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ABSTRACT

Thomas King's fiction is typically read as offering an avenue for reconciliation between Native and non-Native cultures. Some readers locate this reconciliation in a reconfiguration of the hierarchical relationship that exists among reference codes originating from different cultures, while other readers see it as emerging from the dismantling of cultural borders. Each approach fails to account for the specific and material effects of border dynamics, and therefore advocates a limited form of understanding that cannot be sustained beyond the bounds of the text. In contrast to such readings, this study demonstrates that King's texts draw attention to common failures in efforts at reconciliation and simultaneously urge the reader towards an alternative approach to the project of cross-cultural understanding. This new approach separates understanding from reconciliation, and advocates a more meaningful and lasting form of understanding firmly grounded in the reality of cross-cultural exchanges.

GETTING THE HANG OF IT:
Cross-Cultural Understanding and Border Dynamics
In Works by Thomas King

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INTRODUCTION

"If there is a need to understand a culture," says Thomas King, "and one can only hear a single story that culture tells about itself, that story should probably be a creation story." He argues that such stories articulate a people's fundamental values and, in particular, the framework within which a culture perceives the relationships among its members and between its members and their world (1986, 69-70) -- that is, the "reference codes" that guide and structure a culture's ways of being. King's own work is replete with both Native and non-Native creation stories, including those drawn from the Cherokee, Navaho and Blackfoot cultures as well as the Biblical account of Genesis, the story of Columbus' "discovery" of the new world, American frontier mythology, and legends of Canadian constitution-building. The prominent role played by such stories in King's writing suggests that he seeks to encourage a project of understanding. At the same time, however, his texts defy easy access by those who seek within them insights into the stories another culture might tell about itself. What, then, is the nature of the "understanding" enabled by these texts?

As a starting point for a study of King's fiction, this question prompts a closer examination of the various ways different critics have read cross-cultural reconciliation into King's work. These readings make particular assumptions about the different motives assigned to the project of understanding -- when might there be a need to understand another culture? -- as well as the means by which stories might be carried and heard across the border between cultures. In many cases, the reconciliation vaunted in critical responses to King's work proves to be an ephemeral understanding that can

temporarily elide the borders between cultures, but that cannot be sustained beyond the bounds of the text. Attention to the material as well as the textual implications of different approaches to the problem of communication across cultural borders serves as the ground for my own exploration of the particular ethic of understanding at work in these texts.

My interest in the tenuous nature of cross-cultural understanding dates back several years to my work as a land claims negotiator for the government of British Columbia and, more specifically, to one particular set of negotiations. At issue in these discussions was the establishment of measures to protect the interests of the Nuu-chah-nulth Central Region Tribes prior to comprehensive treaty negotiations, and at the heart of the dispute was the question whether or not certain watersheds should be "preserved" pending a final treaty. On one side of the table, the First Nation negotiators were determined that these lands, which were critical to the integrity of their traditional territories, should be preserved. On the other, the province was equally determined that these lands, which were rich in forest resources, should continue to be logged. The resulting impasse held until one of the First Nation hereditary chiefs offered his observation to the table: "when you people talk about 'preserving' you mean 'leaving it alone.' But when we talk about 'preserving' we mean it as in preserving salmon. If you catch a salmon and then leave it alone, it rots. But if you preserve it by changing it in some way -- smoke it, dry it, can it -- then it will last and will sustain your family through

the winter. That's what we mean when we talk about preservation."[1] The identification of this difference in interpretations appeared to be a breakthrough. Once it was agreed that "preservation" could be read as "sustainable use" negotiations resumed. Agreement between the parties on the definition of this key term did not in itself resolve the many issues on the table; however, it did establish a ground for discussion and eventual settlement. The resulting agreement was widely hailed by aboriginal and non-aboriginal observers alike as an historic accomplishment representing a new era in relations between the Province and First Nations -- and yet the ink was barely dry before renewed disputes broke out, each party maintaining that the other was backing away from the commitments it had made at the table.

The experience at this negotiating table has its echoes in relations between aboriginal and settler cultures in Canada since the signing of the first treaties. Even efforts at reconciliation that are well-intentioned (and they certainly have not always been) sooner or later founder amid accusations of ignorance, bad faith and racism. When I left the government to pursue graduate studies in contemporary Canadian literature, I brought with me an interest in the difficult project of cross-cultural communications together with a suspicion of claims to reconciliation. This combination of interest and scepticism led me to the work of Thomas King who, perhaps more than any other contemporary writer in Canada, operates in the vexed spaces between cultures.

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[1] In the absence of a written record, I am paraphrasing the words of Hereditary Chief Earl Maquinna George of the Ahousaht First Nation in his oral address to the Clayoquot Sound Interim Measures Agreement negotiating table, in Victoria, November 1993.

King's own heritage is a combination of Native and European. His aboriginal heritage is Cherokee, but his closer cultural ties are to the Blackfoot nation. He was born and raised in the United States but identifies himself as a Canadian, and maintains joint citizenship; his academic career includes work on both sides of the Canada/US border.[2] The multiple referents and codes operating in his work locate it at the borders not only between Native and non-Native cultures, but also at a variety of boundaries that exist within each of those two impossibly broad categories: on- and off-reserve, urban and rural, academic and popular, Canadian and American, historic and contemporary, the borders carved out by discourses of theology, film, oral traditions, literary theory, public policy, Native sovereignty and more.

Distinct, and frequently competing, reference codes appear in King's works without any clear framework against which they might be organized or reconciled. In this regard these works are characteristic of what King describes as "associational literature" -- that is, literature that presents different cultural models in such a way as to provide "a limited and particular access" for the non-Native reader to a Native world, while serving to the Native reader as a reminder "of the continuing values of [Native] cultures" (1990, 14). Although King describes associational literature primarily in terms of this content, he also identifies some of its formal characteristics, including a flat narrative line. Some of King's work can also be aligned with his description of "interfusional" literature which, he argues, blends oral and written literatures to "re-creat[e] at once the storyteller and the

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2 Biographical information is from Contemporary Literary Criticism as well as various published interviews with King. See, for example, Canton, Walton, and Lutz.

performance." His discussion of interfusional literature chiefly turns on its structure and in particular its rhythms, which evoke "the power of the oral voice" (Gzowski 72). While King distinguishes between these "vantage points" from which to regard work by Native writers,[3] associational and interfusional literatures are alike to the extent that their mode of operation results in the interaction of multiple codes within the text, both formally and thematically. These "networks of cultural knowledge" offer different points of access and closure to different readers (Fee and Flick 131). At the same time, King is careful to note that such literature "eschews judgements and conclusions," thus refusing to assign blame or to advocate the values of one culture over another (1990, 14).

Despite this observation, some readers do find such judgements in his work. Denise Low, for example, suggests that in Green Grass, Running Water the three Native characters Alberta, Lionel and Charlie find "identity and some measure of peace" in their return to the Native community, and that Alberta's baby validates the triumph of Native traditions over mainstream domination (105). Similarly, Marlene Goldman sees Green Grass serving as a kind of beacon for Native people "lost" in a non-Native world: "[a]ccording to the text, gaining a meaningful direction in life involves . . . opening oneself to tribal ways of understanding" (38). In such readings, the understanding

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[3] In addition to these two "vantage points" proposed as alternatives to the term "post-colonial," King offers "polemical" literature -- that is, literature with a clearly political objective that articulates Native resistance to colonization -- and "tribal" literature, which exists primarily with a Native community and may be retained in a Native language (1990 12-13).

reached is one that champions Native traditions.[4] That is, where multiple codes operate to give different meanings to the text, the critical act effects a reconciliation through re-ordering, by which one particular meaning is selected and valorized as the basis for further action.

This selection process is akin to that which took place at my negotiating table when both parties acknowledged that the term "preservation" had more than one meaning, and agreed to use the meaning proposed by the First Nations. In effect, the Province adopted a set of traditional aboriginal values relating to resource stewardship and community sustainability. The Province did so only because this term could be employed to validate the Province's own agenda of allowing continued economic activity in the disputed areas. Readings such as Low's or Goldman's are motivated by projects of Native resistance to colonization rather than by the colonizer's agendas of domination, appropriation or commodification of Native cultures. Nevertheless, they seek to reconcile competing demands through a similar process of first acknowledging multiple meanings, and then arranging these meanings into a hierarchy of values.

These readings share an assumption of cultural authenticity on the part of the writer, the medium for sharing stories between cultures. Viewed as an emissary entering one culture from another, this kind of writer is expected to represent a genuine Native culture and to offer the truth about this world to those who wish to see it. Such readings

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4 While it would be exceedingly difficult to read King's work as valorizing non-Native traditions over Native ones, this is not to say it has not been attempted; in one library copy of One Good Story, That One I encountered, the marginal notes reflected one student's tortured effort to read "The One About Coyote Going West" as a Christian allegory.

perpetuate the definition of Native culture primarily through its opposition to non-Native values -- a definition that King locates in post-colonial theoretical models. King argues that such models inappropriately assume that the struggle between Native and non-Native cultures serves as the "catalyst" for Native literature and thus delineates "both method and topic" (1990, 12). The attribution of authenticity to a representation of a Native culture is, furthermore, problematic both in its suggestion that there is such a thing as an essential (and therefore homogeneous) Native culture, and in its failure to attend to the ways in which cross-cultural exchanges "affect and infect" both the original and the alien culture (Chow 189).[5]

As a result, readings which find in King's work an "understanding" based on an acknowledgement and hierarchy of conflicting codes result in, at best, a temporary and limited reconciliation. The acceptance of one set of codes over another enables the larger question of how these different codes reflect and inform different world views to be set aside. Furthermore, the newly agreed-upon values are themselves vulnerable to appropriation, as demonstrated by the Province's ability to subsume its apparent acceptance of traditional Native values into a conventional Western economic model. In the absence of an effort to reconfigure the relationships between the cultures that articulate these different codes, the apparent reconciliation of cultural differences here ultimately proves itself at odds with the project of cross-cultural understanding.

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[5] See Harmon for a fascinating discussion of the ways in which historic efforts to establish a clear line demarking Native from non-Native populations in Washington State were perpetually undermined both by Native practices that escaped categorization by non-Native officials, and by inter-group exchanges.

Other readings of King's work locate in it a form of understanding based upon an explicit refusal to accept the duality of reference codes. Dee Horne, for example, argues that King's work offers freedom from this opposition between reference codes by deconstructing it to "create a new discourse -- one that imaginatively reconfigures the relationship between settlers and Natives into a collaboration rather than an opposition" (256). Such a process relies on a form of syncretism that can "blend the new into the old" to establish vibrant, new traditions (Chester 59), and thereby provide a space for shared experiences. These readings reflect the effort that Arnold Krupat makes to arrange Native writing along a continuum in which connections to a specific Native tribe give way to a "postnativist" solidarity and allegiance to a new "transnational 'tribe'" (54-55), and suggest the same assumption that progress and creativity involve leaving behind the concerns of a particular community in order to adopt a perspective that can be shared between cultures.

The vehicle for this kind of reconciliation is a cultural "go-between" who can serve as a link between worlds. J.K. Donaldson assigns the task of reconciling and harmonizing primarily to the mixed-blood writer who seeks to "bridge the gap between cultures . . . just as his or her very physical existence represents a biological end to this same difference and a beginning of something new " (220).[6] Other critics have noted that the position of straddling cultures is not exclusively occupied by mixed-blood individuals

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6 Donaldson distinguishes between two positions available to the mixed-blood writer: the "trademark" is an opportunist stance complicit with cultural stereotyping in order to win the approval of a mainstream audience, while the "metaphor" actively seeks to reconcile opposing cultures. Both of these assume, however, that the position between cultures is essentially static, and the stances are distinguished only in how they are employed by the mixed-blood individual.

(nor, indeed, do all mixed-blood individuals straddle cultures); all contemporary Native writers operate, to varying degrees, in a bicultural environment, while the multiplicity of positions and slippage within the category broadly termed "Native" belies any such simple assignment of cultural identity.[7] Of the critics who find in King's work an understanding based on hybridity some stress King's mixed heritage, while others identify him primarily as a Native writer. In either case, they suggest that his privileged access to multiple cultures enables him to create a hybrid world to which both Native and non-Native can have equal access.

The effect of valorizing shared experiences is to efface the specific, lived experience of different cultures. At one extreme of this removal of the multiple reference codes from the socio-political arena are the self-identified "postmodernist" readings by critics such as Gerald Vizenor, who argues that the world of Medicine River is populated by "trickster characters . . . not motivated by the tragic or heroic romances of colonial discoveries" (1992 p. 223)[8]. Other readers have similarly found that King's work presents cultural differences as matters of linguistic play alone, in order to achieve liberation through discourse itself (Carlton Smith 526). Such readings fail to acknowledge that, as Laurence Grossberg notes, "there is a 'reality,' an otherness that is not merely the mark of difference within our signifying systems" (1997, 311).

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7 See, for example, Damm and Harmon.

8 Elsewhere Vizenor argues that the trickster is "a comic sign with no histories, no political or economic signification" and therefore that trickster narratives should not be read in conjunction with these "bureaucrac[ies]" (1989 p. 13).

Even where historical and socio-political events are acknowledged as contributing to the deployment of the different reference codes that frame particular ways of engaging with the world, a reconciliation that takes place strictly at the level of discourse cannot account for the ways in which such discourse finds expression in material experience. While it is possible, within the sphere of textuality, to engage in a productive exchange between reference codes in such a way that opposing discourses can be reconstructed as the site of collaboration and reconciliation, Horne's "imaginative reconfiguration[s]" do not go very far to create lasting understandings between cultures. The category "Native" may be a discursive construct, but the suicide rates within Native communities are all too real. The agreement reached at my negotiating table was just such an "imaginative reconfiguration"; while the effort to blend reference codes produced a single document that all parties viewed as articulating a new relationship based on the reconciliation of cultures, the failure of our efforts to account for the specific experience on each side of the table resulted in a set of terms that read very differently to different audiences, and produced an illusory "understanding" that quickly disintegrated in the face of everyday social and political demands.

