

INVITATION TO INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE:
EXPLORING THE HUMOUR OF
THOMAS KING AND LEE MARACLE

by

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ABSTRACT

James Tully calls our modern age "intercultural," and, in particular, the modern Canadian experience, which suggests the necessity of interaction among segments of contemporary Canadian society that previously may have existed in comparative isolation. The intercultural literary scene in Canada produces authors from many different backgrounds, and requires readers who are willing and able to appreciate various voices. Specifically, literature written by Native-Canadian authors can present challenges to non-Native readers, including invitations for intercultural exchange and interaction. Humour, as a significant part of Native-Canadian culture that is yet under-explored in North American criticism to date, can be considered as part of these invitations.

This thesis examines the use of humour in the writings of Thomas King and Lee Maracle: explicitly within the contexts of their respective works, and implicitly as part of their very different invitations to intercultural dialogue. King's writing is "funny," emanating from linguistic manipulation of English and Native tongues, as well as from a sense of humour that he portrays as specific to Native-Canadians. King laughs at both Native and white cultures, and in so doing suggests an approach to Native-white relations that focuses on the equality between the two cultures. Maracle's writing, however, is predominantly serious and intense. Her Native characters' humour binds them together in survival, and helps them to cope with the oppressions of white culture. Maracle invites readers to examine Native humour as part of a value system that can offer an alternative to the faulty structures of white culture.

Through their respective methods of story telling both authors invite non-Native readers to listen, to think, and to adjust their cultural perspectives, something that they and Tully fully consider an essential step in social progress within our culturally diverse country.

Introduction

In his recent work, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity*, James Tully promotes "a philosophy and practice of...continuous conciliation in dialogue - an offer which just might bring peace" within contemporary Canadian society (xv). Tully suggests that

[n]ot only do cultures overlap geographically and come in a variety of types. Cultures are also densely interdependent in their formation and identity. They exist in complex historical processes of interaction with other cultures. (10-11)

"The modern age," he says, "is intercultural rather than multicultural" (10). If this is true, then the literature of this modern age, as a product of its cultures, is also intercultural to a greater or lesser degree, and presents a variety to its readers that may not have existed decades ago. If, as Tully suggests, cultures are in fact "interdependent," then readers who wish to be well acquainted with today's literature must engage with the work of authors of various cultures. This process, however, may present challenges to readers trying to approach literature with which they are unfamiliar.

Tully suggests that verbal negotiation, which includes trying to understand another's voice, must involve careful listening: in fact, "the primary practical ability is not

speaking well but,... listening well" (xv). This statement can also be related to reading literature different from one's own: the most important ability may well be to learn to negotiate through "listening" to the author's voice. "[I]ntercultural 'common' ground," says Tully, is "the labyrinth composed of the overlap, interaction and negotiation of cultures over time" (14). The literature of our modern age may be considered as an intercultural labyrinth through which readers may find their way by listening, thinking, and then taking appropriate responsive action. Tully believes that different cultural voices can meet and reach a new level of understanding: that they can engage in productive intercultural dialogue. Agreement with this statement is the foundation upon which this thesis has been written.

The work of Native-Canadian authors plays a significant, if still marginalized, role in modern Canadian literature. Thomas King, part-Cherokee and an academic who has written extensively about Native life and issues in both Canada and the United States, and Lee Maracle, Métis-Salish and a feminist and activist, both write from a consciousness of what it means to be Native and therefore outside the mainstream culture. Their approaches to, and uses of humour, however, are very different. This thesis will

explore ways in which their humour relates to the invitation to intercultural dialogue implicit in their work.

Historically, non-Native writers have frequently misrepresented Native culture. Daniel Francis discusses many of the contexts in which this has occurred, including the popular image of the "cigar store wooden Indian": the stoic individual who is serious and long-suffering, but never funny, because "Indians have no sense of humour" (85). This depiction, according to Francis, replaced some of the earlier, more negative portrayals of Native people as wild and untameable, but it still serves as an example of absolute misrepresentation.

Humour as an established feature of Native culture, and therefore of its literature, has in fact been acknowledged by several authors. Vine Deloria, Jr. suggests, for example, that humour is often used by Native people as a mechanism to cope with life and its problems: "The more desperate the problem, the more humour is directed to describe it." Humour, he says, is "a regenerative tool [that] balances an otherwise tragic vision and provides hope for future opposition against oppression" (Jannetta 62). Both King and Maracle use humour in this way, as well as in other ways, as part of their portrayal of contemporary life in Native culture.

Humour, for the purposes of this thesis, is not the same as comedy; nor is it restricted to wit. Rather, the operative premise is that King and Maracle's humour is presented through vehicles such as theatre and language, and includes all of the laughter, teasing, and sense of joy in which their characters participate. For lack of one more culturally specific, the Oxford dictionary's generous definition of humour will apply: "the condition of being amusing or comic." This incorporates expression, as well as the ability to perceive that which is humorous, and suggests issues of cultural difference in sense of humour. Both authors present as humorous things that some non-Native readers may not appreciate as such, but this too is part of the challenge of intercultural negotiation: for non-Native readers to find a way to see the humour in works by Native writers such as King and Maracle.

Before proceeding with the body of this exploration, it seems prudent to clarify the choice of subjects for this thesis, as well as to make clear my own approach, as a non-Native reader, to the work of these Native authors. First, King and Maracle were chosen as the focus because they each use humour differently in their writing: not because I consider them to be in any way representative of "Native" culture, "Native" writers, or even of their individual communities. If Native peoples themselves have difficulty

defining their own cultures in general terms (King, *Relations* x), then certainly I, as a non-Native reader, have no right or ability to try to make that definition for them. I consider King and Maracle to be Native writers because they write about communities of First Nations peoples with the authority of first-hand experience and perspective. The issues affecting their families and friends are real to them, and they are adept at conveying their own perspectives of some of those issues in their writing. King and Maracle present themselves as Native writers, in the context of whatever that means to each of them.

Adopting this approach of authors-as-individuals, however, must be tempered by the awareness that because King and Maracle are Native writers, their works do need to be read with some understanding of the issues informing them: "The significance of a literature can be best understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and the purpose of literature is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumption on which the literature is based" (Allen 54). Care needs to be taken in this process to avoid over-individualising *and* over-generalising, and although I cannot pretend to be capable of maintaining the ideal balance throughout this thesis, an attempt will certainly be made to achieve it as consistently as possible.

As a non-Native reader and writer, I am aware of my status as an outsider to this literature. I cannot, and do not, expect to understand and/or describe Native issues in any way but a functional one to this thesis. I cannot analyse the humour in either King or Maracle's work from any perspective but an outsider's: one who has approached their work with an open mind, but also with the inability to grasp many of its subtleties. I cannot expect to "get" all of the humour in these writings, but must work within my own understanding. Given its limitations, I cannot conscientiously speculate on authorial motivation or consequence as it relates to King and Maracle's uses of humour. I can only look at the literature itself, and explore some of the ways in which it seems to issue invitations to intercultural dialogue.

Before analysing their use of humour in detail (in Chapters One and Two), some general introduction of King and Maracle's styles is warranted. King uses humour as a dominant narrative device in his novels, *Medicine River* (MR) and *Green Grass, Running Water* (GGRW); and in his collection of short stories, *One Good Story, That One* (OGS). His narrators are clever, with a dry sense of humour that incorporates both tongue-in-cheek and self-conscious commentary. This becomes immediately obvious on the first page of *Medicine River*, where Will describes Autumn: "It

wasn't good, just better than the other three [seasons]. Then there was the wind. I generally tried to keep my mouth shut about the wind in *Medicine River*" (1). A sense of secrecy is established here, which is consistently prevalent in the other works as well. We are never sure whether the narrator is telling us the whole story or not: reliability is destroyed at the end of "Magpies", for instance, when the narrator vows that although he knows what really happened, he can't tell because he promised not to. "You can count on me" he says (OGS 30). We are left in doubt to wonder whether we have just read the "real" story, or whether there is in fact another version that has been reserved. This notion of secrets is compelling, and contributes to the momentum of King's writing.

King's linguistic artistry is another important feature of the humour in these works. His descriptions are concise and surprising at times, as when he says that "Eddie looked drab, like someone had plucked him" (MR 56). This phrase appears in the midst of a fairly ordinary conversation, yet it calls attention to itself and demands a full stop as we envision Eddie's appearance. Again in *Medicine River*, Harlen is described after his ill-fated canoe ride as laying "there in the water on his back, laughing, looking like a great yellow and orange garbage bag" (246). Soon afterwards he gets up to speak to Will, "splashing across the rocks

like a retriever" (247). King's adept word choice that arrests the readers' momentum contrasts sharply with the narrative secrecy that increases its speed. The juxtaposition of these two devices keeps readers off-balance and alert.

Other humorous linguistic devices include puns, as when Coyote uses "Friday" as the name of a day instead of a character following Thought Woman and Robinson Crusoe's identity argument. "I have to get back," he says to the narrator. "How about I call you Friday?" (GGRW 295). This sort of word play is common in King's humour. In "The One About Coyote Going West" Coyote makes a mistake and falls into a hole. The mistake, having been created (made) by Coyote, takes on a personality and participates in the rest of the story (OGS 70).

There seems to be operational in these works the premise that humour is beneficial to people: that it can help the characters deal with depression, and ease tension and fear. "Little humour always helps", Harlen tells the disconsolate Will (MR 106). Big John and Eddie nearly come to blows over the bone choker, but then somehow realise the pettiness of their dispute and begin "laughing their heads off" (68). Henry and Maydean push at each other in angry miscommunication, but when all of the kids start pushing each other and begin to laugh, the fear is dispelled. From

then on the developmentally delayed Maydean is better accepted as one of the group (OGS 193).

Finally, humour is part of the conversational tone of King's work. As in verbal exchange, King gradually gives his readers bits and pieces of information and small episodes of concurrent events which eventually fit together to make sense. *Green Grass, Running Water* is actually a composite of several stories that are layered and connected throughout. In *Medicine River* Harlen's friend Bud cannot tell Will what has happened to Harlen without including several other stories by way of introduction (90-91). Consistent with King's use of unreliable narrators, we are never sure which stories are "true", and which are outrageous fabrications. King seems to push the limits of the conventions of fiction writing by creating doubt in several places that any of what is said is accurate.

In contrast to King, Maracle uses humour as part of her characterization, but not as an obvious linguistic technique. One cannot describe Maracle as a humorous writer, but rather as one who writes humour into her stories as it is experienced in her characters' lives. There is little play or light hearted banter in the general tone of her novels, *Ravensong* (RS) and *Sundogs* (SD), nor in the short stories of *Sojourner's Truth* (SJT). There is, however, an undeniable presence of humour associated with the indirect

expression of intense emotion, for example. Marianne finds teasing and laughter "much easier to take" than the serious words of a touching moment (SD 205). Corrections are often made through teasing as well. Stacey laughs when she starts to throw a temper tantrum, once she remembers another that she once had. Her mother smiles at the memory: "'That was a good one all right, lasted half the night. Thought sure we'd have no plates by breakfast.'" They both roared. They relived the moment by repeating the scenario, imitating all the players and laughing till their sides hurt" (RS 128).

