, thus opening it to the unlimited circulation of produced knowledge, is a violation of trust and property, and actions to prevent such violation constitute legitimate exercises of sovereignty (KRUPAT, 1996, p. 23).

The violation of trust and property mentioned by Krupat is exactly what photographing the Sun Dance represents, to the extent of the little stories I told previously in this chapter – photographing may be equivalent to stealing and invading. The narrative of *Green Grass, Running Water* brings up this issue and describes the tension enacted from an attempt of foreign appropriation of ritual knowledge. At this point, the story allows this knowledge to be stolen and there is no clue as to its use by the tourist. I mentioned the man returned *a* film from his camera, not that this film was the one which really contained the pictures from the Sun Dance. Here is what follows the development of the film:

> The film was blank. The picture at the photo store told Leroy that it had never been used. Orville wrote the man, but the letter came back a month later marked "Address Unknown." Leroy had copied down the man's license number. He called the RCMP and explained what had happened, but there was little they could do about it, they said. The man hadn't broken any laws (KING, 1993, p. 157).

The episode concludes with a tone of hopelessness; there is no outside authority to retrieve the stolen images and there is no knowing what use they were put to. This episode seems to contrast with Latisha's photographic work to fool tourists. While then she managed to trick outsiders into believing her farce, here the Blackfoot end up frustrated by the Michigan tourist's deceit and are symbolically denied the possibility of maintaining narrative power over the Sun Dance to themselves. Both situations are left unfinished in the storyline, open to speculations, as are many of the sections of the novel, mostly composed of a patchwork of interweaved stories.

The next and last sample of photography as a major element in the novel offers yet again a conflicting scene in which two opposed forces attempt to keep to themselves the technology for narrating a contemporary enactment of the Sun Dance. If the previous two episodes seemed to balance the score of the discursive battles underlying the story, this last one will settle the outcome to one of the sides.

4.2.3 Hidden Cameras and Sneaky Pictures

I have already mentioned previously in this chapter that the use of the camera and the immobilization of images can be seen as an aggressive and invasive action. Taking pictures can, however, be even more hostile should the photographer attempt to hide his activity. In this last episode analyzed, we have the situation of a sneaky endeavor of registering forbidden images.

George Mornigstar, Latisha's ex-husband, shows up a couple of years after having abandoned her to raise their three children by herself saying that he misses them. Actually, what he really wants is to use his privileged access to the Sun Dance due to his marriage with Latisha, having already participated of the ceremony before. Since he now works as a photojournalist for a magazine called "New Age" (in which people are "crazy about Indians" (KING, 1993, p. 419)), he considers it to be a potential good report the covering of a Sun Dance in a way never done before. He turns up during the event and approaches Latisha in a very intimate way and, after having been turned away, he contents himself with just laying near the camp to watch the dances and other activities. George settles on the grass and positions his suitcase beside him in which there is a hidden camera operated by a disguised mechanism. Once people at the event realize what is going on, the conflict begins. Before entering the argument subsequent to the discovery of the sneaky camera, let us try and elaborate on the symbolic importance of George Morningstar's attempt to steal the images from the event and the ultimate denial of his doing so.

From his first appearances in the story, George openly addresses questions such as Indianness and Whiteness, Americanness and Canadianness, always polarizing to the extreme his opinions and definitions of these terms. His strong positions bear a high level of prejudice and overt generalization, but they work to insert in the narrative already

established opinions on those topics. However, I will not focus on George's commonplace beliefs, but on the underlying discourse his voice represents. The whole novel contains reference after reference of the importance of movement, of evolvement, of non-linear progress, as we have seen in the episodes in which First/Thought/Changing/Old Woman figures. Her extreme mobility and immunity to stagnation are samples of the need for change and adaptation. Still, some representations of Native Americans suggest that they have gotten stuck at a certain point in the past, and it is those same representations that are used to depict them as museum pieces, savages, inhabitants of the past. George focuses on the seemingly outdated practices of the Blackfoot to characterize their culture as stagnant and disappearing. At a certain point he says that "things that stand still, die" (KING, 1993, p. 213). Although his comment is perfectly aligned with the underlying discourse of *Green Grass, Running Water*, he ends up working to try and immobilize a Blackfoot ceremony, namely the Sun Dance, and attempts to depict it as picturesque and exotic. For that he employs, naturally, the camera.