While their methods differ, these two common approaches to King's work -- those that seek cross-cultural reconciliation by acknowledging different cultural codes and re-arranging this difference into a hierarchy of values, and those that seek such reconciliation through the dissolution of the borders between cultural codes -- share the same fate. Both produce an illusion of understanding, a *mis*-understanding that cannot be sustained. This *mis*-understanding is not a "misunderstanding" in the sense of a quarrel

but rather an understanding gone amiss, a reconciliation that effaces its own misunderstandings. The semblance of understanding can be maintained only as long as the complexities of history and lived experience can be suspended. What is read as a reconciliation is in fact only a momentary collusion or intersection between different cultures.[9]

The operation of this *mis*-understanding was made evident to me when, some time after my experience at the negotiating table, I had an opportunity to compare notes with members of the First Nations' negotiating team. While I already had a sense of the differing interpretations on either side of the table with respect to the agreement itself, what surprised me was the extent of the discrepancy in our interpretations of what took place *around* the table. Our perceptions of the context for the negotiations -- including the circumstances that led to the initiation of the negotiations as well as the events that influenced their course -- were remarkably different. Events that one party considered to be crucial passed unnoticed by the other, and even the causal connections between events were read very differently from each side of the table. The understanding that was reached when both parties signed the final agreement represented, in effect, a point of intersection between two parties on very different trajectories, operating within very different worlds.

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My notion of "*mis*-understanding" owes a certain debt to the concept of "*mis*-recognition" employed by Barthes in his discussion of the operation of "myth" in bourgeois society. Barthes notes that "myth" operates by draining images of their political and historic content such that the historical is mis-recognized as the natural; "contingency" becomes "eternal" (116). Similarly, *mis*-understanding relies on an erasure of the historical in order to present an apparently natural and lasting reconciliation.

The observation that different cultures do not exist in a fixed relationship to one another but rather travel on paths that periodically collide, intersect, merge and diverge has implications not only for the ways in which reconciliation must be read, but also for the position of the intermediary charged with relaying stories from one culture to another. The notions of the beacon or bridge that underlie the two approaches discussed above are inadequate to the shifting grounds of cross-cultural communication. Based on her own experience in the work of alliance-building involving multiple cultures, Gloria Anzaldúa argues for a more fluid sense of the role of the border inhabitant. She identifies four "choice[s] of moves": a "bridge" involves mediation between communities, while a "drawbridge" provides the option of periodically withdrawing from contact. In contrast, the "island" represents a separatist stance in which "there are no causeways, no bridges, maybe no ferries, either" to other communities -- a position that is occasionally necessary but, she argues, cannot be a way of life. The fourth move is to adopt the position of a "sandbar," a form of mobile natural bridge that can be submerged or partially exposed, shifting with currents and tides, and perhaps "may be partially underwater, invisible to others." This stance can be inviting, as "you can somehow choose who to allow to 'see' [and] . . . walk on your 'bridge,'" or forbidding: "[o]f course there are sandbars called shoals, where boats run amuck" (1990, 224). This model, which recognizes that the border inhabitant can select from a variety of moves, provides a more useful framework within which to examine the work of transmitting knowledge across borders.

Returning, then, to the question that opened this exploration: what kind of understanding can be enabled by a text that denies any stable ground for cross-cultural association? By insisting on rather than seeking to dissolve or overcome borders, King's prose fiction illuminates the means by which understanding can better be pursued if it is wrested altogether from the notion of reconciliation.

In the introduction to her examination of border writing, Emily Hicks notes that "[a]s the functional expression of the self-conscious attitude of a writer juxtaposed between multiple cultures, border writing must be conceived as a mode of operation rather than as a definition" (xxiii). To seek a reconciliation within the text itself is to miss the mark: the text, after all, is only one moment in the interaction among multiple cultures. Border writing instead demands a reading both of the text and of its context, and its reader is urged not merely to learn about another culture but to learn how "to live another form of life" (Asad 149). King's work must be read with attention to both its bridges and its shoals, as well as the points at which bridges are withdrawn. From the point of intersection articulated by the text, it may then be possible to reconstruct the various reference codes of which the text is constituted.

In the chapters that follow I explore the ways in which King's texts escape from overt efforts at cross-cultural reconciliation to prompt another form of understanding. This manoeuvre is aptly illustrated by King's narrator's description of the hazards of telling stories to Coyote:

> I tuck my feet under that chair. Got to hide my toes. Sometimes that tricky one leave her skin sit on that chair. Coyote skin. No Coyote.

> Sneak around. Bite them toes. Make you jump. ("The One About Coyote," 67-88)

This figure serves as the backdrop to my examination of King's fiction in the chapters that follow. The first chapter explores the evasive movement that takes place in Green Grass, Running Water. Like Coyote leaving her skin in the chair to attend to the storyteller while she slips away, this text provides the illusion of responsiveness to the desire for cross-cultural sharing while simultaneously escaping it. The juxtaposition of reference codes serves to disrupt efforts at delineating cultural borders, even for the purpose of overcoming them. Instead, Green Grass articulates the slippage around the border itself and, consequently, points to the need for an alternative means to hear the stories of another culture.

The second chapter considers the nature of the border subject that emerges in Medicine River. The treatment of issues relating to home and belonging -- what Anzaldúa terms "the fracture: at homeness/estrangement" (1990, 218) -- problematize the boundaries that govern movement and behaviour. In response to the conflicting demands of multiple communities, the shifting stances of the border inhabitant produce a unique form of agency. Coyote sneaks around to tease the story-teller; the border subject smuggles meaning across cultural boundaries to disrupt fixed ways of knowing. The particular form of subjectivity that emerges at the border has implications for the generation of meaning and for the possibility of communication between cultures.

The third chapter focuses on the short stories "A Coyote Columbus Story" and "Totem," along with Green Grass, Running Water, to examine how King's reformulation of history positions the reader as a border crosser made to "jump" into a mode of perception informed by multiple reference codes. The adoption of an alternative perspective enables the reader to take part in the effort of translation and reconstruction central to King's concept of "fixing the world."

The task of understanding ultimately revolves around the engagement of the reader in this act of reconstruction. Understanding -- like story-telling -- is a joint effort. The project is a daunting one and the result is likely little more than the "difficult communication, weak communication" Claude Denis finds possible through his own investigation of the relationship between aboriginal and Canadian governmental structures. Nevertheless, as Hawkeye notes in Green Grass, Running Water, fixing up the world becomes possible if one starts small to "get the hang of it" before "mov[ing] on to bigger jobs" (125).

The alternative mode of conceiving understanding and reconciliation presented in these texts has implications that extend beyond critical approaches to King's work, and indeed beyond the negotiation of relationships between aboriginal and non-aboriginal cultures. The concluding pages highlight how this approach to cross-border exchanges can contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics at play in any negotiation among different communities.

CHAPTER ONE
COYOTE SKIN, NO COYOTE:
Evasive Manoeuvres in Green Grass, Running Water

Thomas King's short story "Borders" relates the experience of a Native boy and his mother caught between border posts as a result of their refusal to declare their citizenship as American or Canadian. Over the course of the story the border line is opened to reveal its own political and economic territory. In this space there are offices, and a duty-free store whose manager wears a name tag with the Maple Leaf on one side and the Stars and Stripes on the other. There is also a place where the Native woman can lean against her car at night to tell traditional stories about the stars to her son, her skyward gaze tracing a line that the unidimensional pressure of the border can neither perceive nor contain. Green Grass, Running Water draws similar lines of escape from the totalizing effects of borders that seek to fix territory and identity. In this text the treatment of maps and of the various manifestations of tourists exposes the complicity of cartography and tourism in the enterprise of colonization, and also resists this enterprise through a movement that is "a stealing away" as well as a "stealing" (Bensmaïa xvii).

In the coffee shop of the Blossom Lodge Hotel, Alberta reflects "Only tourists wouldn't know that Canada's largest reserve was just to the east of town," but then corrects herself: "No . . . that was the very thing that tourists *would* know" (284). This scene in Green Grass foregrounds questions about what maps can tell and what tourists will know -- questions that reverberate throughout the text. Given the text's emphasis on

the ways in which the construction of space and the direction of the colonizing culture's gaze are implicated in the power relations between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples, it is not surprising that a number of critics reading King's work locate opportunities for reconciliation within a modification of the terms of mapping and sight-seeing in a manner that dismantles the one-way flow of information in favour of a shared space or perspective, a "new social space for us all" (Dvorak 137) or a "map [of] new terrains in which diverse cultures can co-exist" (Horne 257). Such readings emphasize the dissolution or transcendence of cultural boundaries as a means of resistance to the totalizing pressures of a dominant culture. King's strategy, however, is a very different one. By countering one set of reference codes with another, Green Grass both recounts and enacts a dislocation and evasion that continually inscribe the border through and across potential avenues of reconciliation to gesture towards an alternative form of understanding.

The reference codes of the map are those of "abstraction, uniformity, repeatability and visuality" (Harley 1989 13). Together these codes establish a claim to objectivity that effaces the way the map conceives, articulates and structures the world in a manner that "cannot escape involvement in the processes by which power is deployed" (Harley, "Maps, Knowledge and Power," 279).[10] The maps that appear in Green Grass deploy the same codes in a manner that establishes the map as one form of the "mimesis [that] has

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[10] Harley identifies both a power "external" to the map, derived from the forces that govern the mapping activity to determine what is to be mapped and how, as well as a power "internal" to the map. The latter is exercised through the ethnocentric rules that govern the compilation, organization and communication of information: "to catalogue the world is to appropriate it" (1989, 13).

historically served the colonial discourse" by endorsing "a particular kind or view of reality" (Huggan 126). The hydroelectric corporation Duplessis produces a technical map to support the development of a dam and to facilitate the sale of the resulting lake-front property, while Dr. Joe Hovaugh charts a course in an effort to trace the four Indian elders who have escaped from his hospital, and Bill Bursum arranges a display of television sets into a technological map as a marketing strategy. In each case, the text exposes how the act of mapping is involved in the power relations of colonization.

The topographical map produced by Duplessis selects and represents particular forms of information divorced from the social consequences of the dam itself. By abstracting the contours of the land from the issues of aboriginal rights questions surrounding the prior ownership of the land, the company is able to present a territory open for development. The naming of "Parliament Lake" after the seat of government power compounds the reinscription of non-Native political order over the Native lands. Duplessis prepares the map and provides it to potential purchasers "[e]ven before the dam had been started, before the contours of the lake were actually realized" (266). This map is thus an example of "anticipatory geography" which, as Harley notes, has historically "served to frame colonial territories" in the minds of distant speculators, a process of invention and conceptual integration that had to take place before new territories could be "owned, colonized and merchandized" (Harley 1992, 531-32). Even before the development is complete, the map transforms traditional Blackfoot territory into real estate marked by the language of commerce: "Secluded. Exclusive. Valuable" (266). Bursum imagines his future lake-front property and "he [is] pleased" (268), his

proprietary tone echoing the language of Genesis when God looks upon his creation and sees that it is good.[11] The anticipated development is thus created as a present reality, and the "visualization from a distance" choreographs the expansion of colonial development (Harley 1992, 531).

The chart prepared by Hovaugh is also future-oriented, in this case seeking to determine where and when the four Indian elders are likely to appear. Hovaugh plots dates and occurrences in a journal in which he has recorded the previous escapes of the Indians, and the "disasters" that co-incided with these escapes.[12] This book draws on several fields of knowledge including cartography, tourism, cosmology, and mathematics:

> 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. And, of course, there was the star. 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. (389)

Hovaugh's chart consolidates various fields and forms of knowledge, its comprehensiveness serving to verify his own prior comprehension: "Of course. . . . The dam" (347). This link between past and future relies on the code of repeatability -- what happened before will happen again -- which assures him that knowledge of the future

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[11] Bursum's sentiments echo Joe Hovaugh's satisfaction with his hospital gardens (16), a landscape carefully cultivated with imported species -- peacocks and daffodils -- superimposed upon the indigenous terrain. The text highlights the interconnections among these different colonizing endeavours.

[12] Hovaugh's book serves to highlight the fact that "disasters" are very much in the eye of the beholder. The more recent dates of the Old Indians' escapes include 1969, the year when the federal government, faced with tremendous opposition from aboriginal peoples across the country, was forced to withdraw its (aptly named) White Paper that urged the assimilation of Native peoples; and 1973, when the Supreme Court of Canada first recognized aboriginal title as a concept in law and held out the possibility that a First Nation might retain unextinguished aboriginal title to its territory.

location of the Indians is contained in their past movements. Hovaugh intends to employ this knowledge for the purpose of control, seeking to capture the Indians before they can cause another "disaster." This link between the map's predictive power and its power of containment is made evident as Hovaugh's "Tomorrow. . . . Tomorrow and tomorrow" is matched by the three "deliberate circle[s]" he draws to circumscribe and enclose the site at Parliament Lake at which he expects the Indians to appear.

The map built by Bursum is introduced in a manner that emphasizes the way in which the visual code of cartography relies on a context of values. The map spreads over the wall of Bursum's store in a meaningless expanse:

> On the lower right-hand side, several twelve-inch televisions hung down like a tail. The entire left side was uneven, moving in and out as it rose to the roof. Even the top row dipped and peaked as it ran the length of the wall. (126)

It is only when Bursum provides the framework within which it can be read that the shape resolves itself into a familiar form: "It's a map! . . . Of Canada and the United States" (128). The seamless shift from an unreadable space to a socio-political reality articulates the deployment of power in a manner that directly evokes European imperialist policy. At the touch of a button the blank screens come to life, "creating a sense of space and great emptiness" which recalls the belief, reinforced by European legal principles, that the Americas were empty lands at the time of their "discovery" by European explorers. This construction of territory as an empty space available for exploitation formed the foundation for European colonization. When Bursum inserts a videotape of a Western, the code of uniformity overwrites the possibility of distinct spaces within the map: "all

the sets have to show the same movie," one which tells a story of the white man's conquest of the frontier (127-129). The remote control Bursum holds suggests the power of the colonizer to govern from a distance, while the display itself conceals the "difficulties of the logistics, the intricacies of the wiring, the spatial arrangements" (128) which reflect the intricacies of policy and jurisprudence that lie hidden behind the unified front of empire. Combining a totalizing narrative with representation in the service of "[p]ower and control" (127), Bursum's map display reproduces the "concept that [lies] at the heart of business and Western civilization" (298).

The codes of abstraction, uniformity, visuality and repeatability enable maps to delineate the borders and territories necessary to the maintenance of cultural domination. Graham Huggan defines one form of resistance to the cultural limits implied by cartographic enclosure in a strategy of re-mapping to "project spaces other than, . . . or to articulate the spaces between, those prescribed by dominant cultures" (131). This re-mapping, he argues, serves as a counter-discursive strategy that emphasizes "the provisionality of all cultures" and thereby allows for the reformulation of links both within and between cultures (132). As Hicks notes, however, any space which can be articulated and shared in this manner can also be subject to new territorializing pressures (xxix).[13] Rather than producing a counter-map, Green Grass engages in a form of un-

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[13] Hicks' observation applies equally to geographic locations and to discursive spaces. Herb Wylie, for example, observes that hybridity itself is not a solution to the problems of colonization; both dominant and minority cultures may be syncretic, each incorporating elements of the other, but their differential access to power structures and means of articulating this syncretism ensures that they cannot be viewed as "all one" (109). The territorializing pressures of the dominant discourse will act to claim the syncretic, relegating the minority discourse once again to the margins. See also Asad on the power imbalances between languages.

mapping through which each map is rendered meaningless, and each cartographic enterprise impossible.