Maracle's narrators are often sarcastic and glib. Although they are not "funny" in King's sense of the word, they do utilise a certain dark humour. This is probably most strongly illustrated in "Bertha", where the narrator appears initially to be making excuses for the cannery workers' living conditions: "Cannery row, where the very fortunate employees of the very harassed and worried businessmen reside, is not what one might call imaginatively designed" (SJT 15). Clearly Maracle is not defending management, but rather her narrator, by his or her tone, is presenting the company line in all of its cruelty. "The holes," in each roof of the cannery workers' shacks, "not being part of the company's construction plan, are more a fringe benefit or a curse of natural unrepaired wear, depending on your humour" (16).

Maracle's humour is frequently harsh, delivering a sting of criticism that causes a sharp inhalation of breath, rather than an exhalation of laughter. Once Frankie has insulted the narrator's children in "Who's Political Here?", she says, "'Look, sweetheart, you are really pretty and your body works the way it ought to, but father to my children you are not. Even if you were, I doubt very much that I would take your advice'" (SJT 34). Some readers might appreciate the humour of a good put-down, found frequently in Maracle's work.

There are several occurrences of laughter at white people in Maracle's work because of cultural difference, rather than because of blatant conflict. Marianne and Paul laugh at the idea of inviting white people into Marianne's home. "'What would we have them do?'" she asks:

The whole idea of white youth muttering over the marvel of twins, gurgling at them along with a dozen or so other people crowded into a small kitchen seems absurd.... All the jokes would go over their heads. Some of the jokes would offend them. My mother's diatribes on the Premier would frighten them. Her lack of decorum, her different sense of courtesy would rub them the wrong way. And likely, after all that, we would feel offended about their inability to look and see, then do, rather than nag us into silence about what we are talking about. (SD 188)

Maracle's characters frequently seem to identify cultural conflict angrily, but then deliberately try to find something humorous in each situation, as a kind of comic relief. Occasionally, though, even laughter fails to ease

the tension, suggesting that humour is not always foolproof, or even appropriate. In *Ravensong*, Stacey's mother thinks Stacey is making a joke about white people throwing out the plants that Natives need for flu medication, and "let[s] go a hearty laugh. Stacey just looked at her - the laughter stopped dead in its tracks unfinished. 'You aren't kidding are you?' 'No,' and her mom shook her head back and forth. 'I will never understand them people. Help me tie these up'" (76).

Finally, the laughter that Ned brings to Stacey's house is at least partly responsible for the new sense of peace that gradually influences her mother and the whole family (RS 90). Maracle presents humour as an essential part of healthy life, but never allows it to remain untainted by conflict. "Every moment of joy [is] tangled and saddened by snags" (RS 92). For Maracle, it seems, humour is important, but it never threatens to dominate her narratives. Unlike King, she takes few risks with her humour, and chooses instead to keep it confined within functional and rational boundaries.

Linda Hutcheon calls reading "an act of philosophical puzzling as well as one of co-creation" (*Canadian* 17). What a reader "does" with a text is as, or more, important than the author's intent. As with the solving of any puzzle,

each step of the process is not necessarily easy, particularly when the reader is not part of the primary audience for the work. "In our postmodern world, the positive valuing of difference has been translated into ... making room for other voices to be heard..." (Hutcheon, "Furor" 16). How are non-Native readers to hear the voices in King and Maracle's works when we are not being directly addressed, and are in many cases being completely ignored? (This issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three). The answers are obviously not simple, but Peter Dickinson provides one practical suggestion that echoes Tully's approach to intercultural dialogue. He asserts that in some Native literature, "oral features function as deliberate narrative strategies", and that these may "transform the usually solitary reading experience into a more cooperative and responsive act of listening" (320). Both King and Maracle employ techniques of storytelling in their writing, which Dickinson says help to "destabilise... the traditional opposition between orality and literacy" (324). Storytellers assume that their listeners are paying attention, that they are trying to follow the storyline, and perhaps most importantly, that they may learn something from the story, and act upon the new information: "Oratory, according to Maracle, is both a 'place of prayer' and a method of persuasion" (323). According to Dickinson we are

challenged, not only to "acknowledge orality" in Native writing, but to "incorporate auralty within [our] reading" (332).

This challenge provides a method by which to explore some of the topics introduced here in more detail. Chapter One will examine King's humour, including his use of trickster characters; and Maracle's humour, specifically as it is shared by her female characters, will be explored in Chapter Two. In the final chapter some of the connections in these works between humour and invitation to intercultural dialogue will be identified and discussed. Throughout, credence will be given to Tully's assertion that "the primary practical ability is...listening well" (xv)

Chapter One

Humour in the Works of Thomas King

The best way to talk about politics and morals, according to Thomas King, is "'to sneak up on people and scare the pants off of them!'" (Lutz 113). Although King writes for "'a Native community'" when he "'[does his] Native material'" (Rooke 72), it is also clear that a message for non-Native readers is firmly interwoven within his words. Frequently, this message is not the one that such readers might expect. King uses several devices that could startle a non-Native audience, including decentring his plots, refocusing the identity of Native characters, and understating critical points by presenting them with humour.

"Associational literature", as King calls the writing of contemporary Native authors, concentrates

on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life and organiz[es] the elements of plot along a rather flat narrative line that ignores the ubiquitous climaxes and resolutions that are so valued in non-Native literature. In addition to this flat narrative line, associational literature leans towards the group rather than the single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of the members of a community, a fiction which eschews judgments and conclusions. (King, "Godzilla" 14)

Both of King's novels and his short stories employ this "flat narrative line." *Medicine River*, for example, focuses on details as ordinary as the formation of a basketball

team, and the day-to-day fluctuations in a fledgling romance between two of its adult characters. The most dramatic events are deaths, yet most of these are reported, rather than experienced by the characters, and are treated as integral parts of daily life in the town. When a baby is born, several members of the community immediately surround her and her mother, as if to indicate that a birth is a group matter, rather than one intended to isolate or elevate an individual.

Although most of the short stories seem to have a central character, in each case that person operates within, and is very much influenced by, a community. Laetitia's mother, in "Borders" (OGS), appears to be hopelessly stranded and isolated between the American and Canadian customs offices, but is in fact supported by the entire Blackfoot nation as she takes a stand for her heritage. Even though she behaves as a cultural hero might, and is filmed by television crews, King quickly downplays and re-contextualizes her actions by describing her visit with Laetitia in very ordinary terms, including the flavours of pie that she and her son eat. When she crosses the border again on her way home, King does not describe the event, but simply suggests that her entry back into Canada is not hampered.

"'I'm tired of negative descriptions of Indians,'" says King, "'whether Indians develop them or whether non-Indians develop them, and I'm tired of romantic images too!'" (Lutz 114). King's focus is clearly on "'very calm, very ordinary images, Indians doing ordinary things'" (114). White characters are also present, but they play supportive roles. This reversal of the usual non-Native hierarchical portrayal demonstrates King's desire to emphasize "'a certain cultural tenacity that keeps [Native peoples] going... [I]t doesn't help the fiction if all you do is talk about the kinds of oppressions white culture has had on Natives. There are all sorts of other ways to do it which are much more powerful'" (Lutz 112).

Dee Horne categorizes King's writing as "creative hybrid text" that "does not merely reverse the Manichaeian opposition" of settlers versus Natives; "it deconstructs it" (255). King, says Horne,

juxtaposes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal/settler perspectives to highlight the gap between the two and the comic misunderstandings that arise because of the different cultures and rules of recognition. Specifically, this juxtaposition serves to depict the struggle between the two cultures and to critique the absurdity and immorality of settler imperialist culture. (260)

King's writing testifies not only to the survival of Native peoples despite the imposition of "imperialist culture," but also to the power of creative response to this domination.

One might expect that, given the gravity of King's subject matter, and the import and intensity of his message, his writing would be heavy-handed and dark. The fact that King employs understatement extensively, in the form of dry but direct humour, is another startling aspect of his work. Furthermore, since this humour is foregrounded, one might expect that the serious message within it might be overshadowed or negated, but King does not allow this to happen. His serious messages lie just beneath the surface of his humour, so that although readers may be attracted to his writing because of its linguistic cleverness, they will find it almost impossible to ignore the serious message implicit in each situation. In this way King's humour serves as an intercultural bridge, and as a vehicle for his political statement.

Margaret Atwood suggests that King's stories "ambush the reader. They get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny." Humour, she says, can be "a subversive weapon, as it has often been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical, weapons" (244).

One of the stories Atwood discusses is "Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre" (OGS). In it, Joe says and does everything that is unacceptable to his own white society. He crosses the borders between speech and silence

(Hyde 156) by mentioning the unmentionable. "Joe is entirely although tactlessly honest," says Atwood, "and for this reason he is the only white in the town who can look back at the town's founding, see that it was based on the ruthless massacre of the earlier incumbents, and say it out loud. Second, Joe is not sentimental over this... He lays the actions out and lets them speak for themselves" (Atwood 246). All of this occurs beneath the surface of the story's apparently ordinary events, told by a Native narrator with King's typically dry humour.

"What are we to make of this apparently artless but secretly designing story?" asks Atwood. "Why do we feel so *sandbagged*?" (246). King creates a situation in which white readers find themselves sympathizing with Natives who are actually undermining white stereotypic portrayals of Natives: the joke is on the white reader, and King, through his "inventive twists of narrative and alarming shifts of viewpoint," triumphs (250).

Paul Lewis calls the use of humour an exercise of power, "a force in controlling our responses to unexpected and dangerous happenings, a way of shaping the responses and attitudes of others and a tool in intergroup and intragroup dynamics" (13). "Humor plays so large a role in social relations," he says, "in part because it conveys value judgments implicitly, seductively" (67). Research on humour,

according to Lewis, frequently associates it with the perception of incongruity ("the pairing of ideas, images or events that are not ordinarily joined and do not seem to make sense together" (8)). Certainly, the juxtaposition of King's perception of Native and non-Native worldviews qualifies as incongruity. Lewis outlines three "primary responses to incongruity - fear, problem solving and amusement" (15). The way that humans deal with incongruity either allows humour or does not (18), but when humour is present, it provides "an alternative to both fear and problem solving" (73). "The cognitive trick of humor," according to Lewis, is in the "quick and delightful refusal to take potentially dangerous or puzzling incongruities seriously" (69). "Humor," in fact, "allows for delight in incongruity" (73). Lewis suggests that in human development, "each incongruity, however alarming, points toward an area of potential growth" (110). It "is not only an aspect of maturity but also a force in the process of maturation" (72). King's determination to focus on aspects of Native-white relations other than oppression suggests that he recognizes this use of humour and employs it deliberately in an attempt to explore more creative perspectives and possible solutions.