George's use of the camera works for the purpose of fabricating an artificial past. This ability of the photographer is suggested by Susan Sontag in the following way: "the photograph offers a modern counterpart of that characteristically romantic architectural genre, the artificial ruin: the ruin which is created in order to deepen the historical character of a landscape, to make nature suggestive – suggestive of the past" (SONTAG, 1990, p. 80). His intention is to portray the event as a proof of the Native American attachment to a disappearing past that no longer has a place in modern society (several times he mentions that the twentieth first century is not a time for such practices to still exist). George fails to see any significance of the Sun Dance that may serve for 'modern' Native Americans, and points his camera in such a way as to narrate it partially through images that are selective enough not to give a global idea of the ceremony. It is not enough for him to depict 'real Indians'; he needs Sun Dance material to narrate the Other with little or no resistance from the Other's part. The sneaky shots were meant for the painted dancers, not for men in suits and driving SUVs, not for businesswomen or his own Native ex-wife. These are not good enough for his report. He needs 'authentic' Indians, authentic in Edward Sheriff Curtis' fashion.

The lively gathering of the Blackfoot is what George's pictures attempt to ignore. Here is how the event is described to Eli Stands Alone's eyes:

> Smoke was rising from the teepees. There would be the horses moving on the prairies and the camp dogs nested beneath the wagons and the cars and the trucks, waiting for the day to begin. And the children. All the sounds and smells, all the mysteries and the imaginings that he had left behind (KING, 1993, p. 226).

The verbs 'rising' and 'moving' help setting the lively tone of the passage. The children and the beauty of the landscape point to the renovation aligned with tradition that the ceremony represents. None of these elements would be present in George's pictures had he been allowed to take them. Since the camera is hidden in a case, any pictures taken would have had an aspect of guile, slyness and dissimulation. Furthermore, they would be focused specifically on framing those elements George wants to present as exotic and old-fashioned. He would be employing the selective ability of the camera to fit his narrative purpose. According to Susan Sontag, this ability of the camera is what enables the photographer to "catch so-called normal people in such a way as to make them look abnormal. The photographer chooses oddity, chases it, frames it, develops it, titles it" (SONTAG, 1990, p. 34). The SUVs parked just outside the Sun Dance and the everyday clothes of the goers would probably not be included in George's film, for he deems them too 'normal' and 'modern', and would not be fitting to his narrative. He prefers oddity to chase, frame, develop and title in such a way that can be interesting to his public and pecuniarily useful.

George, however, ends up never taking the pictures. At this point of the novel, as mentioned before, several of the loose stories converge and many characters who did not seem to have any connection gather at the same location. George has been mentioned before, in chapter 2, in the episode in which Lionel wakes to his communal responsibility, and he does that exactly by denying George the possibility of taking pictures and potentially misnarrating the Sun Dance. While Eli Stands Alone snatches the case containing the camera, Lionel physically struggles with George to buy time so that the film canister can be removed and the negatives destroyed. The intruder's reaction when his camera is taken reveals his real beliefs in regards to Native American practices. He insults

them and calls the ceremony a useless outdated thing. Here is how the conflict ends, with George offending the Sun Dance:

> "You can't believe this shit!" George shouted after Eli. "This is ice age crap!"
> Lionel moved forward, and George fell back several steps.
> "Probably time to go," said Lionel.
> "Come on," said George, "Come on! It's the twentieth century. Nobody cares about your little powwow. A bunch of old people and drunks sitting around in tents in the middle of nowhere. Nobody cares about any of this."
> "Go away, George," said Latisha. "Just go away."
> "You're a joke!" George's lips were wet with spit. "You all act like this is important, like it's going to change your lives. Christ, you guys are born stupid and you die stupid." (KING, 1993, p. 427).

Thus, George reveals his real intent in trying to photograph the Sun Dance: to depict it in the way manifest manners have been doing in many different media, as a primitive, barbaric religious ritual, which the narrative makes clear it is not. The most important aspect of the whole episode seems to be that George is denied to possibility of manifesting his voice, of narrating his view. The question may be raised as to the possible authoritarian implication of the text of *Green Grass, Running Water* negating a white North American, representative of the Western discourse on primitive versus civilized, the technical power to display an outsider's position in regards to the event. The previous two photographic episodes seemed to have demonstrated opposing narrative forces working to install their view as privileged. George's powerlessness to express his photographic storytelling settles the score – the Native American perspective remains as predominant over the outsider's. The contrast with the Michigan tourist's success in escaping with the precious images of the Sun Dance seems to reinforce George's failure. The first attempt at acquiring the images and taking them outside of the circle of the Blackfoot succeeded, but the declared intention of selectively narrating the Dance as negative was vehemently thwarted.