The topographic map produced by Duplessis is undermined by the earthquake which alters the shape of the land itself, erasing its contours and draining the lake, and leaving Bursum to trot helplessly after the receding waters (415). The fixed lines of the map are no longer able to reproduce the land which dances (409), surges and rolls like the ocean (413). As the land transforms itself from a commodity of exchange to a natural force, the earthquake's relationship both to the fault lines that lie invisible beneath the land's contours and to the dancing of the trickster Coyote establish a new code that cannot be captured or represented by the map.

Hovaugh's chart is similarly undermined by the emergence of a new code that exceeds the map's representational capacity. Three cars (including Hovaugh's own) float down Parliament Lake and strike the dam, their non-logical movement contradicting the logical progression of Hovaugh's carefully-plotted calculations. At the same time, the predictive power of Hovaugh's chart -- relying as it does on linear time and the certainty of "[t]omorrow and tomorrow" -- is opposed by cyclical or mythic time in which the three ships of Columbus' historic voyage -- the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria* -- reappear in the Nissan, the Pinto, and the Karmann-Ghia. The causal connections of Hovaugh's calculations are countered by the indeterminable: the relationships between Coyote, the earthquake, the Indian elders, and the appearance of the cars at the dam remain unclear, and it is impossible to know with certainty what causes the dam to burst. The four Indian elders similarly slip beyond the constraints of Hovaugh's map, vanishing

with Eli under the flood waters and subsequently reappearing back at the hospital. Like the Duplessis map, Hovaugh's chart is rendered meaningless when faced with a form of movement and signification that exceeds its bounds.

A combination of meaning and movement also serves to dismantle the controlling project of Bursum's television map. In Bursum's store, the four Indian elders watch a Western movie and, realizing it needs to be "fixed," they begin to sing:

> The Lone Ranger's voice was soft and rhythmic, running below the blaring of the bugle and the thundering of the horses' hooves. Then Ishmael joined in and then Robinson Crusoe and then Hawkeye.
> . . .
> On the other side of the river, riding at full gallop, the cavalry thundered along the valley floor. And as they came, as the music swelled, there was a new sound, faint at first, but building until it lay against the cadence of the oncoming soldiers. (320-321)

The "running" song, whose words are not recorded, alters the course of the totalizing story told by the display and produces a new story in which the Indians emerge victorious. Again, the form of resistance is one that evades the possibility of representation based on the fixed codes of cartography. The technology of Bursum's equipment can broadcast the thundering of the cavalry and the swelling of the music, but the "new sound" remains indescribable. Even the visual code of the map changes as the movie suddenly shifts from black and white -- a scheme intended to evoke a "brooding effect," according to Bursum (316), but one that also suggests the simplicity of the value judgements that informed Western expansion -- to vivid colour. Just as the Duplessis map cannot represent an earthquake, Bursum's map cannot represent the song that rewrites the

Western, transforming the ending of the movie into a victory for the Indians.[14] As a means of resistance, the song embodies both motion and signification to complement the earthquake, a movement which is also articulate: "Rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble, says that Earthquake. This is fun" (418). Unlike the "asignifying rupture" proposed by Deleuze and Guattari which, they suggest, can "draw a line of flight" to escape the territorializing pressure of oversignification (Thousand Plateaus 9), this form of resistance to the colonizing pressures of cartography relies on a rupture which signifies, but does so through a form which exceeds the reference codes of the discourse of the map.

This strategy of setting the magical against the technological is a characteristic of the border text, in which "the elements that appear to be marvellous actually mark those points of resistance to the intrusion of technology" (Hicks 9). King similarly notes that a sense of what is "magical" is itself contextual: "that line we think is so firm between reality and fantasy is not that firm at all . . . there's a great deal of play in it, . . . the line itself is an imaginary line" (Gzowski 70). From within one set of reference codes, events that occur based on a separate set of codes -- if they are perceived at all -- may be perceived as magical. Such an approach recalls Paula Gunn Allen's suggestion that Native writers counter "alien traditions with their own," setting the cyclic against the linear and the mythic against the technological (1985, 102). In Green Grass, the magical

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[14] The brutality and humiliation of the victory scene, in which John Wayne "stare[s] stupidly . . . as two bullets [rip] through his chest and out the back of his jacket" while Richard Widmark wets his "fancy pants" stands out in sharp contrast to the gently comic tone of most of the novel, and serves as a reminder that the process of "fixing" is not just a matter of peaceful reconciliation.

intervenes to disrupt the technology of mapping; however, the text does not suggest that resistance to appropriation can be enabled solely by a return to Native traditions. The text's treatment of the tourist enterprise indicates that "lines of flight" can also be traced through the technological.

In the same way that maps rely on the operation of specific codes to give meaning to the spaces they delineate, tourism is grounded in and takes its meaning from the codes that establish distinctions between "self" and "other." As the tourist seeks to gain access to the spaces of the other and to adopt the perspective of the insider, the individual tourist enterprise becomes engaged in a process of objectification and acquisition. The tourist gaze is authorized and organized by a discourse that reduces cultural otherness to signs or images that can be captured, collected and reproduced (Urry 177). This cycle of seeing, representation, appropriation and reproduction mirrors the work of cartography in its impetus towards domination and exploitation. The colonial project is exposed in the various forms of tourism figured in Green Grass. While the most conventional tourists are the visitors who flock to Latisha's "Dead Dog Cafe," Eli's non-Native partner Karen and George Morningstar/Custer also represent particular dimensions of the tourist enterprise.

The inspiration for Latisha's business comes from her aunt. "'Tell them it's dog meat,' Norma had said. 'Tourists like that kind of stuff'" (109). Tourism relies on experiences that can be distinguished from those of the tourist's everyday life, and here Norma's observation reflects the tourist's fascination and repulsion by the "grotesque" elements of another culture (Hicks xxviii). The grotesque encompasses those elements

that "suppor[t] the unsupportable, assai[l] the unassailable" to upset the commonly-held values of the tourist (Danow 3).[15] In so doing the grotesque provides evidence of an absolute otherness and, consequently, of authenticity: the possibility of being served dog meat validates a sense of contact with a savage, alien people.

At the same time, this encounter with the other serves only to reinforce the tourist's own normative codes. When a group of tourists arrive with a stated intent to "ask all the questions everyone else is too embarrassed to ask" the possibilities for open communication are quickly derailed when each response Latisha provides launches the members of the foursome into a repetitive narrative of their own pasts:

> "Twenty-five years I was a sergeant with the RCMP, and if we had heard of anyone cooking up dog and selling it in a restaurant, we would have arrested them. It's beef, right?" . . .
>
> "Black Labrador," said Latisha. . . .
>
> Jesus," said Nelson. "I had a black Lab when I was a kid.". . .
>
> "It's a treaty right," Latisha explained. . . .
>
> "I've never heard of that, either," said Bruce, "and I was a sergeant with the RCMP for twenty-five years." . . .
>
> "His name was Tecumseh," said Nelson. "After the Indian chief. And you know what?" Nelson motioned for Latisha to come closer. "He could sing."
>
> "You're not eating Tecumseh," said Rosemarie. "Did I tell you I was in opera?
>
> . . .
>
> "He lived to be fourteen years old," said Nelson. . . .
>
> "That dog wasn't singing, Nelson," said Rosemarie, "he was just howling. Now, I could sing, isn't that right, Jeanette?" (131-3)

The self-absorption of these tourists reflects the ways in which the tourist enterprise transforms its interaction with other cultures -- and especially the "grotesque" elements of

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15 Danow notes that the "grotesque" is typically underscored by a "dark side" (34). This observation holds true here as well. As noted by Margery Fee and Jane Flick, there is a gesture here to the historical fact of dispossessed and starving aboriginal people having to eat dog meat (1999, 149).

those cultures, which defy the tourist's expectations and cultural norms -- into a "private narrative" that reaffirms his or her own authenticity (Stewart 135). The touring culture recycles its own stories rather than hear those of the culture it visits, using its engagement with the other to reinforce its own identity and its assumptions about other cultures.

In contrast, Karen engages in an effort to establish a relationship that bridges cultures. While her effort may be well-intentioned, it nevertheless reflects the dynamics of appropriation. Karen likes "the idea that Eli [is] Indian" (163), but her sense of Native identity is a limited one drawn from the realm of popular culture and the "books about Indians" that she carries in her bag. Books about Indians, like other "culturally authoritative representations" including "brochures, advertisements, guidebooks, coffee-table books, all the idealized typifications of the Other" (Frow 144), objectify aboriginal cultures by transforming the lived experience of Native people into stereotyped images that are then contained, possessed, carried around, and shared with friends. Indeed, what Karen sees of the Sun Dance is a coffee-table centrefold: "It's like it's right out of a movie . . . It's like going back in time . . . It's incredible" (203). Her approach to Native culture is to define cultural difference "through signifying structures that mark or reduce it" (Culler 167), an approach that extends to her treatment of Eli himself:

> Karen rolled on top of Eli, straddled him, and held his arms down by the wrists. "You know what you are?" she said, moving against him slowly. "You're my Mystic Warrior."[16] And she pushed down hard as she said it. (164)

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[16] The nickname is a reference to a made-for-TV movie of the same name, based on Ruth Beebe Hill's novel Hanta Yo (1979). The movie generated a number of complaints from Native groups because of its offensive stereotypes of Native cultures (Vizenor 1992, 224).

Eli's Native identity is reduced to that of a movie stereotype, while the conjoining of equals implicit in the moment of intercourse is undercut both by Karen's possessive tone and by her imprisoning position. Although Karen may be seen -- and might see herself -- as seeking to forge a relationship that bridges cultural boundaries, her desire to connect with and participate in Native culture is nevertheless characterized by images of cultural domination and repression.

The character George, who is at once the contemporary George Morningstar and the historical frontiersman George Custer, further reveals the ways in which the discourse of tourism elides acts of violence. Like Karen, George gives his Native partner a nickname, referring to Latisha only as "Country." This association between Native people and the land operated in frontier nomenclature to identify Native territories with land available for colonization and exploitation (Harley 1988, 292), and is echoed in George's approach to the Native community's Sun Dance ceremony as the site of his own commercial venture. To justify his intent to photograph the Sun Dance and sell the pictures to a magazine, George evokes his membership in the Native community, claiming that the prohibition of photographs is "for strangers. Not family" (380). Placing himself at once within the community and beyond its laws, George adopts a position that combines privileged access with detachment. He emphasizes his dissociation from the colonizing endeavour by physically separating himself from the hidden camera, leaving it to operate on its own while he stands by smiling, shrugging and looking away (381). This "claim to innocence and disinterestedness" of the observer conceals a discourse of "conquest and possession" (Pratt 57) in the same way that the language of inevitability

and necessity -- "[i]t's almost the twenty-first century . . . And the more people know the more they understand" (380) -- overwrites the appropriation and commodification of Native cultures.

Each of these three manifestations of tourism reflects an effort to appropriate and reproduce an experience of the "other." Although each is informed by a desire for contact with the perceived mysteries of Native traditions, its trajectory marks a decline "from immanence to instrumentality . . . from the world as being to the world as simulacrum" (Frow 142). The tourist's encounter with the other is encapsulated, narrativized, and then validated by the tourist's possession of a photograph, a guide-book, or one of Latisha's Dead Dog Cafe menus. At the same time, the lived experience of the Other is reduced to a rehearsal of the touring culture's prior expectations and assumptions. Resistance to this colonizing project is enabled by access to technologies that undermine the codes of the grotesque, the magical and the spiritual at work in the touristic enterprise.

The tourists who arrive at the Dead Dog Cafe are offered postcards that authenticate their encounter with the grotesque. As a souvenir, the postcard is "characterized by a complex process of captioning and display" which -- through its purchase, re-inscription, bestowal and reception -- acts to validate the experience of an "authentic" site as the site of the tourist herself (Stewart 138), and thus enables the tourist to appropriate the experience of the Other and reproduce it as her own. This appropriative process in this case is blocked, however, by the postcards themselves, which do not show authentic Native activities but rather replicate yet another colonial image:

> [Latisha] got Will Horse Capture to make up a bunch of photographs like those you see in 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. (109)

The image of a white man holding up a lion's head reflects the emergence, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of big game hunting as part of the popular British imperial ethic, and of the colonies as a testing ground for class virility and cultural dominance (MacDonald 11-13). As Donna Haraway has noted, such images re-present the values of empire typically effacing the "profusion of objects and social interactions" involved in their creation (27). Similarly, the photographs of successful duck-hunting and fishing expeditions contained in contemporary outdoor recreation magazines present images of a territory open to exploration and exploitation, while eliding issues relating to Native hunting and fishing rights. The postcards created by Latisha and Will, which purport to illustrate the exercise of a Native "treaty right" (132), thus replicate the images the Empire shows itself of itself, and thereby return to the colonizer the received narrative of colonialism. In this way, the technology of photography serves to interrupt the tourist's anticipated access to and possession of the grotesque.

The cycle of representation that underlies tourism, in which signifiers of a particular culture are selected, authorized, and reproduced, is figured in Green Grass as a magical one. At the car rental agency a clerk stuffs a bag with brochures, maps, and tourist information: "as one thing disappeared into the bag, another would magically appear at her fingertips" (149). This detritus is then transformed into the "books about Indians" that Karen pulls out of her bag, one after another: "Magic" (162). The conjuring

trick is echoed in Karen's recycling of stories about the Sun Dance ceremony. Upon her return with Eli from her first visit to the Sun Dance, Karen "told all their friends" about her experience, and "for months afterward . . . found ways of working the Sun Dance into the conversation" (263), pulling out representations of the event at every opportunity. When Eli finally agrees to return with her to the ceremony, Karen again tells "all of their friends" about their plans (343), setting the stage for another round of stories. This cyclical movement is brutally interrupted when Karen is killed by a car as she and Eli travel to a going-away party in honour of their planned trip to the Sun Dance. The linear progress of the machine "plunging through the intersection" severs the cycle of touristic appropriation (343).