Consistent with King's decentred approach, humour, according to Lewis,

is not one but many things: humor marks the boundaries of our sense of the real, reveals our values, solidifies our social and psychological identities, supports our maturation and enables us to learn - serving as a weapon, an embrace, an evasion, a lesson, a puzzle and a game. (156)

As such, the use of humour seems appropriate in writing such as King's that addresses issues of boundaries, values, and identity from a marginalized point of view. King's humour also demonstrates its use as puzzle, in that some of his readers may understand some parts of it, and not others. Because of its complexity, and because of the presence of "inside jokes," non-Native readers may simply not "get it."

Gerald Vizenor removes Native literature from the realm of psychological research, and describes its "oral and written narratives" as "language games, comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands or social science theories" (4). While these theories "constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism and the politics of academic determination," Vizenor sees Native literatures as "unstudied landscapes, wild and comic rather than tragic and representational, storied with narrative wisps and tribal discourse" (5). That discourse includes the view that creation is "ongoing and must be retold again and again 'to make it right'"... and "that is what oral stories do; they update old tales and relate them to modern times" (Matchie 163).

The conversational nature of King's work, referred to in the introduction of this thesis, can be more precisely identified as the presence and perpetuation of oral literature. Linda Donaldson calls it "a fundamental truth" of this oral tradition "that every story elicits another story" (29) and this sort of evolution, or ongoing creation, is present throughout King's writing. He likes to think of *Medicine River*, for instance, as "'a cycle of stories,'" rather than as a novel (Rooke 63). The oral narrative "has a life of its own - it knows where it's going - and [the] characters invent themselves in the mind of the storyteller" (Ruffo 149). King's characters frequently seem to take off on their own, as if they are set free from the bonds of published fiction, released from the narrator's imagination.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the presence of the oral tradition in King's work, however, is his use of the trickster. This, according to Ruffo, mythologizes rather than fictionalizes King's narrative voice, and identifies the narrator immediately with the art of Native storytelling (153). "The trickster is an important figure for Native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony." Tricksters call

forth a timeless quality in Native writing, and suggest "essential relationships that exist in traditional cultures": those between humans and animals, humans and the land, and those between reality and imagination (King, *Relations* xiii).

Janice Acoose articulates the importance of tricksters more finely, by describing the "Christian-patriarchal hierarchy" of the non-Native view, and the need for opposition with the "gynocratic circular harmonious" lifestyle of Native peoples (38). "Putting the Trickster back among Indigenous peoples," she says, "re-establishes harmony and balance to Indigenous peoples' way of being, seeing, and doing" (37). "Perhaps the most important aspect of contemporary Indigenous peoples' writing that distinguishes our writing from non-Indigenous peoples' is the Trickster who endures all: the survivor" (38-9).

"The trickster is [also] postmodern." According to Vizenor, "serious attention to cultural hyperrealities is an invitation to trickster discourse, an imaginative liberation in comic narratives" (9). While tragic narratives, often the "paternal rhetoric of liberal politics" (10), insist on discourses of domination, revision, and revaluation, comic narratives, often including tricksters, rely on chance, humour, and communal discourse. The trickster "unties the hypotragedies imposed on tribal narratives" (11).

Tricksters, according to Lewis Hyde, do indeed disturb the knots, or joints, in cultural webs: in fact, "[t]he webs of signification by which cultures themselves are woven are the more complex and enduring sites of trickster's labor" (205). These mythical figures "shift patterns in relation to one another, and by that redefine the patterns themselves" (257). "To be sure," says Hyde, "imagining tricksters most often lets off steam and enlivens the existing order, but sometimes these imaginings are the beginning of much deeper alterations" (189). Societies are at risk for having tricksters around, because "[t]he domesticated trickster is like domesticated fire" (262).

Vizenor sees the trickster as a "language game in a comic narrative" (187) that "uncovers the distinctions and ironies between narrative voices" (192). Although the trickster, in its role of comic healer and liberator "bears no evil or malice" (10), it does promote social antagonism (192), and in the process summons combative imagination and "livens chaos" (188). Acoose seems to disagree, at least to the extent that trickster's "motivation is neither solely altruistic nor virtuous": that it can, and often is, unkind, suspicious, and cruel (38). Hyde characterizes the trickster as "shifty as an octopus, coloring himself to fit his surroundings, putting on a fresh face for each man or woman he meets, charming, disarming, and not to be trusted"

(53). "Trickster means different things to different people" (Velie 131). Trying to define this presence in literature in any sort of concise way is extremely difficult, and seems best done by consensus.

Stanley Diamond notes the historical evolution of the trickster, from concrete portrayal to more abstract literary conceptualization. When the trickster meets contemporary civilization, it is "epitomized abstractly in the civilized assumption that evil, reified, befalls good men," and the trickster is then transformed into "the problem of injustice" (xiii). In Native literature, this "evil in the world ... resides in a natural imbalance that constantly needs to be corrected" (Matchie 164). Paul Radin provides general traits of tricksters, as they appear in several different cultures. Trickster figures can be simultaneously creators/destroyers, givers/negators, and dupers/dupees. They have no conscious wills, but are instead controlled by impulse. They hold no values, but are commonly held responsible for good and evil (xxiii). "Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does" (xxiv).

In his essay in Radin's book, Carl Jung mentions the presence of trickster characteristics in historical figures such as poltergeists, shamans and medicine men, and the Old Testament Yahweh; as well as in practices such as festivals, medieval customs, and Italian theatricals (195-8). Hyde

also associates tricksters with the carnivalesque, wherein "[m]ocking but not changing the order of things, ritual dirt-work operates as a kind of safety valve, allowing internal conflicts and nagging anomalies to be expressed without serious consequence." Tricksters are often found in the middle of carnival: "a sort of psychic and social drainage system in which structure's garbage gets expressed only to be carted away when the banners come down" (187). Tricksters are "privy to the hidden joints where purity may be cut down" (254).

According to Jung, tricksters provide a "collective personification," and are welcome because everyone can identify with them (201). They also serve as personal shadows who are held responsible for accidents (202), and who contain an element of danger because they represent the "epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals" (209). Velie suggests that literary tricksters are footloose, amoral, callous, and often sympathetic to the reader (121). Tricksters frequently are composites of elements of stock characters like the rogue, the fool, and the clown (130), and are often split into forethinker and afterthinker characters (133). Hyde associates tricksters with prophets, who "speak of things that will be true in the future because they are true in all time. [Prophets] disrupt the mundane in order to reveal the eternal" (284).

Andrew Wiget characterizes tricksters as "lurk[ing] on the margins of history" (86). They are, he says, "animate principles of disruption" overwhelmed by appetites, preoccupied with orifices, dissociated, proclaiming irresponsibility, and relishing it. Tricksters assume several personae including the bumbling fool; the creature with a mission beneficent to humans; and the deceitful, vain, selfish overachiever who fails frequently, but survives to make an appearance in the next story (87). "Here is a fool," says Wiget, "fit to discombobulate the self-important servants of status and the status quo... oversexed, underfed, dissatisfied, and on the move" (86). "The effectiveness of Trickster in disclosing the potential for abuse inherent in social structures of any kind also makes him a useful medium for attacking the institutions of invading people" (90). In an overly illuminated, highly ordered culture, Trickster speaks from within, "for change and the possibility of a good laugh" (95).

With the inclusion of trickster figures in his writing King evokes all of the possibilities present in the cross-cultural history of tricksterism: a virtually unlimited number of potential situations and a corresponding unlimited number of possible solutions, characterized by their resistance to providing closure. King's frequent use of Coyote, one trickster most often associated with Native

storytelling, in no way limits the trickster's potential. Coyote operates within a whole realm of historical verification, wherever he is, and King merely contextualizes him within his own novels and short stories. While a trickster may temporarily wear the vocabulary of a culturally specific context, by its nature it is never truly confined within any particular culture or any period of time.

"Coyote... embodies the collective knowledge of an entire culture and, in doing so, a mythological existence. For this reason, King gives no explanation of who Coyote is. The reader is already supposed to know" (Ruffo 146). This may, initially at least, put readers uninitiated with Native or other mythology at a disadvantage, but Coyote's *modus operandi* quickly becomes clear: "Coyote's aim is to 'fix the world,' a metaphor signifying the misguided goal of tampering with the natural world in order to improve it. Coyote's predicament is thus set up to parody... the experience of western culture in North America since the coming of the European explorer" (Ruffo 143). Coyote's actions, then, while unbelievable in terms of rational perception, become more believable when considered as part of this parody of European settlers. Surely their actions must have seemed just as ridiculous to original inhabitants

of North America as Coyote's may seem to some of King's readers.

Coyote, then, enables King to incorporate a strong sense of tradition within contemporary Native life, at the same time he criticizes many of the European attitudes and events which have affected that life. King has at his disposal all of the historical significance of the composite trickster figure, embodied by one particular trickster who can be used to make contemporary social comment. Coyote's very presence signals that the rules and the balance of contemporary interaction will somehow be challenged by the historical significance of trickster influence.

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, King introduces Coyote in the prologue. He is asleep, satisfying physical need, and he is dreaming: "When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen" (1). Coyote is dissociated from his own dream, which wakes him up. He does not argue with the dream about being in charge (which places him in the trickster position, operative on the created), but he does claim to be smart. He assigns roles, trying, as always, to clarify identity, but then he misinterprets the dog's insistence on power as "cute." The dog turned god shouts itself into capital letters, but all Coyote notices is that all the yelling is hurting his ears. Coyote's assertion that "everything's

under control" creates immediate suspicion, confirmed by those famous last words, "Don't panic" (2).

Coyote is as impervious to time as the typical trickster is. He is present at the beginning of the world, but he also advises the dog to "watch some television" (3). In fact, he moves freely within time as well as space, present for each retelling of the creation myth and present in the action of the human characters as well. Paradoxically, he operates as a marginalized presence not belonging to any particular group or situation, but becomes fully involved to his own extent when anything catches his interest.

Also consistent with tricksterism, Coyote is frequently blamed for events that may or may not be his fault. He, however, always insists on his innocence, and often, his absence. He was in Toronto, for example, when the dream got mixed up (when he was in fact simply not paying attention (68)), and he was asleep whenever the rangers were killed (70). He is even blamed for things when he is not actually present, and is used as an explanation for the unexplainable (310-11). King even seems to imply that Coyote may somehow be responsible for the necessity to retell the origin myths several times. The narrator connects Coyote's not paying attention and therefore not understanding the significance of the first story with the need to tell it again and "get

it right." "You must have been sitting on those ears," he says. "No wonder this world has problems" (100).