Therefore, although it may appear that Thomas King's story authoritatively rejects an outsider's point of view, it is in fact performatively enacting the right posited by Arnold Krupat of denying foreign appropriation of ritual knowledge. There are many references along the novel that outsiders are not unwelcome at the Blackfoot celebration, but the transgression of taking pictures when one is specifically told not to is not tolerated. Far from undemocratic, this denial suggests a legitimate performative procedure to try and counter historical distortions through manifest manners.

Evidence of the symbolic inversion Thomas King's text proposes on the narrative of Native American cultural practices is the tone of liveliness and renewal with which the description of the Sun Dance ends. I close this chapter with the excerpt from *Green Grass, Running Water* following Eli's, Lionel's and Latisha's ordeal in facing the invasion of their symbolic space, and the cyclic analogy it contains: "In a while, the dancers would return to the center lodge and the families would go back to their teepees and tents. And in the morning, when the sun came out of the east, it would begin again" (KING, 1993, p. 429).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I have mentioned before that some literary texts contain the perspectives of multiple voices, of multiple worldviews, some contentious and some harmonic in the story they tell us. In the pages above, I have attempted to investigate how this multiplicity of discourses works in the pages of Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* to question established paradigms, propose new views and, potentially, offer some sort of democratic, far-encompassing alternative to narrative structures that pose as totalizing powers. I cannot, however, claim to have given a solution to the question of whether a formerly oppressed voice, by confiscating and employing the oppressor's techniques and using them as its own, falls into the same totalitarian position of placing itself above the previously dominant voice. Although I have sought to consider Western and Native American perspectives as equivalently important, it would be naïve to consider my exposition to have been neutral or to have reached a balance in the symbolic battles of opposite sides, of opposite points of view.

What I hope to have succeeded in proving is that a text representative of that locus which has suffered the oppression of a dominant one can and must resort to discursive tools that will allow it to claim to itself the power for self-representation and for independence from whatever forces are attempting to deny this right. By this I mean that the Native American literary text should not only offer symbolic representations of the particular epistemological views on the various tribes and groups, but also to incorporate the same discursive apparatuses and strategies that Western texts have disposed and use them as leverage in their frequent cultural clash.

Although legitimate, these incorporative procedures are not necessarily (and in many cases, not at all) innocent in the sense that they can also work for totalitarian purposes such as labeling every Western narrative practice as bad and/or total and all Native ones as good and/or democratic. Such claims, astonishingly common among Native American scholars, seem to be as wrong as those which preached for the extermination of Natives due to the allegation of their inferiority. An inversion of the binary oppressor/oppressed to result in something like Native/Western is a simplistic movement that, in my perspective, demonstrates the unwillingness of struggling for a positivity of the

former to, instead, preach for a negativity of the latter, which results in the total construction that everything Western must be denied as useless. Such discursive constructions are as draconian as the scientific totalitarian voices described in chapter 3, and function by positioning themselves above all other discourses for their universality. They propose that the universal man is superior to the absolute man because he can claim to have analyzed both/all sides and discovered the middle ground, the true path. The result is, however, as absolute as any other.

How, then, should we look into these bellicose appropriations of Western cultural material by Native American narratives? I have conceded so far that, in what concerns the text of *Green Grass, Running Water*, appropriations work to focus attentions on the Western oppressive practices and to demolish them. This is done, however, not to unilaterally invalidate the Other's episteme, but to disarticulate the oppressive patterns it contains. As examples we have the episodes heavily charged with scientific practices in chapter 3 and the photographic narrations in chapter 4. It is not a question of claiming that science should not employ Cartesian methods of evidencing or that it must not target Native American practices as objects of investigation; it is also not the issue of forbidding pictographic narratives of ritual knowledge. What is really at stake in the symbolic deconstructions enacted by Thomas King is that these discursive apparatuses must not be allowed to misnarrate Native material.