The intervention of technology to interrupt the magical operates in a similar way to block George's efforts to photograph the Sun Dance. Eli's familiarity with George's sleight of hand -- by which George hopes to conceal the film on which he has recorded photographs of the Sun Dance -- enables him to retrieve the film and to strip it from its canister. The images on the film are exposed, and at the same moment they vanish. This doubled gesture serves to evade the territorializing gaze of the camera, and indeed to return the gaze so that George himself becomes the object of scrutiny:

> Eli got to his feet and turned to face George . . . George was florid, a mottled yellow and orange . . . George's lips were wet with spit . . . As he got to the car, he turned and shouted, his mouth snapping open and shut like a trap. But the words vanished in the distance and the wind. (386-7)

George is left powerless and mute, his attempt to make the film disappear foiled, the images he has sought to capture vanishing like his words.

By countering technology with the fantastic and mystical, and the grotesque or magical with technology, Green Grass relies equally on multiple sets of reference codes. The text does not establish a hierarchy within which one set of codes emerges as more valid than another, but rather illustrates the ways in which one set of codes can render another meaningless. This strategy of "emphasiz[ing] the difference in reference codes" among cultures is a feature of the border text (Hicks 9), which here serves torob the cartographic and tourist enterprises of their appropriative capacity and therefore to limit possibilities for the representation of a shared space or the construction of a shared perspective. At the same time, the text does not blend reference codes to create a new ground for reconciliation between cultures. Rather than fulfil the reader's expectation of access to a Native perspective, the text enacts a form of resistance similar to that which it recounts in order to evade the reader's own efforts at cartographic or tourist activity.

Green Grass, which provides details of relative distances and of directions among geographic locations within the text, invites its reader to participate in a process of constructing a sense of place. This endeavour is undermined, however, by a decidedly non-cartographic movement which shifts both distances and directions: the reserve is at once "two hundred and ten kilometers" from Calgary (33) and "three hundred kilometers" from Calgary" (201); an hour's drive from Blossom (174) and "just across the river" from Blossom (242). While the car rental clerk notes that the reserve is "to the west" of town (149), Alberta reflects that tourists will know the reserve is "just to the east of town" (284), and on the next page Eli, driving from his home on the reserve to Blossom, heads east, placing the reserve once again to the west of town (285).

The impossibility of establishing a fixed relationship among locations within the text is compounded by the connections that serve to link geographically discrete sites. The flood that trapped Eli in his cabin seven years ago (111) simultaneously produced a blight in Hovaugh's Florida garden (73), while the dam's reduction of water flow in the river, which threatens the cottonwood trees on the reserve (376), is manifested in a drought that leaves Hovaugh's garden "unusually dry" and the leaves on his trees "yellow and curled" (96). Similarly, the sound heard in Hovaugh's office, "hard and quick like breaking ice" (48), as Hovaugh and Eliot discuss the disappearance of the Indians at the outset of the text, is the sound Latisha hears as George's shutter clicks while he photographs the Sun Dance -- first a "faint clicking as if she had stepped on something brittle," then "louder . . . Hard. Metallic" (380-1). The text's insistence on the interconnectedness of disparate spaces and on the indeterminability of spatial and temporal relations counters the verisimilitude constructed by the codes of cartography. In a doubled movement that recalls Eli's exposure of George's film, the text gestures towards the map, but simultaneously denies the map's ability to organize and impart a sense of spatial relations within the text.

This movement reflects precisely what operates to prevent easy access for the tourist into a realm of purportedly authentic experience. Dean MacCannell suggests that tourist regions are structured according to a "staged authenticity" whereby a "front region" of performance to outsiders conceals a "back region" of "intimate reality," and that the natural trajectory of tourist motivation is to seek access to the back region of authentic experience. This distinction between front and back is, MacCannell notes, problematic,

as front regions can be decorated to appear as back regions and, conversely, tourists are occasionally allowed glimpses into back regions (95-97): "*Insight*, in the everyday, and in some ethnological senses of the term, is what is obtained from one of these peeks into a back region" (102).

Such insights greet the non-Native reader who seeks in Green Grass an opportunity to encounter authentic Native culture. King himself observes that his "Native material" sells better than his other works, and also that the bulk of his readers are not Native (Rooke 63). At least a sizeable proportion of the readers of Green Grass are therefore 'touring,' using the text as a vehicle to explore a culture not their own. The glimpses of Native culture afforded by Green Grass, however, are no guarantee of an authentic experience. As MacCannell notes, the tourist's assumption that once she moves "off-stage, or into the 'setting,' the real truth begins to reveal itself" is complicated by an arrangement of tourist settings into a continuum that can appear "as an infinite regression of stage sets," beyond which the tourist can not penetrate to reach a "real back region" (105-6).

The slippage of authentic space away from the gaze of the tourist operates in a similar manner to place closure on the touristic reader's attempt to see beyond the "false fronts" of the setting and into a space of Native experience. The reader is allowed access, for example, to the back region of the Dead Dog Cafe, sharing the perspective of Latisha and her staff as they survey the arriving tourists (155). This insider's position is limited, however, as is made clear by the way in which the text both reveals and conceals the Sun Dance ceremony. While brief glimpses are provided into the setting of the Sun Dance,

the ceremony itself is never displayed. George asks questions which the non-Native reader might be expected to share -- "'Why are they skipping?' . . . 'Why are they holding hands? What do they do inside the double tepee all day?'" (338-9) -- but these questions are never answered. Latisha's attempt to describe the Sun Dance is overwritten by the comments of her friend, who "hobble[s] her with questions" and tries to compare the Native ceremony to a Catholic one (369-70). Each time the reader approaches the space of the Sun Dance, the ceremony itself recedes behind a veil of questions and inept associations such as Karen's comparison of the setting to a scene from a movie. In the same way that Latisha's postcards provide to the tourist only a reproduction of a pre-existing touristic narrative, the text itself returns to the touristic reader only a re-presentation of his or her own questions and stereotypes.

This evasive move is anticipated in the title of the novel itself. Green Grass, Running Water is an echo of the promise, made by representatives of the Crown to aboriginal leaders, that treaty settlements would be honoured "as long as the grass is green and the water runs"[17] -- a promise that was not kept. The novel similarly fails to live up to its promise of reconciliation, and in effect simply plays back to the non-Native reader the breach of promise to which it refers. The promise is merely a Coyote skin, left to sit attentively while Coyote herself slips away.

At the same time, the text evokes the possibility of a new promise that can serve as an entry to a renewed process of negotiation between cultures. The clash of

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[17] In Alberta -- perhaps in recognition that the prairie grass is rarely "green" -- the treaty with the Blackfoot was prefaced by the promise that its terms would be upheld "as long as the sun is shining, the rivers flow, and the mountains are seen" (Bottle 1999, 132).

incommensurable reference codes produces a form of what Vizenor terms "mythic verism," a "narrative realism that is more than mimesis or a measure of what is believed to be natural in the world" (1989, 190). In this case, the reader discovers that she lacks the reference codes that could organize and make sense of this new reality, instead finding herself in unfamiliar territory. The text thus depicts "a kind of realism that approaches the experience of border crossers" (Hicks xxv). The challenge for the border crosser caught between conflicting reference codes is not only to "[sustain] contradictions" but also to "[turn] the ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldúa 1987, 79). The following chapter examines the border subject and the kind of agency that emerges to meet this challenge.

CHAPTER TWO
SNEAK AROUND. BITE THEM TOES:
The Border Subject in Medicine River

On more than one occasion King has remarked that the border dividing Canada from the United States is "an imaginary line" (Rooke 70), one that carries little meaning to the First Nations whose territory it divides. At the same time, however, this border does have a real effect upon the lives of those who cross it. Indian status does not travel intact across the border, and this fact is examined in some of King's work. The short story "Borders" adopts an ironic and humorous approach to the assimilationist demands of the border, while the novel Green Grass, Running Water points more bluntly to the darker side of border effects when, for example, traditional Native regalia confiscated at the border is eventually returned in ruins. The same tension between fictiveness and materiality also holds true for the boundaries between Native and non-Native communities, including the borders that demarcate Indian Reserves as well as less-defined cultural borders. These lines, imaginary though they may be, are the places where identity is reclassified. Medicine River, King's first full-length novel, provides a ground for exploration of the kind of subject that emerges at the border, and the particular implications the border space holds for the self-determination, or agency, of the subject. This text challenges the notion, advanced by a number of critics of Native literature, that responsible action is possible only within the context of community, and proposes instead an alternative form of agency that is articulated in the space of the border itself.

Medicine River unfolds around the experiences of Will Horse Capture, the son of a Native woman and White man, who returns from Toronto to his childhood community of Medicine River. The text comprises a series of chapters or "text-pieces" (Cox 151) that can be read as self-contained stories, but that take on additional form and meaning when read in conjunction with one another. King himself describes it as a "cycle of stories" (Rooke 63). Unlike many contemporary story cycles, however, Medicine River does not at first glance appear particularly experimental in form or content. The text-pieces follow a loosely chronological pattern, and all are narrated in the first person by Will.[18] Perhaps partly as a result of its apparent adherence to these realist conventions, the text itself is often read as a conventional story of "home-coming" in which Will gradually comes to find his place in the Native community.

Despite its generally linear chronology and its univocity, however, Medicine River does not present a unified narrative. Instead, each text-piece alternates between a contemporary narrative and Will's memories of an earlier time -- either his childhood, or his adult days in Toronto before his return to Medicine River.[19] In so doing, the text intertwines multiple narratives in a manner that dislocates the notion of "home," presenting in its place a perpetual movement among subject positions that eventually leads to a redefinition of community.

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[18] In this the text differs markedly, for example, from other contemporary story cycles by Native authors such as Sherman Alexie's The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1994), in which the perspective shifts between first-person and omniscient narration, while the narrative itself skips back and forth in time as well as across the conventions of realism and myth.

[19] For the purposes of the discussion here I distinguish between the "contemporary narrative" -- that is, the account of Will's adult life in Medicine River -- and the "remembered narratives" which include Will's memories of his childhood in Medicine River and in Calgary as well as his adult years in Toronto.

The three narratives that are woven into the opening chapter of Medicine River introduce an array of questions surrounding home, belonging, and the relationships between individual and community. These questions resonate throughout the text. From the outset, simple constructions of place are rendered uncertain, as the setting for the contemporary narrative of the text is established. The town of Medicine River includes both a Native community and a non-Native community, while the Native community includes both Medicine River and the adjacent Indian reserve. Although Will's interactions in Medicine River are exclusively with the Native community, little of the action takes place on the reserve itself. The Native community, in effect, slips its boundaries and escapes from the reserve in order to take up residence in a non-Native space, while the name of the reserve, Standoff, at once suggests both detachment and confrontation.

The force of the line that sets Indian reserves apart from non-Native communities is also figured here, as Will recalls the circumstances surrounding his father's death and his mother's announcement "We're going home" (8). The young Will assumes that this means they are returning to the reserve, but is confronted instead with the boundaries erected by the federal Indian Act as they are explained by his cousin:

> "You guys have to live in town cause you're not Indian any more."
> "Sure we are," I said. "Same as you."
> "Your mother married a white."
> "Our father's dead."
> "Doesn't matter."
> . . . "We can go to the reserve whenever we want. We can get in a car and go right out to Standoff."

> "Sure," said Maxwell. "You can do that. But you can't stay. It's the law."[20] (9)

Maxwell's declaration is borne out when the family does indeed stop short of the reserve and settles in Medicine River. Will attributes this, however, not so much to the law as to his mother's pride (9), suggesting that Will's mother has internalized the juridical requirements in such a manner as to reproduce the institutional regulations that govern her movements, and to redefine "home" as "not-quite-home." The effect is to blur the boundaries between "home" as a site that reflects personal choice and "home" as a construction imposed by powers external to the self -- in this case, the legislative and policy requirements of the government of Canada.

This questioning of concepts of home and belonging is preceded, in the text's opening chapter, in a second remembered narrative that relates Will's encounter with another forbidden space, this one more personal. When the young Will is found reading his mother's letters, he defends himself by asserting a right to the letters, citing both their origin -- "they're from . . . my father . . . the letters [ellipses in original]"-- and their destination, reading himself into the salutation "Dear Rose" in order to claim "[t]he letters were to me and James, too. They're not just yours . . . Those are my letters too." Will reads his mother's name as including his own, and argues that the letters should be shared, in contrast to his mother's contention that "they're private" -- so private, in fact, that she

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20 Until recently, the Canadian *Indian Act* required that a Native woman who married a non-Native man lost her Indian status, along with the right to live on or own property on an Indian Reserve. This section of the Indian Act was revoked in 1985. For a more detailed examination of the legal and policy treatment of aboriginal women in Canada, see Sally Weaver. See also Claude Denis for a discussion of the ways in which the particular combination of gender and cultural oppression legislated by the *Indian Act* served to force Native women into the position of "agents of destruction" of their own cultures (106).

would prefer to burn them than share them (5-7). Will responds to his punishment by taping the letters to the bottom of his mother's chest, a gesture that serves to keep them hidden from view and prevent them from circulating. Will's act of banishing the letters after they have been forbidden him echoes his mother's effort to assert a degree of control over the regulations that govern her movements.

The letters resurface in the contemporary narrative of the chapter, when they are returned to the adult Will by his friend Harlen following Rose's death. In the contemporary narrative, however, Will is taken aback by the discovery that the boundaries that once defined his mother's private space have dissolved, and the letters have become communal property:

> Harlen poured some more hot water in his cup. . . . "He wrote a good letter. Bertha said they made her cry."
> "Bertha read these?"
> "You know Bertha."
> "Shit." (10)

As the letters circulate from the private to the familial to the communal, Will's conflicting responses establish the tensions between the two senses of "belonging" -- that is, the sense of constructing an identifying relationship between self and others, and the sense of being owned. This dual meaning is reflected in Edward Said's comment on the provisionality of homes: "[b]orders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons" (54). Together, the three opening narratives -- the remembered narrative of the letters, the remembered narrative of Will's mother's return to Medicine River, and the contemporary narrative featuring the exchange between

Will and Harlen -- highlight the shifting and precarious ground that underlies definitions of "home" and the boundaries of personal and communal spaces.

After setting the stage for the oft-cited paradigm of the Native individual seeking to return "home,"[21] Medicine River avoids what might be the expected metaphors of the recuperation of a sense of belonging, as well as those of cross-cultural reconciliation or syncretism. Although each of Will's two romantic interests, the non-Native woman Susan and the Native woman Louise, finds herself a new house over the course of text, Will does not take up residence in either. No new families are established, and Louise's baby South Wing remains fatherless.[22] Nevertheless, a number of readings of Medicine River locate in it a narrative of progressive integration in which Will returns "home," is accepted into the Native community, and comes to find a sense of responsibility to the community.[23] The suggestion -- explicit or implicit -- in these readings is that accepting his place within the community provides Will a basis on which to act and to take on new responsibilities. While this notion proposes a neat solution to the problem of identity, it fails to account for the ways in which subjectivity is complicated by the interaction of multiple communities in this text.