King identifies Coyote with European settlers, as part of his parody. Coyote recognizes the presence of "Christian rules" and greets them with a "Hooray" (350). No matter how exciting the action becomes, and how involved Coyote appears to become in it, he still remains self-absorbed and self-referential. Right in the middle of the garden story, Coyote pays attention to the food (41). When first Woman and Ahdamn are on their way to incarceration in Florida, Coyote wants to go too, only because he has always wanted to go to Miami (93). He admires Young Man Walking on Water's "trick," totally oblivious to the conflict between him and Old Woman (350).

Coyote is the inaccurate observer, taking as significant the most trivial, textually irrelevant details. At the beginning of the second telling of the origin myth he proves that he apparently cannot pay attention (at least not in the conventional way), and he becomes intent on determining the exact qualities of the water (104), although he can never identify them. There is some ambiguity in his response to being inaccurate so often. When Changing Woman and Moby Jane leave for the warm place, Coyote guesses a number of destinations, all wrong, and then says, "HMMMMM... How disappointing" (198). We cannot be sure whether he is

disappointed because he has the facts wrong, or whether it is because the details refuse to fit into his preconceived idea of what should happen.

Despite his frequently irrelevant and incorrect impressions, however, Coyote does occasionally make an astute observation. This reminds readers that although he acts as symbol (identified with settlers), he is still trickster (as fool or prophet), and therefore is able to play several roles simultaneously. He correctly locates all the fun outside the garden (71), and relates the "contrary dream" at Noah's ark to the garden story (147). He knows what Moby Jane and Changing Woman are really doing (224) and he comments on the significance of all the floating and water imagery in the novel (352). King also uses Coyote to comment on the ludicrous personality traits that Nasty Bumpo assigns to Whites and Indians. Coyote recognizes that he has a keen sense of smell and that he is compassionate, so therefore concludes that he must be both Indian and White (393). This ability to be one thing and another is key to Coyote's effectiveness as observer/commentator in the novel. He is in the ideal position to draw the readers' attention to the ludicrous, as well as to the most significant, all in his role of apparent self-absorption.

Related to this duality, and true to Velie's observation about tricksters, Coyote is split into two characters in this novel; he appears in fore and after-thinker roles to the extent that he functions as observer/commentator and participant. Old Coyote is introduced in the garden when Ahdamn names him a cheeseburger. We immediately realize that he is a trickster instead, when he responds, "It must be time for lunch" (41). Coyote, meanwhile, remains outside this frame as observer, while Old Coyote participates in the retelling of the myth itself. When First Woman and Ahdamn leave the garden in disgust, Old Coyote decides to stay, because the food is so good. Coyote thinks that perhaps he should stay as well, but is hurried along instead to observe the next scene of the myth (70). This situation is repeated later, for instance, when Old Coyote is on Noah's ark while Coyote is outside making connections between that myth and the first retelling. Old Coyote participates in the old myths, while Coyote eventually participates in the human storyline of the novel.

Coyote appears in a similar split-character situation in "The One about Coyote Going West." Here, Coyote is female, and stops by the narrator's house on her way to "[f]ix this world. Straighten it up" (OGS 67). The narrator distracts her long enough to tell her a story about

herself. Coyote says, "I love those stories about that sneaky one," as if she is somehow separate, and is somehow not being sneaky herself (69). King's story continues along these two tracks, with Coyote observing and commenting on a story about the Coyote who wanted to change the world, at the same time she is participating in the framing action between herself and the narrator. The fact that the current coyote pays no attention to the intended moral of the narrator's coyote story is not surprising. Unable to see any faults in her own logic, and completely missing the point, Coyote says, "We going to fix this world for sure. We know how to do it, now. We know how to do it right" (80). With that she drinks the narrator's tea and leaves, as focused on her original intention and as ruled by impulse as she was at the beginning of the story. The narrator makes plans to "watch the sky" for "falling things that land in piles," because "[w]hen that Coyote's wandering around looking to fix things, nobody in this world is safe" (80).

Although his actions are also dictated by impulse, Coyote in *Green Grass* can actually contribute to events in a positive way. Very late in the novel he hears Latisha and George's conversation at the Sundance, and warns the four Indians. "See, I can be helpful," he says (383). He also apparently influences Alberta's pregnancy, and helps to dance and sing the earthquake into motion. This last action

is also part of the two-sided nature of the trickster: he is both creator and destroyer as he liberates the water from the dam, but causes Eli to lose his life as a result.

The blue coyotes in "...Corporal Colin Sterling..." (OGS) play a similar dual role. They appear as aliens to the RCMP, but are in fact liberators of the petrified Native people. This, of course, suggests the conflict of perception between Native and non-Native cultures, which is a dominant theme of King's writing. The coyotes protect the Natives, but they also steal them, and readers are left to consider whether this is simply a trickster-like joke, and King's concept of an alternative to life with Europeans; or whether, like Eli's death in *Green Grass*, the consequence of their actions damages some of the very people they are trying to help.

Possibly one of the most frustrating, and yet somehow endearing qualities of Coyote is that she takes no responsibility for her actions. Since they are so strongly related to impulse, she apparently can dissociate them from the relationship between action and consequence. In "A Coyote Columbus Story" (OGS) she unabashedly changes the rules of the game so that she can win. The only reason she is sorry that she thought up Christopher Columbus is that when he leaves and takes all the Indians with him, she has no one left to play ball with her. This serves as a final

example of the advantages of King's use of Coyote as trickster figure: she is mythical enough to humorously transcend restrictions such as facing consequence, yet convincing enough as a character to function as a symbol of humans who have tried to do the same thing.

Although Coyote is the most obvious and "conventional" trickster character in King's work, he is certainly not the only one. King seems to use the traits of the trickster freely, as its diversity allows, by making other characters trickster-like. Although they may not meet all of the criteria of tricksterism, they are not simply human either, and display several of Coyote's features. The four Indians in *Green Grass*, for example, transcend time (they are apparently several hundred years old) and space (they have disappeared from the hospital at least thirty-seven times without detection). They are clearly on a mission, determined to retell history from an Indian perspective.

Although they each take a turn at reconstructing the origin myth, they also operate as a cooperative group, allowing us to consider them as a composite trickster-like entity within the work. Horne suggests that because they do not assimilate into the dominant culture, but do appropriate both from it and from Native culture, they "exemplify creative hybridity.... They disguise themselves in settler garb and identities," she says, "to critique and undo

settler exploitation of First Nations" (261). "All four of the settler characters whom the Indians appropriate exemplify 'rugged' individualism" (265). They are isolated pioneers, who in some way attempt to conquer the savages. "All four," however, also

have Native accomplices who symbolize the 'noble savage': Lone Ranger-Tonto, Robinson Crusoe-Friday, Ishmael-Queequeg, and Hawkeye/Natty-Chingachgook. By re-presenting these settler literary characters as a community of Indians that sets out to fix the world, King satirizes these settler icons and suggests that the values they represent have contributed to the mistakes that settlers have made. (266)

Even these identities, however, are not completely stable. In their hospital files and to the police the Indians are known as "Mr. Red, Mr. White, Mr. Black, and Mr. Blue" (GGRW 52) (the exact shades of the "great swirl of motion and colors" in their remake of Portland's movie (321)); but Babo knows them as old women with different names (53). The fact that the Indians live in a hospital (presumably a mental health facility) places them on the margins of mainstream society. This, their fluid identities, and their ability to come and go at will give them the mobility they need to "fix the world."

The Indians' retellings are associated both with the action in the human stories, and with the accounts of the origin myths. Being trickster-like, they can move from participating in one to telling the other, with no contradiction in verisimilitude. King uses them in this way

to make a connection between the traditional and the contemporary, as if to emphasize the importance of the version, rather than the specific content of the stories.

The Lone Ranger establishes the foregrounding of Native storytelling with mistaken beginnings to his story that move from the traditional European fairytale, "'Once upon a time...'" and "'A long time ago in a faraway land...'" ; through a white representation of a Native storyteller, "'Many moons comechucka...'" ; through the Biblical beginning; and finally to the acceptable opening lines of a Native story told by a Native person. "It is begun well," says the Lone Ranger when he finally gets it right (15). Trickster-like fallibility is a consistent quality in all of the Indians, but it is introduced with the Lone Ranger. His mistakes immediately follow, and are textually related to Norma's comments on choosing carpet: "You make a mistake with carpet, and you got to live with it for a long time" (8). The possibility of error is obvious, as are the potential consequences. When he makes a decision for the group of Indians, the Lone Ranger *thinks* he is "being omniscient again," but is not completely sure (49). He decides to play the role anyway, but the strong possibility of failure remains.

The Lone Ranger is associated with First Woman, who is also a trickster-like figure. She walks around critiquing

others in Sky World, "looking for things that are bent and need fixing" (39). Despite her assertiveness, however, she and Ahdamn are eventually arrested and imprisoned in Fort Marion. First Woman, not content to stay there when there is "lots of work to do", when "this world is getting bent [and] we got to fix it," simply puts on her Lone Ranger mask and walks out of prison. Suddenly, "the Lone Ranger and Ishmael and Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye head west" (100). Like us, Coyote is surprised by this, since he has not yet met the other Indians. Even though we have, we have been given no indication of how they got to the prison, or why they leave with First Woman. This is truly a trickster maneuver in which the characters exchange identities, and it again emphasizes the importance of the essence of the event (Natives freeing themselves from white restriction), rather than preoccupation with the specific details.

At the very end of the novel this event is contextualized, when Coyote and the Indians walk away from Blossom after the earthquake. Each of the Indians has told his version of the origin myth, and at the same time they have all participated in the ongoing story of the human characters. They end up all together at Fort Marion with Old Woman (the main character of the final myth), and an ever-increasing number of Indians. "Boy, says Hawkeye, this place is crowded." "Perhaps, says Ishmael, we should move"

(417). Suddenly, "the Lone Ranger and Ishmael and Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye head west" (418), just as they did on page 100. Right after that, another earthquake, but a different one, occurs. "The Lone Ranger and Ishmael and Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye keep walking until they get here..." (419).

Coyote "doesn't get it," and the readers can only surmise, but King appears to be emphasizing the circularity of the Native experience throughout history: that no matter how the story is told, the dominant culture insists on imprisoning those on the margins. The Indians get out of prison only by disguising themselves as a hero of the dominant culture. The soldiers are deceived by the flimsiest of disguises because they want to see white, rather than Native, and they respond to the external appearance, rather than to the genuine person within. The story never ends: the world continues to need fixing.