One might ask at this point who decides how fitting a narrative is and how inappropriate it is. This question is so complex that it evades my power to answer here (it is comparable to the issues of who should regulate the media or restrict freedom). What I can propose, nonetheless, is that no discursive practice which does not listen to its objects' perspectives and offer them a chance at participating in the narrative will do. My view is that, by incorporating so many Western cultural and epistemological elements in the lines of *Green Grass, Running Water*, Thomas King has achieved some sort of positivity of the encounter between cultures in contention without necessarily denying fundamental discursive rights. In the case of the character George Morningstar with his guileful attempts at misnarration, the denial by the narrative of voicing his perspective, although apparently authoritarian at first, points to the prerogative of preserving ceremonial integrity, not to altogether shutting off any form of external perspective. The same occurs with the

mythological storylines of creation offered by the Bible and the female Native character. The biblical logic is denied to the point of allowing for the questioning of the repressive aspects it can be said to contain in regards to their use for colonial purposes. Further meanings and implications from the Christian text remain untouched and unexamined by King's text, for they do not concern the underlying symbolic battles the novel's text aims at deconstructing.

Furthermore, Native American displays of resistance, although recurrently denounced for being overtly victimist, have been intensely engaged in disassembling the tradition that has categorized the Indian as a Platonic essence, with extremely delineated form and meaning. King's work, besides its literary poignancy and beauty, manages to further the cause of a dynamic and renewed approach on contemporary Native American issues. Since present Native concerns still include a broader recognition by various social actors, it seems natural that some sort of clash with mainstream, established, canonic powers occurs. Because of that, it appears that those appropriations of naming and structuring procedures depicted in chapters 1 and 2 are epistemologically and politically valid. The confiscation of the symbolic power of naming, although somewhat contentious towards biblical and Western paradigms, poses as a rightful enterprise once we take into account that, besides striking back at a tradition of domination and suppression, it allows for the long sought for self-determination the aboriginal peoples of the Americas have been coveting.

The same is true to the performative resistance offered by the literary text towards those immobilizing powers described under the panopticon and synopticon sections above. Since *Green Grass, Running Water* has been produced within the very superstructure it endeavors to question and sometimes annul, it sounds fairly pertinent to point to the apparent paradox of this endeavor. However, the issue of functioning within a structure in order to question it can be posed to account for any contradictions here. Thomas King extrapolates the boundaries of tribal oral traditional, cyclical and member-oriented in nature, to provide a sample of tribal material exposed to the large public and highly interweaved and interconnected with Western material to propose a negotiation of usually diverging epistemes. Had he limited the scope of the narrative by writing in, let us say, Cherokee instead of English, the negotiation would have also been restricted to the point in

which no contention would have been possible, since that language does not reach those social and cultural actors that might be influenced to perceive Native American issues in a different, more receptive way. Therefore, the enactment of symbolic appropriation and questioning performed by *Green Grass, Running Water*, as described under chapter 2, poses not only as a powerful tool in the battle for self-representation, but also as a dutiful enterprise of an artist, Thomas King, who has reached the position that allows such questions to be proposed.

I hope to be able to foster the discussion on the role of writers and literary works and their importance in showing paths for the approach of controversial issues related to material reality and contemporary individuals. It is not a question of pondering if the literary praxis has the responsibility of accounting for social and political concerns, but whether we, as readers, interpreters and critics, can and/or should engage in such considerations. My view is that we should, since, as posited by Edward Said, the very locus conquered by minority voices in mainstream structures is the potential force that will allow a cyclic relation of power/knowledge to be established, thus providing such voices with the means and arms to balance relations that have been historically uneven. I believe there is no such thing as a neutral or apolitical artistic production; *Green Grass, Running Water* is no exception. One could propose a purely technical or stylistic approach to the novel, and I am quite certain it would be a very productive enterprise. However, by ignoring such aspects as the role of naming in the domination of representations, the implications of community demands over individuals, the historical practices of scientific voices on the creation of truth(s), and the mediatic influence over the narration of peoples' cultures, it is my belief that we would be missing major elements of Thomas King's production, which refer to direct implications on material reality.

Summing up, I see those material implications as paramount not only in the lines of *Green Grass, Running Water*, or in King's works, or in Native American literature in general, but in artistic productions of any kind. I attempt, as a reader open to paradigmatic changes when confronted with the Other and with the diverse, to try and see what contributions (besides the noble role of Literature (with capital 'l') of humanizing and teaching through abstraction and beauty) a specific piece of art can bring to the discussions of such contemporary issues as identity boundaries, belonging, self-definition, propositions

of truth and so on. This paper is, I sincerely hope, an example of how academic investigation can be undertaken in that fashion – not to the diminishment of literary quality through the path of political implications, but to the enhancement of our humanistic practice via far-encompassing investigative procedures.

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