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21 See, for example, Bevis, who argues that "[i]n Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good" (582).

22 Arnold Davidson acknowledges that South Wing appears too early in the narrative to signify "resolution," yet proposes nevertheless that the baby "allows Will . . . to get a better fix on his life" and to resolve the issues that trouble him (190). In fact, the baby complicates even further the already unstable boundaries of community, as her Cree father represents an additional Native community beyond Medicine River, highlighting the variability within the space marked as "Native" by the dominant culture.

23 See, for example, William, Walton (1990), and Wylie.

The notion of individual agency arising from a communal context is consistent with Paula Gunn Allen's assertion that for the Native subject, "the individualized -- as distinct from individualistic -- sense of self accrues only within the context of community" (1985, 44). The assumption underlying Gunn Allen's "self-in-relation" is that there is a clearly definable community within which the individual can be located. In Medicine River, this assumption is echoed by Will's friend Harlen, who points to a local landmark as an element of community identity. Encouraging Will to return to Medicine River from Toronto, Harlen notes "'you can't see Ninastiko from Toronto.'" He goes on to explain,

> "Ninastiko...Chief Mountain. That's how we know where we are. When we can see the mountain, we know we're home. Didn't your mother ever tell you that?" (93)

Harlen's insistence on the relationship between identity and place assumes that identity can be fixed, and that there is a clear distinction between "home" and "not home." Harlen similarly encourages his losing basketball team to recognize their surroundings, in an effort to inspire them:

> "That's why we lose those games when we should be winning . . . cause you don't know where you are. . . . "You see what's over there? . . . Ninastiko."
>
> You could see Chief Mountain clearly, its top chiselled back at a slant, its sides rising straight off the prairie floor. (15-16)

In both cases, however, the text questions the possibility of establishing a clearly-defined identity. On each occasion, the mountain is identified twice, as the Native name is followed by an English name. The marker of a Native homeland is itself marked by a non-Native name, in a move that recalls the colonial legacy of re-mapping and re-naming

discussed in the previous chapter, and suggests the challenge of locating a clearly Native space within a landscape largely overwritten by non-Native interests. Set against the prairie sky, the mountain appears solid and imposing, but its "chiselled" top and "straight" sides project an image of permanence belied by the fluidity with which the mountain's identity doubles back on itself to challenge simplistic notions of "home."

This slippage around the notion of "home" is reflected in Will's ongoing negotiation among different positions available to him in the Native community. When Harlen takes Will to visit the shaman-like Martha Old Crow in order to find a birthday present for Louise's baby South Wing, Martha provides them with a traditional rattle. The blue and yellow cover of the rattle conceals "stones or seeds" within, suggesting both permanence and renewal (140). The exchange is couched within the expectation that Will will assume a particular role:

> Martha got up and headed for the house. . . . As she got to the door she stopped, turned around, and looked me up and down like she was measuring me for a suit. "That little girl needs a father. You see her born?"
>
> "I was there."
>
> "Okay. That'll do." (139)

The rattle is accompanied by a song which Martha sings. As King notes, "within an oral culture, it is the voice, symbolically and actually, that links a single member to the whole" (Inventing 123). Martha's injunction, "[b]etter learn that song" (141), reinforces the suggestion that learning the song will help Will to forge his links with the community, to put on the "suit" that has been set out for him. The expectation that Will will assume a new role in Louise's family initially appears to be borne out, as Will and Louise make

love for the first time. This expectation is undermined by the image of ambivalence that concludes the chapter, as Will "trie[s]to remember the song" (143). Whether Will is successful in recalling the song, or indeed whether he resists remembering the song, is unclear. Throughout the remainder of the text Will makes no further effort to learn the song as recommended by Martha, suggesting that neither the song itself nor the process of learning the song, and thus of pursuing knowledge of Native traditions, serves to define Will's relationship to the community.

A similar ambivalence recurs over the course of Medicine River. Will is urged to adopt a range of roles and identities by the Native community: a partner to Louise and father to South Wing; one of "the boys" who plays basketball and drinks at the American pub; a mentor to the troubled Clyde Whiteman; a link between the elder Lionel and the modern world of banking; a participant in the Native resistance movement along with David Plume. Through the shifting foci among family, community, and culture emerge various iterations of community expectations and pressures. As Will manoeuvres around this range of subject-positions, however, none proves adequate, recalling Anzaldúa's discussion of the border inhabitant who moves among multiple communities -- "none of them 'home,' yet none of them 'not home' either" (1990, 218). The circulation of identity recalls the circulation of Will's mother's letters and raises again the tension surrounding the notion of belonging. The emergence of responsible action, in this instance, is not a matter of finding a place within the Native community: the source of agency must be located elsewhere.

Will's negotiation among community possibilities is reflected in his movements around the river that runs through the community. He walks beside it, loses things in it, retrieves things from it, and is occasionally immersed in it. This has the effect of drawing attention to a third space marked "Medicine River": along with the Native and non-Native communities, there is the river itself. The river suggests another potential solution to the problem of belonging, that of relinquishing the notion of a stable community in favour of a state of perpetual flux -- a position that recalls Anzaldúa's "island," a subject position defined by the absence of fixed connections to a defined community. Anzaldúa argues that, while it has its merits, this position "cannot be a way of life" because "each person depends on others" (1990, 223). Indeed, when faced with the possibility of an exhilarating plunge from a bridge into the river below, Will finds himself unable to make the leap.

When Will, Harlen, and Harlen's brother Joe climb the bridge over the river and dare one another to jump off, the narrative is juxtaposed with Will's memories of his own brother James. James, like Joe, travels around the world, but James always identifies his return address as "Bentham Reserve." The name is a reminder of the basement of the Bentham Street apartment the boys lived in in Calgary, and also an echo of Bentham Prison, the influential penitentiary that inspired the European disciplinary system. Foucault argues that this system, which was grounded in the notion that constant surveillance could cause its subjects to internalize juridical requirements, served to establish a mode of power exercised "*within* the social body rather than *from above it*" (39). The reference to Bentham in the novel suggests that James, like his mother, has

internalized a set of expectations regarding where Native people "belong" to such an extent that he remains caught in what Homi Bhabha describes as a "margin of non-movement within an economy of movement" (Clifford 1992, 114), imprisoned in his past even as he travels the world. In contrast, Harlen's brother Joe "let[s] go of everything and plunge[s] into the green water" (164), adopting the "*bildungsroman* model of self-in-isolate-splendour that drives American civilization" (Gunn Allen 44). Clinging to the bridge, James' letter in his pocket, Will watches as Joe "jump[s] or rather . . . [falls]" into the river below and is swept away (164). The scene figures Will as poised between these two models of selfhood -- one defined entirely by the expectations of others, the other refusing all connections to community.

This predicament is reflected in the way the scene destabilizes the notion of the bridge as a link between communities. King notes that, in many texts by contemporary Native writers, bridges between Native and non-Native communities serve as a metaphor "to establish the distance and difference between Indians and non-Indians," dividing two different worlds (Inventing 116).[24] Will's position on the bridge might imply that he has a role to play in reconciling these two worlds. In this text, however, the bridge does not so neatly divide the Native and non-Native communities, and Will does not cross the bridge but rather undertakes a treacherous climb up the structure of the bridge from below. Will's own position on the border between the Native and non-Native worlds is

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[24] Examples include Lee Maracle's Ravensong (1993), in which the bridge between the Native community and "White Town" serves as the site of the protagonist's mediation between her responsibilities to her own people and her relationship to the non-Native community, and Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1979), in which the main character Tayo, hoping to be healed of his post-Vietnam-war malaise, crosses a bridge to reach the shaman Betonie.

likewise complicated by the multiple border-crossings in each chapter between accounts of Will's life in Medicine River and his life in Toronto or Calgary. With each crossing the "distance and difference" between the various worlds -- Native and non-Native, past and present -- is marked out in the text by the spaces that both separate and connect the various narratives. The spaces or silences between narratives thus serve as the "bridges" that Will must negotiate.

The reformulation of the bridge from a fixed to a fluid connection among possibilities reflects Anzaldúa's insistence on the multiple and shifting stances adopted by the border inhabitant who is "immersed in all the worlds at the same time while also traversing from one to the other" (1990, 217-18). The border is not a fixed place, but rather marks or holds open the space between communities. In Medicine River, the "distance and difference " among worlds can be expanded or compressed by Will's shifting allegiances to his multiple communities: leaving a party in Toronto at which he has been embarrassed by Susan, Will asks to be dropped off in Medicine River, "just west of Toronto" (234). Rather than serving as a fixed link between communities in a fixed relationship to one another, this "bridge" marks out a dynamic "interstitial space of identification" (Bhabha 434). It is to this space that Will clings "for dear life" (164), and within this space that the possibility of responsible action must be defined.

Paul Smith argues that the responsible subject -- the subject capable of taking action -- emerges from the "simultaneous registering of differing strands and their concomitant claims" (149). In this formulation, agency is derived from multiple subject positions. For the border crosser, as Hicks notes, subject positions are multiplied, and the

differing strands arise simultaneously from multiple sources: "the border crosser 'subject' emerges from double strings of signifiers of two sets of referential codes, from both sides of the border." The result is that "the border crosser is both self and other," registering the demands of each space simultaneously (Hicks xxvi).[25] From his position among multiple narratives, Will maintains doubled and redoubled connections to each side of the border separating his experience within and outside the Native community as he crosses back and forth. The challenge is to turn this space into a productive ground for action.

This border space is similar to that in which Said locates the "exile" who is always aware of at least two cultures or homes. Experiences in one environment, he argues, "inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (55). Although in terms of linear chronology Will moves from the reserve to Calgary to Medicine River to Toronto and back to Medicine River, in the text all of these settings exist simultaneously. In the same way that (as discussed in the previous chapter) Green Grass dismantles conventional approaches to temporality and spatialization in a manner that undermines the distinction between disparate times and places, in Medicine River Will experiences his new and old environments -- and registers the demands of his multiple communities -- concurrently. The result is a "plurality of vision [that] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (Said 55). Will's negotiation of his

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[25] While Hicks here discusses the border primarily in binary terms, elsewhere she acknowledges the multiplicity of cultures and reference codes that make up the border space. See, for example, her "Jumpcut" exchange between "Anglo monocultural feminist" and "Chicana multicultural nonfeminist maid," pp. 121-22.

relationship to the Medicine River community is thus informed by the subject-positions that emerge simultaneously in more than one discourse.

As other critics have noted, the multiple narratives of Medicine River are separate but interconnected, influencing one another.[26] The juxtaposition of narratives has the effect of registering an ongoing exchange between Will's personal historical past, and his reaction to the community expectations that surround him in Medicine River. These two orientations of the self recall Krupat's discussion of the "metonymic self," which is a self figured "predominantly as different and separate from other distinct individuals," and the "synecdochic self," which emphasizes "the self in relation to collective social units or groupings" (212). While Krupat presents these as alternative models, in Medicine River the two exist contrapuntally, continually inflecting each other, and with neither emerging as a dominant model of selfhood.

The result is the articulation of what Bhabha describes as a "movement in between third and first persons," in which the "third person" is the individual constructed as a reaction to cultural histories and dominant narratives (the synecdochic self), while the "first person" is the self-aware individual, the register of personal experience and specific events in history (the metonymic self). While Bhabha describes the "third person" subject as primarily constructed from the dominant society's narratives about the other -- that is, the discourses of prejudice and stereotype -- this "third person" position applies equally to

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[26] Percy Walton, for example, notes that a reading of the scene in which Will photographs Bertha's family takes on additional meaning when read in conjunction with Will's recollection of his childhood family portrait, while at the same time the childhood narrative is re-inscribed by the contemporary narrative (83).

the narratives constructed by a community in relation to its own members to the extent that they also impose external expectations and discipline, codes of behaviour and sanctions. Bhabha argues that the "minority" position -- an analogue for Hicks' "border crosser" -- emerges where these two positions exist in an unresolved, ongoing and ambivalent "proximate relation" to one another. It is not one position or the other, argues Bhabha, but "the-first-in-the-third/the one-in-the-other" that provides the ground for action (434-5).[27] This "minority" position is the one in which Will finds himself as he navigates between the roles set out for him by the Native community and the positions informed by his personal experiences in the multiple communities he inhabits.

The means by which this ongoing exchange between subject positions can form a ground for action in Medicine River is indicated when Harlen, driving Will home from a basketball tournament, insists on a detour to the Custer monument in Billings, Montana. Harlen emphasizes the relevance of the "bigger picture," conflating the unique experiences of different Native peoples: "History, Will. It's part of our history," while the unenthusiastic Will argues for greater historical specificity, "[t]he Blackfoot didn't fight Custer" (107). The account of the visit to the monument is intertwined with two other narratives: a dispute that Will has had with Louise, which is largely unacknowledged by Will but to which Harlen repeatedly draws attention; and Will's memory of his relationship with his non-Native partner Susan. The three narratives are linked by the recurrence of the message "too late." Will and Harlen arrive at the

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[27] In this the border subject is similar also to Grossberg's "nomadic subject," which is both "an articulated site and a site of ongoing articulation within its own history" (314).

monument as it is closing, too late to see it; it is too late, Will claims, to call Louise as Harlen recommends (110); and Will recalls his discovery of Susan's marriage, and how he "saw . . . too late" the circumstances that prompted a sudden change in his role from that of legitimate lover to that of a trespasser caught like a thief (113). The notion of "too late" is thrown into relief by the "Time Out!" -- the plea for the clock to stop, even temporarily -- that Will and Harlen imagine Custer crying during his battle. Even as the clock ticks on and Will finds himself sharing a hotel room with Harlen, having succeeded neither in seeing the monument nor in reaching Louise, the counterpoint among the various narratives enables Will to construct his own "time out" to counter the seeming inevitability of "too late."

Although he does try to contact Louise, presumably in an attempt to resolve the quarrel, Will is prevented from reaching her by a busy signal. In the paired narrative, when Will tries to call Susan to confront her, her line is similarly engaged -- "the busy signal sounding for all the world like an alarm," a warning of danger (114). In the hotel room, the narratives combine to energize a figurative re-enaction of the events of the day:

> I lay there in the dark on my side and dreamed about driving up the hill to the monument, bursting through those gates, the tires squealing, bullets flying all around me, the kid yelling for reinforcements, the phone ringing busy in my ear.
> (115)

This re-creation renders it no longer "too late" to gain admission to the Custer monument. At the same time, Will re-writes the narrative of his relationship with Susan, changing his status from trespasser to modern warrior. In the process, the "alarm" of the busy signal becomes a battle cry. This circulation of past and present recalls Bhabha's discussion of

the asynchronicity -- or "belatedness" -- that characterizes the proximate relation. It is not a matter of the first- and third-positions existing together in the "shared, synchronous temporality of present being," Bhabha argues, but rather a disjunctive movement that brings elements of the past into present consciousness (438-39).