Although the Indians adopt a floundering "grandson" and rewrite the heroes of at least one Western movie, and even though they help free the water from the dam, their deeds are only a small part of a very large story. They finally return to the hospital, pleased with the results of their trip ("We fixed up part of the world"), although imperfect ("Unfortunately...part of it got messed up, too"), and certain that they will need to repeat the process ("Maybe

next time, we'll help [Dr. Hovaugh]") (427). Lionel is only one in a line of people who will need their help, all the Westerns will need to be repaired, and there are many other large-scale projects with which they may need to be involved. King suggests that the storytelling will continue as well, since Coyote, after his forced and hyper-genuine apology (at which he laughs), begins all over again with comments about all the water. The last line of the novel is the same as the last of the prologue: "That's true," I says. "And here's how it happened" (431).

In his review of *Medicine River*, Gerry William compares Harlen to a trickster, because he is "seldom pushed into doing things by others" (132). King calls Harlen "'the trickster figure, rearranged in some ways'" (Rooke 67). Although perhaps not as magical as the four Indians, "'Harlen is always looking to do good -and sometimes he does good. Other times he gets things totally wrong. Or he creates a situation in which things don't go as well as they should.... He's a meddler, a constant meddler'" (68).

Harlen wants to fix things, whether they are broken or not. King says that his role is "'darning the community'" (Rooke 67). His schemes often inconvenience people to the point of amusement or mild irritation, but he continues to be included (possibly because he includes himself) in each

of the community's events. In fact, "[a]ny time there was a gathering of two or more Indians in a hundred-mile radius of Medicine River, chances were one of them was Harlen" (MR 89). He goes to a funeral "because there was a funeral. It was Harlen's way of keeping track. And seeing him at funerals and weddings, bad times and good, was somehow reassuring" (47).

In addition to his omnipresence, "Harlen had a strong sense of survival, not just for himself but for other people as well. He took on a lot of weight, and the one thing he enjoyed more than helping someone out with their burden was sharing it with others" (2). Will tells us that "being Harlen's friend was hard" (11). This is partially because Harlen insists that Will can help with his basketball team, despite the fact that Will has no athletic ability. Harlen sees people as potential solutions to problems, and focuses only on those qualities that will help him to carry out his plans.

Harlen is also a storyteller, frequently oblivious to the constraints of time and schedule. Will sees him warming up, for example, to tell him all about Big John's poodle:

"You ever see Big John's poodle? Big black one..."
 I could see Harlen spreading his wings.
 Got that poodle maybe four years ago..."
 "Harlen, I've got an appointment with the bank in two hours..."
 "Harlen..."
 I was going to be late...

There's no point in rushing Harlen. We sat there and drifted together. Harlen floated around lazily touching on this and that. (72)

Harlen has his own perception of happy endings, which always includes satisfaction with his own role in the story:

The following week things were pretty much back to normal.... All of which made Harlen happy, because it was his idea that got Big John and Eddie back together and that was the way it should be, Harlen told me, with good friends and blood kin." (74)

One of Harlen's most persistent focuses in the novel is in his determination to bring Will and Louise together. He, with his "overpowering friendship" (William 132), does everything he can to insist on their relationship, despite protests from both sides. This appears to be an altruistic maneuver, but in spite of his apparent good will, Harlen seems so intent on achieving his version of success that he, in true trickster-like fashion, seems to ignore or to miss altogether the sensible reasons not to pursue it. It never occurs to him to leave well enough alone.

As if to emphasize Harlen's unusual perspective of the world and its inhabitants, at one point King juxtaposes Harlen's description of Lionel James with another character's. Bertha appears to be an average citizen of Medicine River who knows its people and the way that life usually operates:

Harlen said [Lionel James] was almost one hundred years old. Bertha said he was about sixty-nine. Harlen said

Lionel had been a great athlete when he was young, could run for miles. Bertha said he had had a bad drinking problem, spent some time in jail. Harlen said Lionel had been to some of the old-time Sun Dances and had the scars on his chest to prove it. Bertha said he got those in a car crash. But whatever he had been in his youth, he was one of the most respected men on the reserve. (167)

As in *Green Grass*, King seems to be de-emphasizing the importance of specific content in the versions of a story, focusing instead on the process of reaching the appropriate conclusion. Despite Harlen and Bertha's different characterizations of Lionel, they can both agree that he is well respected. That is the crucial point, King seems to be saying: how one arrives at the central perception is less important than its recognition.

King emphasizes the fact that Harlen attempts to improve life and to correct its errors, whether or not he goes about it in the usual way. Harlen, like the four Indians, makes an attempt to rewrite history. All of these characters take action against imbalance, albeit imperfectly, and like the tricksters they resemble, their presence changes the ordinary course of events in the lives of those around them.

Authors who use trickster figures in their work are often compared to the trickster itself. Hyde calls "trickster artists" "joint-workers" who like

the flexible or movable joint. If a joint comes apart, or if it moves from one place to another, or if it simply loosens up where it had begun to stick and

stiffen, some trickster has probably been involved. In several different ways, tricksters are joint-disturbers. (256)

King, for example, masterfully uses English, the settler's language, to make fun of the settlers themselves. He renames Adam "Ahdamn", invents Dr. Joseph Hovaugh (GGRW), and shuffles explorers' names until they are called "Eric the Lucky and that Christopher Cartier and that Jacques Columbus..." (OGS 69). King does not seem to be trying to replace the original associations with these names; he simply demands that they be considered in a new light. His joint-working in this case may mean that whenever readers think of those explorers, they will also think of King's mixing up of their names. Such new associations may trigger remembrance of King's underlying message, and may in fact lead to some cultural joints, at least, remaining more flexible.

In his own way, King appears to set out to "fix the world." Horne suggests that he satirizes the pillars of settler civilization, not only in order to resist those values, but to expose them as "fraudulent and destructive" (259). The fact that King is able to identify humour in cultural conflicts, and to treat the discrepancies as if they are in fact misunderstandings (Horne 260) is one of King's gifts to his readers. There is no doubt that he feels seriously about white oppression of Native peoples,

but his choice to approach the problem with humour makes his work accessible to a non-Native audience.

Donaldson suggests that King's narrative method draws on much more than just the two opposing cultures, and in fact resembles Coyote's coat: "a congeries of incongruous parts that eludes our attempts at unitary meanings.... Borrowing eclectically from many different traditions, King creates his own distinctly hybrid - but hopefully not scraggly - intertextual vision.... Yet... King uses the intertextual process in a ... gentle and generous way" (134).

Hyde points out that an animal coyote "can adapt itself to a changing world" (43). This is certainly true of trickster figures, and is also true of authors such as King, who not only are aware of changes within their own cultures, but are also able to adapt their writing in order to deal with the changes. Tricksters and authors "exhibit a great plasticity of behavior and [are], therefore, ...consummate survivor[s] in a shifting world" (Hyde 43).

In addition to using trickster figures themselves, a great many Native writers make use of several of the key attributes of the trickster figure. Rather than create characters who are inferior and dying, Native writers have consciously created Native characters who are resourceful, vibrant, and tenacious. Like traditional trickster figures, contemporary Native characters are frequently tricked, beaten up, robbed, deserted, wounded, and ridiculed, but unlike the historical and contemporary Native characters in white fiction, these characters survive and persevere, and, in many cases, prosper.... Whatever the damage,

contemporary characters, like their traditional trickster relations, rise from their own wreckage to begin again. (King, "Introduction" CFM 8)

Acoose extends this comparison of the tenacity of tricksters and fictional characters in Native writing to include the tenacity of Native authors. They are, she says, "writing their cultures back into stability and thereby assuring survival" (39)

Chapter Two

Humour in the Works of Lee Maracle

"'When I hear Raven sing, I pay attention to that... Raven is the harbinger of social transformation. Raven sings when the world itself is amiss. And some people hear that song'" (Kelly 85). In her writing, Lee Maracle focuses on social relationships among Natives, never free from the shadow of "white supremacy" (Maracle, "Myths" 184), and particularly among women. She articulates differences in definition and perspective between social groups, and frequently records the use of humour as a means of dealing with those differences. Maracle's humour is presented as an integral part of the Native perspective: a perspective that offers an alternative to everything that is amiss in white, patriarchal culture.

This is not to say, however, that Maracle presents Native culture as a finished product, poised to compete with or to replace white culture. Rather, Maracle claims to hear Raven's song, and therefore records a vision for transformation of her culture: a twofold process by which Native peoples gain a healthy perspective of themselves, and then offer this perspective as a catalyst to redefinition of intercultural relations. Maracle writes as a woman who has redefined herself in Native, rather than in white terms, and

now, having gone through a personal transformation, can speak from a strong centre to others who need to be transformed. She presents humour in relationships among Native women, in relationships between Native women and Native men, and as an important part of Native resistance to white society. In contrast to King's conscious decision not to focus on oppression, Maracle emphasizes it, and her humour arises from the lessons of survival in the face of this oppression in its many forms:

"We're all making our way to the other world. We all need that bridge and we all need to build it and we need to build it from where we are. We need to stand solidly in our own culture, our milieu, our understanding of how Raven and Raven's song work for us and how they lead us in certain directions of change."
(Kelly 85)

Raven may be identified as the primary trickster figure in Maracle's writing, but to her, that is an oversimplification of Raven's identity for Native people (Kelly 85). Raven, according to Maracle, appears in order to challenge attitudes and beliefs that need to be transformed (Myths 183). In *Ravensong* she wants to end a "drought of thought," and is harassed by the dilemma of "how to get the people to awaken..." (23). "Somewhere in the fold between dark and light her people had given up, retreated to their houses in their raggedy villages and withdrawn into their imagined confinement. She had to drive them out, bring them across the bridge" (43-44). Raven is contrasted to the crows in

white town, "whose lack of dignity [stands] in the way of even the most modest transformation" (187). All people belong to the earth and to Raven, and Native peoples need to "undo the sickness which root[s] the others to their own ugliness" (191).

But first, Raven's own people must be willing "to shape the future of their homeland" (43). In *Sundogs* Maracle records progress toward this goal, and the subsequent joy that this progress produces. Marianne and the others in Mark's office delight in the fact that Elijah Harper has said "No" to Meech Lake, and enjoy imagining how he will speak continuously in the legislature until the deadline for tabling (62-66). Although his eventual success does not signal any transformation of white culture, it is a solid victory for Native peoples in Canada:

But we have changed. We are all intoxicated with joy. The joy of the good fight. The joy of victory. We have fallen in love with the prospect of dignity. We have re-claimed our affection for some very unloved and weary people. (112)

After Marianne returns from the Oka run for peace, she shares another victory with her family: "the first time [her] family ever patted themselves on the back for anything..." (206). She savours a new lightheartedness in the room, and identifies its cause: "The weight of grief unrelenting kept us all standing still. The good fight gave

us the courage to move beyond grief and take up the business of living" (206).

For Maracle, the "business of living" involves trying to "bring Trickster/Raven to the modern world and move humanity to another place" (Maracle, "Myths" 184). "'The success,'" she says, "'is my ability to move people to another way of thinking, another way of being'" (Kelly 76). "'Raven has the heart'" (Lutz 174) that inspires her approach:

"It is not negative if people start to feel the world around them, and look upon the world with their heart, primarily, and love the world, and their selves, and as a human being embrace this Earth in solidarity with creation." (Lutz 179)

"I no longer weep for myself or the lost Europeans," she says, "but rather insist on writing myself into a new book that counts all of humanity on its tender, warm and colorful pages" (Woman 67-68). "I shall never again weep on cue at the tragedy outlined by Canada for us. It is only tragedy if we are not sure of the truth inside" (Review 42).

Maracle's truth emanates from a strong definition of herself as a woman of Native heritage. She consistently uses the pronouns "us", "we" and "our" as she describes the Native point of view. While she acknowledges that Native peoples share humanity with white culture, she seems to delineate no other inherent connection between the two.

The Native worldview "'begin[s] with the spiritual and end[s] with it.... Our culture,'" she says, "'looks upon life as constant spiritual growth and social transformation.... Our whole function in life here is to return to our ancestors with some understanding that's new to the spirit world'" (Kelly 74-5).

Each Native person represents

"an infinite number of people, and the only physical manifestation is yourself. Also, you own your own 'house' and that's all you own. It's this 'house' that I live in. The 'I' that lives in here is the thinking 'I,' the being 'I, the 'I' that understands creation, understands that the object of life is solidarity, understands that there are consequences for every action." (Lutz 172)

Linda Warley also describes this "interconnected matrix that is made up of the individual, one's 'lineage' or community, and the larger physical environment" as a "kind of dwelling place" for Native peoples (74).

According to Paula Gunn Allen, Native society allows for many different personal styles. The "organization of individuals into wide-ranging fields of allowable styles," she says, "creates the greatest possible social stability because it includes and encourages variety of personal expression for the good of the group" (2). This reflects "the Indian concept of a circular, dynamic universe in which all things are related and are of one family" (Allen 60).

Maracle articulates the difference between valuing each person and isolating individuals:

"Our culture strives for personal significance and recognizes it, allows us to be personally heroic, where the other culture individuates, and separates, and isolates, so that individuals feel frail and vulnerable, rather than powerful and significant."
(Kelly 75)

"Fragmentation," in A.E. Jannetta's view, "is perceived as a threat to the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the individual and of the tribal collective" (66). The Native sense of self and community dictates that the individual (as defined by white culture) dies in order to preserve the joint lineage of Native peoples. This, according to Maracle, is the "foundation of Native culture" (Myths 184).

It is from this strong sense of cultural community, then, that Maracle's writing emanates. It is the product of thought, and it is the written expression of storytelling, both of which Maracle defines in Native terms. "'For us,'" she says, "'thinking is a complete and total process... we don't spin the web of life, we're responsible for its continuation. That's the basis of thinking for us'" (Lutz 173). Native people come from "'thinking cultures. There's a huge level of awareness that doesn't exist among white folks because white folks can afford to be apathetic. Ours can't'" (Kelly 81). Thinking, then, furthers life, and heightens awareness.

According to Maracle, Natives present their ideas through story. There can be no separation of the two: storytelling is another part of the web of life, and an expression, rather than simply a reflection of experience:

Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing.... Thus we say what we think. No thought is understood outside of humanity's interaction. So we present thought through story, human beings doing something, real characters working out the process of thought and being. (Oratory 3)

Characteristics of this oral tradition, with the emphasis on "tradition," have been identified in Thomas King's work in the cyclic nature of his storytelling, as well as in his use of trickster characters. The fact that Maracle's sense of the oral tradition is so strongly entwined in contemporary Native life makes it more difficult to isolate its specific applications in her writing.

Several people have commented in general terms on the presence of characteristics of orality in Native writing. Among them, Julia Emberley includes "knowledge, teachings, humour, and spirituality" as elements of Native life that are passed on through the oral tradition. Bataille and Sands locate the basis of orality in storytelling, specifically "origin and migration myths, songs and chants, curing rites, prayers, oratory, tales, lullabies, jokes, personal narratives, and stories of bravery or visions" (3).

Allen gives orality contemporary significance in this way: "The oral tradition is vital; it heals itself and the tribal web by adapting to the flow of the present while never relinquishing its connection to the past" (45). The flow of the present demands that stories be transmitted in written form, but according to these writers and Maracle herself, the essence or integrity of orality does not suffer in the process, just as Native life does not suffer through being recorded by Native authors. The key, for Maracle at least, is her insistence that Native authors do the recording: she believes that the social relations that transfer the orality should not be disturbed (Emberley 94).

For Native writers, "'words and meaning are more important than structure... for us 'syntax' is even bigger than in a sentence. It's in our life, in our conduct of being'" (Lutz 171). Stories, according to Maracle, are composites of various perspectives:

"a number of people tell them, and they tell them from a number of different directions from where they're standing... Pretty soon you have a full-fledged story... tangled around the politics and sociology and the health and well-being and the spirit of it and the heart of it all at the same time. I think that's something that we do in our stories, so naturally we are going to do it in our writing." (Kelly 86)

Writing involves the process of rendering stories "understandable, changeable; subtracting the tragedy and restoring the spirit to its healthy, natural state. Our

writing," says Maracle, "is born of our lives and the lives of those who touch us" (Review 42).

Writing the multi-dimensionality of Native lives is "'the heart of where transformation comes from.'" Raven, as the harbinger of that transformation, tells people to "'listen to what's going on in a whole bunch of different ways'": spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially, and personally (Kelly 86). Maracle listens and writes in all of these ways, as a woman. This is not a separate part of her identity that can be isolated - she writes as a Native woman - but her concept of femininity has evolved through a process of defining herself in female terms within the Native culture, and therefore it seems important to look at that definition.

Maracle now "equates 'being' with being sensuous, beautiful, strong, brilliant, passionate, loving" (Grant 130), but this perception is the end product of a struggle for redefinition that Maracle has pursued throughout her writing career. "'When we write,'" she says, "'I believe that what we are doing is reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves.... The writing is that process where every person is sort of on the journey towards her - or himself'" (Lutz 176). Maracle comes "'from a culture that says words are sacred'" and feels an obligation to her community "'as a woman'" (Kelly 87).

Natives, she says, are digging themselves out of a hole of enslavement to white, patriarchal culture (Woman 12). Traditional tribal lifestyles, according to Allen, however, are never patriarchal: "For millennia American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews... the centrality of powerful women to social well-being is unquestioned" (2-3). "We understand," says Allen, "that woman is the sun and the earth: she is grandmother; she is mother; she is Thought, Wisdom, Dream, Reason, Tradition, Memory, Deity, and Life itself" (268).

In her introduction to *I am Woman*, Maracle speaks of history, of bondage, of women, and of the ways that contemporary women are trying to fight the corrosion of traditional Native systems. "Generation to generation the hurt of defeat accumulates in the consciousness of the colonized, until defeat itself becomes the norm," but "it is ultimately better to face the feelings we have and struggle to grow from them to a better place than to deny the heart and make heartless decisions" (x-xi). Maracle uses the writing process to resist, to explore her heart, and to encourage other women to do the same. "The value of resistance," she says, "is the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self. By using story and poetry I move from the

empowerment of my self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book" (Oratory 14).

According to Allen, when one focuses on the female, rather than the male axis in Native literature, when one puts women back "at the center of the tribal universe," one notices a shift in perspective. Women's writing generally is centered on "continuance rather than on extinction," it reflects optimism rather than pessimism, and tends to move from despair to hope (262-64). Maracle presents humour as part of life's continuum, as one of the characteristics of the Native perspective that helps in the struggle for optimism and hope. Humour appears in her work in many forms, including joy in release, and laughter as encouragement or diversion.

The boys who escape from the residential school in "Charlie" immediately "let go the cramped spirit that the priesthood so painstakingly tried to destroy in them," and cavort about, "safe in the bosom of the forest" (SJT 103). In *Ravensong*, when there is too much concentration on "sin, virtue, heaven and divorce," Rena tells stories to make Carol and Judy laugh. This is part of a practical remedy for negativity which also includes the cooking of "a whopping breakfast" (134). When the conversation about tanning versus yelling causes uneasiness between Marianne and her relatives, they welcome a laugh as Dorry falls off Auntie

Mary's knee. The restored humour creates a "sudden change of tempo" in "Momma's kitchen... and commotion over the twins begins again..." (SD 42-3). Later, Marianne identifies laughter as "the healer of us all," as it "rolls around the dismal mood" in the house "and swallows it up" (SD 123).

The easy presence of humour among Maracle's Native characters contrasts sharply with the way they act around white people. "Our silence in their company," says Marianne, "does not define how we are, but it does say volumes about how much we are willing to share" (SD 190). Sharing in this case implies giving treasures away to thieves, but speaking out against injustice, with humour, creates solidarity among Native peoples. Mark and Marianne laugh at the image of Mamma striding up to the microphone at a demonstration and speaking extemporaneously to an audience larger than her family, at last. Marianne can "hear the crowd laugh and cheer by turns" (SD 213-14).

The stable presence of humour seems central to the family experiences of Maracle's characters. Even when their adult lives are as dim as Bertha's, comfort and security come from the recollection of joy within their childhoods. Laughter dies within the walls of the cannery houses where Bertha lives, because "they separate each sister from the other," but Bertha returns to "the happiness of her

childhood memories" as the only source of comfort in "the stark emptiness of the years" since then (SJT 20-21).

In *Sundogs*, Marianne describes the usual tone of a family gathering in Momma's house: "We are accustomed to rolling through family visits on coasters of sorry assed and silly memories, worn out jokes and hee-hawing over the most trivial things" (SD 36). "In a crowd of talkative, festive Indians," she says, "the story will unfold of its own. We are very fond of re-living dramas by repeating their details and hahaing them to death" (64). At the end of the Oka run Marianne jokes with the men who have become like family to her: "We complain about the abortion of the run, relive our moments of glory, laugh about the aches and pains all the way home" (197).

Marianne identifies the special sense of joy and connection that she feels with the women who participate in the run:

I watch these women and I feel like nothing could be more wonderful than growing old like them, like my mom, like all of our women. Laughter colours the world glorious in the worst moments of our lives. Humor lights up bleak days. This run is a bleak run, a terrible moment, yet we all feel so joyous about doing it. (SD 196)

Most of Maracle's narrators or central characters are female, and the humour that they share with other females is particularly strong and binding. Humour is a key component, for example, in Marianne and Stacey's development in both

Sundogs and *Ravensong*. Both girls learn from female relatives and friends to see humour in sexuality and to laugh at themselves. They also learn to turn anger into more constructive humour, and to laugh at white society, all as part of female resistance to sexism and racism.