In this scene, the different narratives feature distinct discourses that structure the "third-person" position. The fence erected around the Custer monument gives material form to the cultural barriers that demarcate historical space and validate the dominance of non-Native over Native cultures, while Harlen's insistence that Will resolve his quarrel with Louise pressures Will to conform to the role of suitor, and Will's discovery that he has broken social codes in his relationship with Susan pressures him to give up that relationship. Will's response is to bring his personal history into play in a manner that counters the one-way flow of these discourses. As the three narratives (the story of the Custer monument, the story of Will's relationship with Louise, and the story of Will's relationship with Susan) combine, the effect is to insist on the specificity of the way in which these experiences are registered in the first person. In the remembered narrative, Will recalls being made to feel like a trespasser; in the contemporary narrative, Will re-enacts this unauthorized presence, turning the battle of the Little Big Horn -- in which the Blackfoot did not fight -- into a battle at which he is himself present.

The dislocation of the "third person" agency -- what Bhabha defines as the "agency of cultural and disciplinary identity" (434) is here made possible by the subversive importing -- or smuggling -- of "first person" elements across the border between worlds to counter the received discourse. Such smuggling subverts the

authorized traffic of cultural identity, illicitly bringing in elements contrary to community expectations. As Will smuggles elements of past and present back and forth among the multiple narratives, a new narrative emerges that resonates through the space marked out by each of the others, from the "bigger picture" of cultural and political activity to the personal.

There is no single trigger or causal connection to motivate Will's re-enaction of the battle. The act "emerge[s] from a conjunction of memory, history and agency, not from [his] deliberation as a self-conscious subject," postulating a form of engagement in which there is "neither a unified subject nor a subject who thinks it is acting on its own" (Hicks 15-17). Bhabha argues that this displacement is the particular power of the "minority," or border, position. Linking agency with the specific historical circumstances that are registered in the "first person" opens the way for agency derived from a source other than the subject-positions constructed by social expectations and institutional demands. Since each action is informed by unique, ungeneralizeable experiences, linking agency more closely with the particular experiences of the "first-person" perspective also has the effect of shifting the issue of individual agency away from a philosophical one, "what is identity?" to a performative one, "what does an identity do?" (Bhabha 433-4). By insisting on retaining elements of a usable past, the identity that performs in Medicine River forges a close link with memory. What is at stake here is not, however, a matter of remembering or returning to a Native heritage, but rather a more complex importing of events from the past into the present.

The possibility of recuperating historical Native traditions is considered in the expedition prompted by Harlen's discovery of an old canoe at a garage sale. When Harlen encourages the idea of a canoe trip, the exchange between Harlen and Will immediately foregrounds the question of tradition:

> "Hey, I've been wanting to go canoeing. It would be fun. You know, you and me out on a river. Just like our grandparents used to do."
> "The Blackfoot didn't use canoes."
> "Sure they did. Some of the world's greatest canoeists" (241).

Whether or not canoeing is a traditional Blackfoot activity remains unresolved, and the possibility of rediscovering a foundation for action within Native traditions is consequently undermined. This ambivalence is compounded as Will and Harlen start off lost and behind schedule, putting their canoe trip on uncertain and unfamiliar ground. Their intent is to put in at one bridge and paddle to the next, where Louise and South Wing await with a picnic lunch, but the plan goes awry when the rapids prove beyond Will and Harlen's skill and the trip becomes a turbulent, uncontrolled movement along the river from its intersection with one bridge to another. The intended voyage ultimately becomes a different kind of trip as Will and Harlen are forced to wade through the river to retrieve the battered canoe:

> As Harlen and I pulled the canoe along, I could feel the large round stones under my feet, could hear the hollow roll they made as they rocked beneath me . . .
> The river swirled around us, sucking at our feet, flashing at our legs as we went. Harlen began singing a forty-niner, beating out the rhythm on the gunwhales. And we brought the canoe back through the dark water and into the light. (247-8)

The stones beneath Will's feet are audible but remain unseen, like the stones contained within Martha Old Crow's rattle, and they provide a ground for the new trip in which Will finds himself engaged. The transformation of the canoe trip, itself occupying the space between the bridges, denies the possibility of a controlled progression, and instead offers a fragmented and unmanageable movement.

This non-linear and fragmented movement is emblematic of that which takes place at the border between self and other. Each crossing of the border effects a fragmentation of the subject as a result of the contradictory demands of individual experience and community expectations. Border agency requires the deployment of memory, not to recapture the intended trajectory of the linear voyage into past or future, but rather to counter this fragmentation. The possibility for such a reconstruction is thematized in the closing scenes of the text.

The final chapter of Medicine River is typically read as offering some kind of closure and resolution. The contemporary narrative in this chapter relates the events surrounding Will's Christmas in Medicine River, and also recounts a fight between two other characters, David and Ray, over a jacket. Trying to make sense of the conflict between David and Ray, Will recalls a phrase of his mother's: "My mother would just shrug and say, 'That's the way things are'" (252). This phrase, which operates as an excuse for acquiescence and non-engagement, enters Will's mind also as a response to his own loneliness on Christmas day (259), but Will opts instead for two separate but linked courses of action. These are the only two significant acts he undertakes throughout all of

the contemporary narrative that are not directly or indirectly prompted either by Harlen or by one of the other community members.

The first of these acts is his apology to his brother James for having lost a ball in the river years ago, when the boys were young. This event, which forms the contrapuntal remembered narrative in this chapter, describes how the ball was lost "in the dark water" (255). Will's apology serves to bring it back, like the canoe, "through the dark water and into the light" (248). The gesture highlights a responsibility to bring past events back into the light of day, to bring them forward for examination, a responsibility that is directly at odds with the notion of accepting circumstances as they are. This responsibility contrasts with James' acquiescence to the social pressures that keep him trapped in "Bentham Reserve," and suggests that insistence upon making evident the personal "first-person" register of experiences can serve as a means of moving beyond the externally-constructed subject position. This in turn sets the stage for the second of Will's acts, in which he wraps up his gift of a top for South Wing.

As Marcel Mauss notes, the economy of gift-giving plays an integral role in binding and also in separating communities; the "perpetual interchange of spiritual matter" associated with the giving and receiving of gifts connects members of a community in a relationship of mutual obligations (12), while the act of giving itself distinguishes giver from receiver (71). This doubled positioning of the gift operates in the circumstances surrounding Will's gift to South Wing to suggest that Will has found a place for responsible action that does not emerge from complete immersion within the community, nor entirely from outside it. The top, wrapped in blue with a yellow ribbon,

recalls Will's mother's letters, which were wrapped in blue velvet and tied with yellow yarn, and which contained Will's father's unfulfilled promise of a top for Christmas (9). When Will tries the top it makes a "sweet, humming sound, the pitch changing as it spun" (260), recalling also the blue and yellow rattle which was accompanied by Martha's song. In an echo of Martha's instructions to "learn that song," Will remembers a "song" from his own past as he sets the musical top spinning. Will's act of taping up the top to put it into circulation reverses his childhood act of taping his mother's letters to the bottom of her chest in an effort to keep them hidden from view, in the same way that Will's apology to James serves to bring to light what had been lost. The gift of the top thus emerges from a confluence of events from Will's personal past with the cultural context embodied by Martha.

At the same time, the gesture remains incomplete. "South Wing was going to love it," Will reflects, but the text ends before the gift is given (261). The indeterminate ground on which the exchange takes place projects the act into the future; as Bhabha argues, "the unfulfilled or unsatisfied present becomes the site of a certain futurity" (447). In this way the memory of the past, itself a negotiation among many pasts, is carried forward to the future to counter the demands and impositions of the discourses that structure conflicting "third-party" identities on either side of cultural borders. Rather than simply accepting "the way things are," border agency arises from an active

examination of the past that enables an act of *re-membering*, by which memory operates to counter the fragmenting, or dis-membering, effect of border-crossing.[28]

Readings of Medicine River typically find in it a triumph of the "third person" over the "first," in which Will's reconciliation takes place "not with the past, but with the community itself" (Williams 129; see also Womack). In fact, a more complex manoeuvre takes place over the course of the text. By re-membering the past into the present, Will undertakes a redefinition of "community" such that it can include the simultaneity of the multiple communities in which he operates. The perpetual circulation in the interstices between self and other enables an evasion of fixed subject positions in favour of a "subject-as-circuit" (Bhabha 444), capable of smuggling elements of various subject positions back and forth across the border between past and present, and between Native and non-Native communities. It is within this circuit, emerging in the negotiation between multiple communities, that Will locates a ground for responsible action.

This smuggling, or "sneak[ing] around," is echoed at a structural level within the text. The separate text-pieces that make up the story cycle themselves sneak around, influencing each other and requiring the reader to read back and forth through the text, from past to present. Like the subject that emerges within it, the text maintains an appearance of unity that belies an internal fragmentation requiring the reader's

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[28] This "re-membering" is akin to Toni Morrison's notion of the operation of "rememory" -- that is, the act of bringing the past into present experience as a critical element of agential development. The chief difference is that for Morrison "rememory" is an interpersonal and even a communal activity (see, for example, Rushdy on the role of rememory in constructing healing relationships), while here the re-membering at work here is an individual task.

participation in an act of re-membering. As the reader learns to negotiate the spaces between the stories, she is invited to participate in the act of border-crossing figured within the text. This has the effect of adding Medicine River as a fourth place: the book itself (which is, like the letters, the top and the rattle, wrapped in a blue and yellow cover).

The multiple locations of Medicine River serve to draw attention to the possibility for medicine or healing, linking it both to the act of border crossing and to the active participation of the reader. The unique position of the border crosser enables a form of perception that is informed simultaneously by reference codes emerging from across multiple borders, and that serves to destabilize the borders between past and present, memory and action. Just as Coyote slips her skin and "sneak[s] around" to "bite them toes" and interrupt the story, so too the manoeuvres of the border subject derail the narrative of progressive integration, instead urging the reader across the border. This interruption serves to startle and "make you jump," forcing the reader to adopt an alternative mode of perception. The connections between this perception and King's notion of healing -- or "fixing" -- are explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE
MAKE YOU JUMP:
Transforming History in "Coyote Columbus," "Totem" and Green Grass, Running Water

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"History may have 'happened' somewhere, but it issues as recorded 'event,' as text," notes post-colonial theorist Helen Tiffin (173). This observation has the dual implication that the "happening" of history is inaccessible except as it is mediated by textuality, and that the "event" as recorded can only be a discursive construct. Some happenings go unrecorded and disappear entirely from the text of history, while others are interpreted and represented in a manner that reinforces the codes and preconceptions of the recording culture. Competing histories are ignored or silenced in order to make the past available only "in a touristified and anthropologized form" (During 47) that both valorizes and validates the agenda of the colonizer. Through this process the centre claims the right to define history and produces, in marginalized cultures, a condition of "historylessness" (Slemon 158).[29] The problem for those excluded from the dominant narrative thus becomes one of finding a means to articulate and legitimize a history not controlled by the colonizer.

This problem is a central concern of King's work. Again and again, King sets his characters to the task of "fixing the world," a task that is always closely connected

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[29] Claude Denis comments on how this condition is reflected in academic disciplines: "Western peoples have 'history,' which is studied in History Departments, while other peoples have 'culture,' which is studied in Anthropology Departments" (86). See also Pratt on the ways in which the textual strategies of ethnographic description reinforce this "historylessness" by equating what the studied culture *does* with what they *always do* and thereby relegating the subject culture to history while denying its historicity (63-67).

to story-telling and a challenge of historical narrative.[30] The project is not, however, one of "telling the other side of the story" by rewriting the text that mediates between the happening and the reader in order to present a Native version of historical events that counters received historical narrative. Indeed, King makes it impossible to establish an "other" history by deploying an alternative narrative. Instead he undertakes a form of translation that undermines the distinction between past and present and leads to a new mode of perceiving the happening of history itself. By figuring history as an ongoing performance rather than as an irretrievable happening, King's work invites the reader to become engaged in the translating act. An examination of the short stories "Totem" and "A Coyote Columbus Story," together with the novel Green Grass, Running Water, illustrates how the reader's participation in the juxtaposition of multiple reference codes contributes to this reformulation of history. Like Coyote's bite, these texts "make you jump," urging the reader to take on the new perspective necessary to fix the world.

The short story "Totem," which represents one of King's most straightforward engagements with historical narrative, both foregrounds the ways in which historical narrative constructs a specific world view and points to possibilities for destabilizing this concept of history. In this story Walter Hooton, an art gallery director, tries to cope with a series of totem poles that sprout through the floor of the gallery and disrupt

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[30] While all narratives about history can be considered "historical narratives," throughout this chapter I use the term to refer to history as it is recorded and disseminated -- to borrow Tiffin's term, the text that issues from the happening. Similarly, I use "happening" to refer to the actual moment of an occasion in history, and "event" to refer to that moment as it is interpreted and textualized. Thus a happening becomes an event which is represented in a historical narrative.

its staff with their noises. When the receptionist first complains that the totem pole is disruptive and unsuitable, Hooton initially assures her that -- while the gallery might once have featured a totem pole -- there now "wasn't a totem pole in the entire place including the basement and storage room" (13). After he is forced to acknowledge the presence of the pole, Walter tries unsuccessfully to trace it in the gallery's records before instructing his employees to move the pole to the basement. "The problem," Walter explains, "is that this totem pole is not part of the show, and we need to move it someplace else" (14).

When the men attempt to move the pole, however, they discover that it grows "right through the floor," much to the surprise of one of the employees, Larue: "'It doesn't make any sense,' he said . . . I was here when they built this building, and I don't remember them pouring the floor around a totem pole" (15). The men cut down the pole with a chainsaw but by morning a new pole has appeared in its place. The staff's initial curiosity is replaced by hostility, as Hooton orders his employees to "get rid of it" (16). One after another, totem poles are cut down by the museum staff, until there is no space left in the basement storage room. Finally, an employee suggests that if they ignore the most recent pole it may simply go away, and so the pole stays in the corner of the gallery.