Even though Marianne doesn't understand all of the nuances, she can identify some of the humour of childbirth as she watches her sister Rita prepare for delivery: "There is some humor in this bit of work half the world volunteers for. Irony, I suppose. There you are on a gurney, grunting and sweating away, your body is being ripped open and you're talking as though nothing unusual is going on" (SD 12). Rita and Momma share several laughs during Rita's labor that not only help to distract Rita, but also demonstrate the solidarity of women who survive childbirth. Marianne and Momma also share particularly female humour as they "prance about the room mimicking Marilyn Monroe's walk and feel gorgeous. Momma gives us a walk and brings her youth into sharp relief for us; we roar; there is nothing quite like this moment" (122).

Stacey in *Ravensong* also identifies this shared celebration of female sexuality: "we have no illusions that virginal behaviour is virtuous," she says. "People love, laugh and have babies" (71). Stacey teases her mom about her boyfriend, and that "put[s] her mom on a different kind

of roll, naughty talk full of risqué banter." Right in the middle of this, Stacey realizes that her white friend Carol and her mother could never share "this kind of joy," (148) because it belongs particularly to the women of the Native community. According to Maracle, "'there are a lot of Native women seeking to empower themselves.... We no longer feel invisible. And we no longer accept the invisibility that we were consigned to as Native women.... We're a whole lot cheekier, I suppose'" (Kelly 78-9).

Maracle's female characters also use humour to lighten the tedium of repetitious tasks. Maggie's family works for three weeks to prepare for Christmas, and as they do, their Mama provides "constant chatter... spinning hilarious tales and making [them] all laugh" (SJT 46). Maggie is on the outside of the laughter in this troubled home, but working and joking together for this short period provides one of the few positive memories for the rest of the family. Laughter is considered part of family work in *Ravensong* as well. Celia helps with the annual canning because Stacey has to study. Stacey sees her "on a wooden chair heaving cauldrons of canned fruit back and forth, filling jars with boiled water, joking despite the huge effort canning [takes] for her small body" (27). Even when the women in Stacey's community are nursing those afflicted with the terrifying flu epidemic, the "dull repetition" of administering

treatment is "punctuated ... by the occasional run of jokes" (56). The laughter here seems to be a part of survival: a practical way to get through tedious tasks that need to be done, and a way to maximize the positive aspect of shared female company despite the nature of the work.

As it is during the flu epidemic, the presence of humour is frequently evident in other situations of helplessness, where there is an undeniable reality that must be faced. Maggie tries to understand and explain the white school system, where she, like the other children, will have to study English until they graduate. She finally laughs, but her sister says that "it wasn't the kind of laugh you let go when you are really enjoying yourself. It was the sort of cynical laugh you let out when you find something really stupid, but hopelessly unchangeable." Her sister laughs too, in response to Maggie, but calls it "comic relief" (SJT 50).

"In accordance with holistic Native perceptions of the universe," says Jannetta, "the voice of humour and of an otherwise tragic vision are well balanced" (71). In "Polka Partners" the Native people respond to the doctor for the clinic, because she is "soft spoken, thoughtful and enjoy[s] a good laugh when things look... their worst" (SJT 91). Later in the same story, the narrator imagines the subject of the song "You are my Sunshine," and is sure that "she

never had to wrap up in a blanket in the dark without any hydro. She didn't know how it feels to crack cornball jokes about no hydro as though it was the best damned bit of fun you had had in a long time" (SJT 97). This laughter is different from the joy of family togetherness, but it binds Maracle's characters together, and allows them to separate themselves from their problems.

The ability to see humour in almost any situation is demonstrated by several characters, including old Ella, who tries to refuse treatment for the flu in *Ravensong*:

"What you going to save me for, have another baby?" Stacey cracked up. The women in the kitchen looked at Stacey. She repeated what Ella had said. They all laughed.

"Sure, why not, Ella. You probably still like trying." They were on a roll, ribbing Ella about her zeal for men. Ella chuckled between wretches, helping them along, making faces and raising her eyebrows every now and then." (RS 50)

Here, as in many other instances, the willingness to laugh opens up ways of coping with difficulty, as if humour sheds new light on hopeless circumstances.

Being willing to laugh at oneself is often a sign of maturity in Maracle's work. It is also frequently evident in ironic situations, such as where Rita pours out her heart to Marianne in *Ravensong*. "Why me?" Marianne asks. "Why is she telling me this? The only social idiot in the family, and she pours out her private torment..." (SD 44). Later, when Marianne has gained some confidence in her ability to

handle social situations more effectively, she identifies her own reaction to a discussion with Lacey:

I am not going to win this one. I laugh inside about the word win - I guess I have embraced the competitive spirit of the outside world, because winning sits front and center of the language of my thought. (SD 202)

Self-awareness and the ability to see oneself with humour seem to develop simultaneously as Maracle's characters grow up. "'Well, Jee whizz, can't a girl whine and cry around a little?'" asks Marianne (SD 203).

Stacey can also laugh at herself when she realizes certain of her own characteristics. She wants to ask her mother why she never had children after Celia, but "thought that something must have happened. She felt a chuckle rise in her throat - here she was again wondering why" (RS 78). Stacey uses her self-directed humour later to entertain her relatives:

Stacey managed to get them all on a roll. "You know me Auntie, I can't resist pouting about nothing." They laughed as though pouting were the darn cutest thing a woman could do. Kate picked up the thread of laughter, reweaving old memories of Stacey's many pouts into a bright cloth of humour. (138)

Stacey is secure enough in her female relatives' affection for her that she can offer herself confidently as the butt of a joke and its inevitable ensuing discussion.

Maracle's characters also recognize that the inability to laugh at oneself can lead to serious problems. One of

her narrators writes "Dear Daddy," expressing her pain and disappointment with his absence from her life, and ends the letter in this way: "You see, daddy, you are the one to be pitied. I don't think you can laugh at your own folly, overcome weakness or see a little crocus on the lawn and imagine it winking at you" (SJT 79).

Maracle's female characters display solidarity in their approach to everyday life, which includes their unanimous resistance to racism and sexism. Maracle herself speaks out strongly against "the colonial and patriarchal process," which present a "myriad of obstacles" for women (Oratory 14). Maracle shares solidarity with other Native female writers, according to Emberley's analysis, in that "Native women's literature can be read... for a critique of sexism, racism, colonialism, and economic exploitation as well as for its mark of cultural, and not essential, differences" (19). Maracle's critique is not as simple as saying that white attitudes toward Native peoples have been wrong in the past; she also believes that those same attitudes are still in effect, and are still damaging Native women today:

"The people at the bottom [of the hierarchy] see more clearly what's happening than the people at the top seeing down. That just makes sense.... We're still colonized. We're still fighting classical colonialism." (Kelly 83)

Within this problem Allen identifies "academic, political, and popular attempts to paint Native American

cultures as patriarchal when they are not." It was the original colonizers' "fear of gynocracy," she says, that provided the "unstated but compelling rationale for genocide" (5). Allen identifies four objectives that must be met in order for an "egalitarian, gynocentric" system to be transformed into a hierarchical, patriarchal system:

1. "[P]rimacy of female as creator is displaced and replaced by male-gendered creators."
2. "[T]ribal governing institutions and the philosophies that are their foundation are destroyed."
3. "[P]eople are pushed off their lands, deprived of their economic livelihood, and forced to curtail or end altogether pursuits on which their ritual system, philosophy, and subsistence depend."
4. "[C]lan structure is ... replaced, in fact if not in theory, by the nuclear family" (41-2).

Maracle speaks to all of these problems within the Native community, and writes her female characters, in particular, as resisters to the continuation of these processes. Much of that resistance is directed toward the white community, but she also identifies the need for women to address the effects of colonialism as they have been internalized by Native men. "'I think that very often racism operates as sexism in our community,'" she says,

"'and often sexism operates as internalized racism. I see it just as much going one way as the other'" (Kelly 80).

Let us begin by talking to each other about ourselves. Let us cleanse the dirty shack that racism left us. Let us deal with our men-folk and the refuse of patriarchy they borrowed from white men. (Maracle, *Woman* 139)

Some of Maracle's female characters connect humour to their refusal to be dominated by a patriarchal system. In "Eunice" the narrator surmises that Eunice's husband must do most of the management of their household:

I want to chuckle at the thought of this faceless man hauling kids to doctors, dentists, school field trips and parent-teacher meetings, but I don't. A piece of me wants to say how hard it must be for him. I bawl myself out. I really loathe the sympathy I can sometimes come up with when men are stuck with doing the work women consider normal living. If he was the disabled person I know I wouldn't feel the same way towards her. I'd be saying something dull like "she must be strong. (SJT 60)

Here the narrator points out the differences, not only in gender roles but also in socialized perspectives of them, and tries to laugh at rather than sympathize with men who carry typical female workloads.

Maracle does not seem to deny that there are differences between genders: rather, she seems to resist the dominance of one over the other, while emphasizing the strength and centrality of women in Native society. Several of her female characters acknowledge differences between their own and male responses. When Rita has her twins in

Sundogs, the men are hurried out "for a cigar and whatever else men do when they have babies," so that the women can go shopping: "Back slapping and guffawing they exit. The hallway echoes their joyous racket even as they disappear behind the elevator doors" (SD 21). The women here are in complete control of the social situation, and the men seem content to comply with their sense of propriety.

The men's joy seems to suggest a difference between female and male perspective manifested in the things that each gender finds funny. In another instance, the narrator's husband in "Who's Political Here" laughs at her as she tries to bundle the kids off to get groceries: "'You look like one of those sixteenth century fish-mongers, pushing her cart with grim determination.'" He finds this amusing." The narrator, however, does not, and rather than laughing with him, gives him "a condescending smile." She then identifies tension between them because he "resents [her] lack of appreciation of his joke. Another obstacle to hurdle" (SJT 29). Again the woman is in control, and is the more sensitive of the two.

Part of the females' resistance to patriarchy involves finding an outlet for the expression of anger. Maracle feels that "'when women are dispirited they move to apathy and males move to violence because... that is the way that humans have always operated together in unsafe

environments.... The woman who gives up and the man who gives up are two sides of the same coin'" (Kelly 80). Some of Maracle's female characters tend to laugh when they are angry, not artificially or hysterically, but determinedly, as if they have chosen a sense of humour as an alternative to giving up or responding with violence.

In *Sundogs*, for example, Marianne becomes angry, not only at being protected from reality, but from not realizing that her family has done this to her for years:

"How did you do on your exams, Marianne?"...

I am tethered to the hot wire of my own rage which is much too large to let go on my sisters. Not only have I been Baby for too long, but the blinkers I wore restricted my vision... I have a sneaky suspicion I could have opened my eyes sooner.

I hold fast to my rage. I tuck it somewhere in the hidden corners of my mind for later reference. I am getting good at saving things for later. I hope that is culturally Native and not European.