"Totem" can be read as an allegory of the history of Canadian state responses to the presence of aboriginal peoples. The gallery serves as a metaphor for the assertion of a cultural territory that displays only approved images. The "contemporary" art permitted here is a series of sanitized landscapes devoid of socio-historical or political

content, while the concrete foundation of the gallery itself recalls the "*terra nullius*" doctrine that denied the prior inhabitation of the new territory and grounded the act of colonization.[31] The reactions of Hooton and his staff to the totem poles rehearse the empire's responses to the presence of aboriginal peoples: first denial, followed by an initial curiosity that gives way to animosity. The final solution arrived at by the museum staff -- keeping the poles sequestered in the basement, away from public view, in the hopes that they will simply disappear -- encapsulates the historical state policy of confining aboriginal peoples to Indian reserves on the assumption that they would similarly vanish.

The short story also points to the "(mis)recognition" that characterizes the moment of cross-cultural contact (During 41). The gallery staff is unable to comprehend or even to represent the sounds made by the totem pole. Beebe claims it "sounds like gargling," while Walter argues "it doesn't sound at all like gargling. It sounds more like chuckling." Larue thinks it is "sort of like laughing" while Jimmy, recalling an in-flight movie, thinks it might be a Druidic chant. The staff's efforts to make the sound fit into their own codes of recognition, like Walter's efforts to locate the totem within the Museum's exhibit record, reflects the imperial exercise of assimilating new cultures into the empire's own values, making them recognizable only through its own codes and reading "the 'other' in the ideological mirror of [its] own

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[31] In the people-less landscapes that comprise an exhibit of "contemporary Canadian art," the gallery exhibits the "ornamental vacuum" Toni Morrison finds with respect to the presence of black people in American literature -- that is, an absence against which the presence and aesthetic discourse of the dominant culture defines itself (11).

metaphysical system" (Slemon 162). The physical and administrative structures of the gallery itself -- including the showroom, the basement storage room, the Director, staff and receptionist -- reflect the ways in which power is deployed to construct and maintain cultural identity.

The effect of the allegorical structure is to project "received images of history . . . into an implied level of meaning that runs in parallel to the literal level of the text" (Slemon 159). One such "received image" is the figure of the receptionist, Beebe Hill. The historical Ruth Beebe Hill was the author of Hanta Yo, a novel originally published in 1979 and marketed as an "authentic" transcription of a story dictated to the author by a Navaho mystic. Hill claimed to have been entrusted with the story in order that she might educate non-Natives about Native world views; the result, according to King, is "an absolutely awful and stupid B Western" (Rooke 70) that perpetuates colonial stereotypes of aboriginal people. As a receptionist, Beebe monitors entry into the gallery and speaks on behalf of its patrons regarding what is and is not acceptable within the gallery. This figure is interpolated between the reader and the historical work of Beebe Hill, who presented herself as an author with uniquely privileged access to an authentic aboriginal perspective and who chose to represent aboriginality in a manner that suited the needs of the colonizing culture.

"Totem" juxtaposes the two parallel narratives of the history of colonization and the mis-representation provided by Hill. This interaction between narratives is a characteristic of the allegorical text, which insists that "fiction, or writing, mediates history," and that the historical material must "be *read*, and read in *adjacency* to a

fictional re-enactment of it" (Slemon 160). The result, Slemon argues, is to bring into play "two separate 'lenses of language,'" enabling a "depth perception" that "refocuses our concept of history as fixed monument into a concept of history as the creation of a discursive practice" and opens history to the possibility of transformation (160-61).

In King's short story, however, a third narrative runs counter to the parallel fictional and historical narratives. The image of a totem pole springing unwanted into the gallery is a direct reversal of another element of Canadian history: the state-sanctioned theft of aboriginal cultural artefacts for display in museum exhibits. As the central figure in the text, the totem -- an integral element in the social and political structures of many aboriginal peoples -- represents a narrative that runs counter to the doubled allegorical narrative. A reading of this text requires not simply focusing two lenses on a single field, as Slemon proposes, but rather "a model that will allow us to look in two directions simultaneously" (Hicks xxix). From the point of intersection among the multiple narratives, the reader looks in one direction at the reference codes of Canadian history, and in another at the reference codes of Native history. The incommensurability of the two codes is represented in the text by the juxtaposition of visual and oral codes; as the totem sings in the gallery, the sounds settle "like fine dust on the floor" (17).

"Totem" thus points to the need for what Hicks terms "holographic" or "multidimensional" perception, a perception that emerges, like a holograph, from the interaction of separate "beams" or reference codes. The "monocultural real" -- in this case, the history of the Empire as seen by the Empire itself -- appears to be structurally

sound and fully determined, in the same way that the gallery appears to its employees to be solidly built upon a concrete foundation. The same narrative seen from a different perspective, however, is revealed as permeable, in the same way that the concrete floor proves immaterial to the totem poles. In the "multidimensional" model advanced by Hicks, meaning is produced through a sampling of two or more reference codes in a manner that records not a unified object but rather the connotations of the object in more than one culture (Hicks xxix). The "multidimensional" perspective embodied by the appearance of the totem in the gallery does not overtly dismantle but simply renders irrelevant the fixed walls and concrete floor of the museum, and bypasses the filtering authority of the receptionist's desk.

While "Totem" foregrounds the problems inherent in the representation of history and indicates some of the strategies King employs to destabilize such representations, the short story "A Coyote Columbus Story" brings the reader into a direct engagement with the multidimensional text. The story is recounted by an unnamed first-person narrator whom Coyote visits on her way to a party for Christopher Columbus.[32] "That is the one who found Indians," says Coyote. "That is the one who found America" (121). The story was first published in 1992,[33] indicating

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[32] The same narrator appears in a number of King's other stories -- sometimes in conversation with Coyote, as here or "The One About Coyote Going West," and sometimes in direct conversation with the reader, as in "One Good Story, That One" and "Magpies." In both of the latter the narrator makes reference to "my friend Napioa." Napioa is the principal creator in Blackfoot creation stories (King 1986, p. 84). The relationship establishes this narrator as a partner in the creation process, and emphasizes the link King makes between story-telling and this process.

[33] "A Coyote Columbus Story" was first published as a children's story in 1992. A revised version appears in the collection One Good Story, That One. In my discussion here I refer to the latter edition.

that the "party" to which Coyote is going is the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" of the Americas. This celebration -- which was staged in various forms across North America -- is an example of the way in which historical narrative operates as a monument to culture, simultaneously reinforcing a national identity based on a mythology of exploration, and denying a voice to Native groups who have little to celebrate on the anniversary of Columbus' arrival.

When the narrator suggests that Coyote is telling one of her "bent" stories, Coyote defends the authority of the historical narrative, prompting a debate between the two:

> Christopher Columbus didn't find America, I [the narrator] says. Christopher Columbus didn't find Indians, either. You got a tail on that story.
>
> Oh no, says Coyote. I read it in a book.
>
> Must have been a Coyote book, I says.
>
> No, no, no, no, says Coyote. It was a history book. Big red one. All about how Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue looking for America and the Indians (121).

Coyote's insistence leads the narrator to promise to "do this story right" and "tell what really happened" (121-22). The narrator tells Coyote a story about Old Coyote, who creates Indians in order to have friends with whom to play ball. When the Indians tire of the ball game (and, in particular, Old Coyote's habit of changing the rules as they play), Old Coyote inadvertently creates Columbus. In turn, Columbus kidnaps the Indians in order to sell them in Europe while Old Coyote covers her face to laugh, thinking it all a joke. And that, says the narrator, is "the end of the story" (126).

The story highlights the "kidnapping" by Columbus of a number of indigenous people, a central occurrence not recorded in the history book. At the same time, the text suggests that the "real" story of Columbus' arrival cannot be revealed through the articulation of an alternative historical narrative. By "ending" at the time of Columbus' first visit to the Americas, where the official historical narrative "begins," the story of Old Coyote inverts the narrative presented by the history book. The central event -- the moment of contact between the European and the Native cultures -- still escapes representation. Coyote presses for details, but the elision remains:

> But what happened to the Indians? There was nothing in that red history book about Columbus and the Indians.
>
> Christopher Columbus sold the Indians, I says, and that one became rich and famous.
>
> Oh good, says Coyote. I love a happy ending. (126)

By turning the story of the Indians into the story of Columbus, the new narrative replicates the erasure performed by the history book, and furnishes instead only the same "happy ending." This text thus simultaneously conjures and denies the possibility of finding within alternative historical narratives the "true" stories left out of history books. In fact, over the course of the text, what was initially presented as an alternative narrative -- a story that will tell "what really happened" -- becomes something quite different.

The story begins as a Columbus story told to Coyote, but by the end has become a Coyote story about Columbus -- and, as the narrator notes, all of Coyote's stories are "bent." The reader, relying on the narrator's promise to set the historical record straight, follows a linear narrative and waits to hear the story of the Indians. At the

same time the trickster Old Coyote, following a "bent" trickster narrative, waits for the punch line of Columbus' joke. At the moment of the kidnapping, the linear narrative pursued by the reader collides with the trickster code employed by Old Coyote. The reader is tricked, left with the "bent" story as the Indians vanish from the text, while Old Coyote is caught in the linear historical narrative, unable to take back the ships she has conjured up (126). As the story twists, the reader is made to exchange reference codes with Old Coyote and finds herself, like the Indians, forced to play a game with changing rules.

This story thus undertakes to translate, rather than to represent, the historical happening of the encounter between Native people and Columbus. This strategy reflects Walter Benjamin's suggestion that translation is a matter of reconstructing intention, not one of re-expressing content. Benjamin argues that rather than seeking to convey information, the translation must "incorporate the original's mode of signification" (78).[34] The interaction of multiple codes in "Coyote Columbus" serves to frame "certain crucial interactions" in order to recreate the "social order" of the relationship between different cultures rather than to represent an event (79). The power of this mode of operation lies in its ability to resist domination. While the event that emerges in textual form from a historical happening can be challenged, rewritten or appropriated, the reconstruction of the meaning of the happening itself produces a "holographic 'real'" that

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[34] Benjamin illustrates his argument by explaining that although the two words *brot* and *pain* refer to the same object, a loaf of bread, they do not have identical connotations in the two different languages. He argues that both words "intend the same object but their modes of intention are not the same." The objective of translation, he suggests, is to reconstruct these connotations, or "modes of intention," rather than to convey the information "bread" (74).

is "less solid" and therefore less available for interpretation (Hicks xxix). Rather than presenting an alternative story, "Coyote Columbus" positions the reader at the moment of intersection among reference codes, enabling her to experience directly the dislocation effected by the moment of cross-cultural contact.

Along with this reconstruction, the act of translation performs a "supplementation" that alters both the original and the translation (Benjamin 74). This transformation is explored in more detail in King's novel Green Grass, Running Water. Here, a number of historical figures participate in the narrative. They include, for example, the poet and writer Duncan Campbell Scott, who was also a senior official in the Department of Indian Affairs in the 1900s and who was responsible for enforcing laws that banned Native cultural and political activities, and Clifford Sifton, architect of early Canadian policy regarding the development of the west (and the concomitant displacement of Native peoples to make way for development projects). The importing of these figures from the past into a contemporary narrative draws attention to the continuing impact of such policies and colonial attitudes on relations between Native and non-Native peoples today. In addition to stressing the way in which historical events reverberate in the present, however, this novel also undertakes a more complex translation of history that undermines the distinction between past and present.

Early in the novel Alberta Frank delivers a lecture to her history class on the capture and imprisonment of members of the Southern Plains tribes in the late

nineteenth century.[35] As the class studies the drawings done by the Native prisoners, Alberta encourages the students to depart from a strict recounting of facts in order to consider the lived experience of the Native captives. Her effort fails to engage the interest of her students:

> "What might we deduce from these drawings? Do they tell us anything about the people who did them or the world in which they lived?"
>
> There was a wonderful, rich silence. Alberta looked at her watch. "Well then, do you have any questions?" (20)

Among the students only Helen Mooney, seated in the front row, pays close attention to the lecture, "writing down every word Alberta uttered," and seeking clarification of details while keeping her head "glued to her notepad" (19-20). Helen's final question echoes that asked by Coyote in "Coyote Columbus:"

> "Professor Frank . . . the seventy-one Indians. The ones at Fort Marion. I was wondering."
>
> "About what?"
>
> "Well, for one thing, what happened to them?" (21)

The reader does not hear Alberta's response to Helen's question, and no direct answer is presented in the text. The question "what happened?" is, however, the axis around which Green Grass turns. Throughout the novel several different narratives are offered as potential answers to Helen's question, but each proves insufficient.

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35 The scene features a narrative reversal similar to that in the short story "Totem." In this classroom, non-Native students (among them historical figures such as Henry Dawes and Elaine Goodale, who played a key role in developing American policies with respect to the education of Native children) are required to learn about Native history. This image resonates with the history of Native children's abduction and forced attendance at residential schools where they were indoctrinated with non-Native values, the result of an educational policy directed at the "eradication of all traces of tribal identity and culture, replacing them with the commonplace knowledge and values of white civilization" (Adams 335).

Paired with the literal level of the text is a mythic narrative featuring four Native creation figures, each of whom in turn "fall[s] off the edge of the world" to move through a story from the Bible and a story from American frontier literature (from which each Native figure draws a new identity) before encountering the soldiers from American history. While the reader might expect to find in the story of these "old Indians" an account of what "really happened," the narrative replicates the story told by Alberta. In each of the mythic narrative's four cycles, the Native figure-cum-literary-character is ultimately captured and imprisoned at Fort Marion, and there is no further discussion of what happened to the prisoners. As in "Coyote Columbus," it is not the content of any one narrative but rather the interaction among narratives that points to the response to the question "what happened?"

One of the points of interaction among the various narratives is a fringed leather jacket. Early in the text, as the four Indian elders prepare to embark on their task of "fixing the world," Ishmael issues a reminder to Robinson Crusoe: "don't forget the jacket" (9). This jacket travels through the multiple narratives of the novel, appearing on George Custer in a painting depicting the Battle of the Little Big Horn in a hotel lobby (61), on the scout in the western novel that Eli reads (204), and on John Wayne in the western movie that threads through the novel and that Bursum plays on his television display. The jacket is also handed down across generations, as the Indian elders give it to Lionel -- to whom they refer only as "grandson" -- while George Morningstar inherits it from a relative. It is George who recognizes and identifies the significance of the jacket: "it's history" (192). As it circulates through the novel, the

jacket figures history as a site of exchange among past and present, and among a range of cultural codes, rather than as a unified, irretrievable event.

The Indians give the jacket to Lionel as a birthday present. Lionel is initially pleased with the gift, which feels "soft and warm" and makes him look "a little like John Wayne" (302-3), but the jacket soon begins to feel uncomfortable. Lionel's discomfort in the shrinking jacket echoes the Native prisoners' discomfort in the increasingly crowded Fort Marion prison (417). The sleeves tighten to chafe Lionel's wrists (363), recalling the manacles which, as Alberta notes in her history class, were worn by the Native prisoners (21). The jacket thus allows Lionel to share the experience of the historic prisoners in a way that Alberta's students do not. Benjamin argues the "translation marks [the original's] stage of continued life" (79); similarly, the reconstruction of the essence of the historic happening brings it into present experience.

At the same time that the translation of history undermines the distinction between past and present, the text also demonstrates how such a reconfiguration denies the possibility of representing this move through a linear narrative that could respond to the question "what happened?" When the four old Indians give Lionel the jacket it already has "a couple of holes . . . in the back" (302), but these holes are not made until later when, while Lionel watches, the Indian elders "fix" the western movie so that John Wayne goes down in a flurry of bullets, two of which pierce the jacket (322). In the same way that the concrete floor of the gallery in "Totem" is made irrelevant by the totem pole that sprouts through it, the laws of linear time and linear narrative are

sidestepped by the interaction among past and present. The causal relationship between act and effect is abandoned in favour of an extension of "the agitated Now" (Bloch 35) that renders impossible the task of establishing the uniquely ordered reality necessary for linear narrative.

While Alberta's student Helen seeks a history lesson that is a strict transmission of information -- what Benjamin terms "the hallmark of bad translations" (69) -- the text reveals an alternative approach to history. Near the end of the novel Coyote, in conversation with the narrator, tries once more to formulate a response to Helen's question:

> "So that's what happened," says Coyote.
> "That's what always happens," I says. (397)

The narrator's reply is not a resigned acknowledgement, but rather a correction: the answer lies not in asking what happened, but rather in re-discovering what happens. This reformulation echoes Benjamin's distinction between "information" and "the story." Information, Benjamin argues, is fixed: it takes its meaning from a specific context and therefore can have only a fleeting relevance. In contrast, the essence or meaning of the happening -- what Benjamin terms the "story" (and which can be equated with the reconstruction of "crucial interactions" involved in Benjamin's model of translation) -- never succumbs to a final, fixed interpretation and thus "preserves its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (86). By recreating what happens rather than telling what happened, King's work contradicts the notion of the

present as inevitably determined by an irretrievable past, and presents history instead as an ongoing process of negotiation and exchange, an act rather than a record.[36]

At the same time as it draws history out of the past into tangible presence, the act of translation opens the way to a new form of perception and understanding. Benjamin argues that translation must be viewed as a supplementation rather than representation of meaning; the act requires the reader to "expand and deepen his own language by means of the foreign language" (81). In the same way, the juxtaposition of multiple reference codes involved in recreating the happening of history urges the reader to adopt a "multidimensional" perspective and to learn new reference codes in order to participate in the reconstruction of the happening.

The process of reconfiguring history from a mode of mimetic representation to one of multidimensional reconstruction is illustrated near the end of Green Grass following Lionel's encounter with George at the Sun Dance ceremony. After Lionel returns the jacket to George and subsequently helps to foil George's attempt to photograph the Sun Dance, the Indian elders indicate that their work to "help" Lionel is complete:

> "Well, grandson," said the Lone Ranger, "that's about as much as we can do for you. How do you feel?"
>
> . . .
>
> Lionel looked at the old Indians. "That's it?"

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[36] This process also achieves the objective of the "interfusional" text to link oral and written literatures. Walter Ong notes that the translation from oral performance to written text results in an imposition of closure and self-sufficiency on the performed events. By presenting history as performative rather than as representative, Green Grass denies the "noetic closure" of narrative (Ong 132) in favour of the immediacy of the oral performance.

> "You bet," said the Lone Ranger.
> "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" (387).

What Lionel might tell his grandchildren remains unclear: that he helped to defend the Sun Dance and thus gained a greater awareness of his Native heritage; that he had an opportunity to try on George Custer's history and learned that it didn't fit; that he spent an afternoon with his uncle Eli and decided to return home, or perhaps to go to back to school -- all of these possibilities, and more, are offered in the text, but none provides a satisfactory answer to the question "what happened?". The only way to produce a coherent, unified, linear narrative from the text of Green Grass is to ignore large portions of the story and to use assumptions about other elements in order to fill in the holes -- precisely the strategy that is employed by a dominant culture constructing its own history.[37] In short, any single narrative line will ultimately produce only Tiffin's "recorded 'event'" and consequently will efface the happening itself. As Green Grass makes clear, it is impossible to say what happened except by recreating the meaning of the event itself by reproducing the multiplicity of codes at work.

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[37] Such efforts to find a unified narrative line are evident in critical responses to Green Grass, and reflect the ways in which cultural assumptions determine the interpretive act. See Sarris for a more detailed exploration of the ways in which such assumptions "frame the texts and experiences of another culture" (169). In this instance, of course, the assumptions at play are as much about narrative (and specifically the assumption that there must *be* a narrative) as about Native culture.

In this scene the question "what happened?" is posed again, this time in a manner that engages the reader directly. The reader is not, however, "inside" the event. The happening itself is left undetermined and is therefore not witnessed by the reader. This displacement is, Hicks argues, a strategy of the border text that causes the reader to become "aware of her own positionality" with respect to the happening (47). As Coyote's bite disrupts the linear narrative, the reader is made to "jump." This leap forces the reader across the border from her traditional stance inside the event to a "position of marginality" from which it becomes clear that her own reference codes are not adequate to an understanding of the happening. The reader must, instead, "hold multiple strands simultaneously" (Hicks 68), becoming aware of reference codes that differ from her own. The moments of apparent incommensurability between the various narrative possibilities point to the need for the reader to adopt a new perspective informed simultaneously by multiple sets of reference codes, and from which the limitations and closures imposed by a monocultural perspective can be identified and re-opened. Poised in the moment of the happening, the reader has an opportunity to experience "how" history happens rather than "what" happened.

In "Coyote Columbus," "Totem" and Green Grass, the impossibility of determining exactly "what" happens reinforces the absence of a transcendent meaning to be recuperated by the reader. Instead, these works argue for the reader's participation in a performance of history rather than examination of history as a closed, narrative event. The effect is to emphasize the *presence* of history, both in the grammatical sense and in the sense of being present. By insisting on the reader's

presence at a present moment defined by the intersection of multiple perspectives -- in short, history in the making -- these texts urge the reader to participate in an examination of her assumptions in relation to the production of meaning. The reader's acceptance of her responsibility to participate in this task of making history is the key to King's concept of "fixing the world" and the starting point for the process of understanding enabled by his work.

EPILOGUE
STARTING SMALL

Gloria Anzaldúa opens Borderlands/La Frontera with the observation that "the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other" (1987, *i*). Of particular note is her use of the word "edge" as a transitive verb. The borderlands are not simply a place where cultures meet, but a place where cultures *edge* -- edge past or around one another, seek to edge one another out, or perhaps set one another on edge. The borderlands are not the quiet spaces between crowds but rather the jostling, shoving, unsteady ground among bodies in constant motion. This ground offers no stable footing for communication or collaboration.

Anzaldua's insistence on the physical presence of the borderlands also serves to emphasize that the borderlands exist not only in discourse. The borderlands are real spaces with social, economic, political and ecological dimensions, and they exert material effects on the lives of their inhabitants. The borderlands are also, by definition, the sites of political engagement. They are the points at which different cultures, ideologies, and objectives collide and wrestle one another.

Critical responses to King's work typically overlook these crucial features of the border spaces between Native and non-Native cultures. Instead, these responses seek a stable ground for reflection and imaginative revision, on the assumption that this can then lead to cross-cultural understanding and reconciliation. Such approaches establish King's texts either as beacons lighting the way to a truth located within an existing cultural tradition or as bridges that provide a shared space between cultures upon which to construct a new cultural tradition. Neither approach accomodates the dynamic or material

nature of the borderlands and, as a result, these readings ultimately produce only the *mis*-understanding explored in my Introduction. Any understanding or reconciliation is effected at the level of the text alone.

My own exploration of King's work began with a question: what kind of understanding can be enabled by a text that denies any easy avenue for exchange between cultures? At the same time, my experience as a negotiator grappling with cross-cultural issues in a political context caused me to return throughout my work to a second question: how might this understanding operate in the material world beyond the text? The examination in the forgoing chapters of the three-part manoeuvre undertaken by King's fiction indicates how this strategy establishes an ethic of understanding that not only has relevance for critical explorations of border literatures but also offers a framework for examining and transforming interactions at other kinds of borders.

The first element of King's strategy is to insist on the border, rather than to blur or dismantle it. Works such as Green Grass, Running Water counter one set of reference codes with another so that a border space emerges from the points of incommensurability between the codes employed by different cultures. Such points of incommensurability between reference codes may arise in different ways. The maps that appear within the novel, like the map that the reader might try to construct of the novel, are rendered meaningless when they encounter reference codes that exceed the normative codes of cartography. The objectives of the various tourists who appear in the novel, in contrast, are defeated not by reference codes external to the culture of the tourist but rather by the codes that the tourist him- or herself has internalized. Within the novel, the tourist's

preoccupation with a personal narrative causes him or her to accept as authentic an image of the Other which is simply a re-presentation of the tourist's own prior assumptions. The touristic reader who finds in Green Grass a representation of an "authentic" Native culture similarly falls victim to this fallacy.

This displacement of reference codes has a dual effect. It allows the Other to evade the colonizing pressure of the dominant culture in its various manifestations, and it also brings into sharper relief the clash of reference codes among cultures. As these edges emerge, the touristic reader becomes more aware of the application of her own reference codes and, perhaps, becomes better able to see where they conceal or fail to account for other ways of perceiving and engaging with the world. Such awareness is crucial in the material world of cross-cultural exchanges. Even in circumstances where different cultures are working together to establish a ground for understanding -- as, for example, in the negotiations discussed in the Introduction -- points of incommensurability remain. This can mean that certain events or perspectives are simply not perceived at all by one group in the discussion, or that the source of a dispute may not be where it appears to be. The assumption that the border between cultures has been dissolved will produce only a temporary and illusory understanding. Instead, King's ethic of understanding relies on an acceptance that there are elements that do not and may never yield to our desire to understand another culture.

The second part of the strategy embedded in King's work also disrupts the conventional structures against which individuals define their relationship to the world. These texts complicate the notion of "home" and belonging, displacing the notion of a

singular, unified subject in favour of a perpetual movement among subject positions. This strategy is evident in Medicine River, which highlights the narrator Will's complex and ambivalent relationships with family and community. As Will resists the pressures that urge him towards integration into a single community, he carves out a space of identification in an ongoing movement between his "first person" subject that is the register of material experience, and his various "third person" subject positions constructed by the conflicting demands and expectations of different communities.

This movement establishes the border subject as both insider and outsider at once, capable of registering simultaneously the different demands of distinct communities. The continual movement from one subject position to another enables the border subject to evade some of the pressures that construct and limit the possibilities for agency within any one community. At the same time, this movement opens the way for the border inhabitant to smuggle elements from one subject position to another in order to overturn these pressures and transform the border into a productive ground for action.

At first glance, such a position appears to limit rather than enhance possibilities for political engagement in the world beyond the text. In a practical sense, all political action, including the negotiation of relationships among different cultures, entails a degree of stasis: a political agent must stake out its ground and identify its positions and constituents if there is to be any possibility of sustaining a political agenda. This ground is primarily the space of the "third-person" identity, the identity that belongs to and is regulated by the expectations of a community or interest group. Attention to the "third-person" identity alone, however, leads to an illusory stability that can be the ground for

only a temporary understanding between cultures. Cross-cultural understanding requires a re-examination of the social codes of diverse cultures in order to identify the ways in which they are registered in the "first person," at the level of individual, material experiences. King's strategy requires the reader to replicate the experience of the border crosser, involving her own "first person" in this re-examination.

In order to grasp the subtleties of texts such as Medicine River or Green Grass, the reader must relinquish the narrative of progressive integration into a unified "home." As the reader imports meaning from one narrative within a text to another, or from one set of reference codes to another, she begins to adopt a position of creative agency derived not from within a single cultural context but rather located along the shifting sand-bar that both connects and divides multiple communities. Instead of offering the reader a cultural go-between (such as Donaldson's "cultural metaphor" mixed-blood, discussed in the Introduction) who can serve as a medium for education and explanation about the traditions of another culture, King's writing forces the reader herself into the borderlands. Like Will climbing up the bridge over Medicine River from below, the reader must invert the notion of a bridge between cultures in order to tackle it from a new angle.

This alternative perspective is central to the third element of King's strategy, which follows from the displacement of reference codes and subjectivity effected by the first two elements. Much of King's work is concerned with challenging history and, in particular, with questioning the validity of historical narrative as an avenue for understanding between cultures. By making it clear that an understanding of "what really happened" cannot be achieved through the deployment of any single narrative, and by

undermining the concept of a uniquely ordered reality, texts such as "Totem," "A Coyote Columbus Story" and Green Grass point to the need to adopt a multidimensional or holographic perspective that can reproduce the interaction among cultures. These texts re-enact rather than relate history, urging the reader to experience the dislocation that characterizes cross-cultural contact and also to participate directly in the work of reconstructing meaning -- the task King links to the larger project of "fixing the world" -- by drawing on multiple narratives.

The effect of the holographic perception is to shift attention away from the specifics of a particular moment in the interaction between cultures and towards the inter-relationship among reference codes that underlies and produces this moment. In physical science, this would be described as attending to the *vector* rather than the *scalar* qualities of the moment; that is, attending to the momentum and trajectories of forces rather than to the form that results from the interaction of these forces at a particular moment in time. Attention to the ways in which present patterns of exchange emerge from the ongoing interactions among reference codes -- including communal and individual motivations, desires, inhibitions, histories and world views -- has the effect of enabling both current and historical events to act as real and present forces in the act of generating meaning. This undermining of the distinction between past and present is not simply a matter of an imaginative revision or discursive transformation. It is an approach to understanding that emphasizes the need to replicate the relationships among cultures rather than simply to transmit information from one to the other. Central to this project is a shift in emphasis

from the question of what we might learn to the broader problem of how we generate meaning.

While the first element of King's strategy establishes the evasive manoeuvre that points to a source of meaning beyond that generated by a single set of reference codes, the second element proposes an alternative ground for action that can resist domination by such codes. In the third element, meaning and action unite: the act of understanding among cultures is revealed as an ongoing project of generating meaning from events both past and present, and from across multiple borders. In this way, King's writing emphasizes both the dynamics and the materiality of the edgy, crowded space that is the borderlands, and ultimately reconfigures the task of cross-cultural understanding itself from a descriptive to a performative one. Understanding, these texts maintain, is not something we have or can acquire; it is something we do, and do over, and do again until, perhaps, in some small way, we get it right. And then we do it again.

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