"I haven't got my marks back, but I don't have diarrhea." Everything moves slow. The last line reaches the middle of the room at the same time as Paula. She joins in the laughter that follows. (SD 38)

Jannetta suggests that the anecdote can serve as a "marker of cultural identity/difference and as a sign of resistance. Anecdotes define a space for subversive humour and introduce to discourse the dialogical dimension of laughter" (64). Humour, he says, "also may function as a distancing device against an unwanted empathy on the part of the white audience" (67). Laughter can affirm "Otherness

and subvert white notions of racial superiority. Laughter gains a revolutionary quality" (69).

The need for revolution comes through clearly in Maracle's writing. Although humour is a tool for many of her characters, its necessity is firmly rooted in the fact that they have all suffered so deeply from racism. "The pain, the effect, the shame," she says, "are tangible, measurable and murderous... I am continually surprised that so few of us are murderers" (Woman 4-6).

White people define everything in terms of their own people, and then very magnanimously open the door to a select number of others. They let us in the door as we prove ourselves to be civilized. Such is the nature of racism. (Woman 137)

Maracle's characters try to deal with "the madness which the colonial process creates," (143) often by turning the colonizers into the victims of their humour.

"White people are a plague of locusts sent to torment us," says Maggie's sister. "When she wasn't ranting about them she was laughing at their stupidity" (SJT 50). "Everyone laughs" at the Meech Lake situation in *Sundogs*: "We love it when white folks get tangled in their complex rules and regulations" (65). "'So'," says James, a white acquaintance of Marianne's, "'What's behind all this Elijah stuff?' 'Genocide,' and I laugh. He looks bewildered, turns a little red, grins like he doesn't get the joke but doesn't want to appear dense, so he chuckles pretentiously.

I giggle" (SD 81). Marianne and Lacey "never get too serious" when they go out: "mostly [they] just laugh and joke about the craziness of the white man's world, his stiff asexuality, and his pompous sense of smarts. In between the laughter and the songs Lacey and I feel a powerful merging of our sense of womanhood, race, and class, in that order" (SD 127-28).

Although much of her characters' humour is blatant and aggressive, Maracle can also be more subtle in her response to racism. Jodi Lundgren suggests that the language of the narrator in "Bertha" contributes to its parody: "The narrator's savvy, cynical tone and the subversion of both language and sentence structure are successful instances of interrogating the dominant discourse" (68-69). Like her characters, Maracle turns the colonizer into victim, this time by manipulating the English language to serve Native purposes. "At the root of the tension in Maracle's style," according to Lundgren,

is the implication that if a Native woman can excel within white patriarchal discourse, then that discourse, which consigns her to illiterate invisibility, is contradictory and thus lacks validity in its implicit claim to be a totalizing ideology. (69)

Maracle, then, like her characters, chooses to respond to the anger she feels in a way that resists and undermines the methods and effects of "the colonial and patriarchal process" (Oratory 14). "[A]chieving competence within the

system is always subsidiary to the goal of subverting it" (Lundgren 69).

Subversion appears to be part of Maracle's goal of social transformation for her people. When they hear Raven's song they become empowered to resist, and when they choose tools such as humour, they display their will to survive. "Like all women in all times, Indian women have been forced to be flexible, resourceful, and tenacious in facing struggles for survival and growth in constantly shifting circumstances" (Bataille 130). Both Marianne and Stacey are transformed through their decisions to use humour in their approach to adult life. Maracle presents them both as strong, resourceful young women who will indeed survive.

Maracle speaks of her own "brutal determination to survive," (Myths 184) and appears to seek the courage that "resides in healing laughter" (Fife 86). Jannetta calls humour "a way to recover the open spaces within necessary for cultural survival and future literary creation" (67). "It is the children," says Maracle, "who will have to learn to claw, dig and scratch in unison if we are to get out of this deep shaft" (Woman 12). "For a Native child to grow up and take this world on in the way that she will have to to survive, she is going to have to be tough, brilliant and well loved. Self-reliant would not hurt either. At the least, we have to be determined" (133).

Maracle's determination to succeed, to "'move people to another way of thinking, another way of being'" (Kelly 76) clearly emanates from a belief that transformation can actually occur. She obviously has confidence in the talents and ability of her people, who can change and survive. Her approach seems consistent with Allen's observation that "[t]ribal systems have been operating in the 'new world' for several hundred thousand years. It is unlikely," she predicts, "that a few hundred years of colonization will see their undoing" (2).

Chapter Three

Humour and Invitation to Intercultural Dialogue

There are several similarities in the works of Thomas King and Lee Maracle, but among the profound differences is the way that the authors use humour as part of their invitations to intercultural dialogue. Both King and Maracle present images of Native peoples in everyday life, engaged in the normal activities that maintain their unremarkable lifestyles within strong surrounding communities. Both authors identify a fundamental conflict in perception between Native and non-Native cultures as key to their differences, and both leave elements such as inside jokes and untranslated phrases as mysteries to their non-Native readers. Both authors use laughter as resistance to domination, and as part of a statement of independence that demonstrates Native strength and determination to survive. Humour is associated with tenacity, but the way that it functions in each of the authors' works is very different.

King, in his determination to focus on positive contemporary images of Native peoples, creates a humorous framework in his novels and short stories, and his characters climb and swing upon its situational scaffolding. His characters' personal senses of humour are secondary to the humorous tone of King's narrative, which sweeps readers

along in a sense of adventure and momentum. King's linguistic ability and comfortable utilization of European mainstream literature contribute to the cleverness and cerebral nature of his humour, which is not elitist, by any means, but largely linguistically based. While King does not deny the problems and effects of colonialism, his response is creative, and often involves laughing at the other side. King puts the awareness of white culture into a new, manageable perspective that informs the tone of his writing. By laughing at the oppressors, he is able to put them into a position in which they no longer have power, and under which Native people no longer must struggle: "the limitations placed on us by non-Native expectations," he says, "are simply cultural biases that will change only when they are ignored" (Relations xvi).

Maracle's humour is more subtly and slowly revealed, as her characters deal repeatedly and head-on with the continuing oppression of the dominant white culture. In Maracle's writing humour is presented as a bonding agent among Native peoples, and a coping mechanism in the face of constant conflict with the white population. Maracle's goal is social transformation: of her own people first, and then, perhaps eventually, of white people as they learn to adopt a perspective more aligned with that of Native peoples. Humour, while not Maracle's dominant personal creative

response, is one of the responses her characters choose as they become more self-aware, and more determined to live independent, traditionally based lives. Much of their humour is directed toward the white population, whose members are inextricably a part of their daily existence. "Despite the fact that no white person has ever been welcomed into our home," says Marianne, "they are never really absent either. They are constantly the subject of endless jokes, their ways are scrutinized, analyzed, and contrasted with our own" (SD 189).

Maracle emphasizes traditional Native perspectives and practices as an integral part of contemporary life. She identifies spirituality as central to the Native lifestyle, and participates in storytelling as part of life's interconnected web of thinking and being. Maracle's characters identify and experience humour as an anchor in their lives, grounding themselves within their culture, and providing a response in the face of white society which is so diametrically opposed in every way to Native tradition.

There are elements of Native tradition in King's storytelling style as well, particularly in his use of trickster figures. His tricksters seem to be significant more because they promote a de-centred sense of adventure, however, than because they are specifically "Native." In fact, the cross-cultural nature of tricksters is more in

keeping with King's style than the fact that they are found in many traditional Native writings. King's tricksters expose the foibles of humanity: they help readers laugh at differences among Native peoples, among white people, and between Native and white cultures.

While some of King's humour is specifically directed toward Natives, to the exclusion of others, most seems to acknowledge a common humanity among readers, all of whom have different perspectives. Natives are certainly contrasted to whites, and the Natives usually look much more sensible, but all are subject to laughter when they fall prey to stereotypes or misinformation. King creates a humour that encompasses and exposes weaknesses in both cultures, and laughs in and at the process of turning the status quo upside down.

Maracle's humour, however, is not designed to include non-Natives in its appreciation. She identifies few, if any, similarities between Natives and non-Natives, and does not create an atmosphere of shared laughter. Maracle's humour benefits her Native characters only, as it binds them together and helps them cope with white society. There is little sense of laughter as bridge in Maracle's work.

What, then, can be said about King and Maracle's uses of humour as they relate to intercultural dialogue? Is King more open to such dialogue than Maracle, because his humour

may seem more accessible to non-Native readers? Is Maracle necessarily closed to the idea of dialogue because her characters' humour is more self-reflexive and self-sustaining? Some indication is evident in the way that Native and non-Native characters interact in their works.

James Tully writes that, "[s]ince the early twentieth century... the Haida and other Aboriginal nations, in the face of appalling social and economic conditions, have sought not only to resist and interact, but to rebuild and reimagine their cultures; to 'celebrate their survival'." Tully sees Bill Reid's sculpture, *The spirit of Haida Gwaii*, as "both a symbol and an inspiration of this revival and 'world reversal', as the Aboriginal peoples call it: to refuse to regard Aboriginal cultures as passive objects in an Eurocentric story of historical progress and to regard them from Aboriginal viewpoints, in interaction with European and other cultures" (21).

Tully presents a new model for intercultural constitutional dialogue that includes respect and consideration for all of the viewpoints represented by the passengers in Reid's canoe. The diversity of the passengers is a challenge: there are even "non-Haida travellers" in the canoe - "the mainland beaver and wolf, and the ancient reluctant conscript from European American mythology" (25). Tully suggests that these characters can work toward a

positive outcome, in the process of which they each tell their stories to one another and find new common ground. Unfortunately, because the sculpture itself is static, its viewers will never see its potential realized or defeated.

The characters in King and Maracle's work, however, are not static. Readers not only can see who is in their "canoes," including non-Native passengers, but can also view the types of interaction that take place among them. For example, traditional white-Native roles are consistently reversed in the interaction among King's characters. The four Indians in *Green Grass, Running Water* take on characters of white settlers and satirize them, exposing the values that contributed to their exploitation of Natives. Dr. Joe Hovaugh, who plays God at the mental health facility to which the Indians return, becomes a confused and foolish figure once outside the safety of his own environment; looking in all the wrong places for the Indians, and losing his car in the process. Even John Wayne, such an icon of white-produced Western movies, meets his match in the Indians, who rewrite the Westerns so that the Indians win. The owner and employees of the Dead Dog Café are in control when the white tourists come to visit. The Natives play right into their expectations of Indian culture, and then laugh at the white reactions to their tongue-in-cheek restaurant fare.

There are a few tense interactions between the two cultures: "In King's text... those settlers who try to appropriate First Nations culture to exploit it... are disempowered. This reversal is evident when the Michigan tourist, and later George Morningstar, attempt to take illicit photographs of the sacred Sun Dance" (Horne 265). George seems to entertain every misconception about Native culture possible. His perception is so completely opposed to Latisha's that a close relationship is proven impossible. It is difficult to know whether King is making a general negative statement here about white-Native intermarriage, or whether he is simply commenting on this particular type of relationship in which the settler is still in a colonizing position.

In Maracle's work there is very little white-Native interaction. All of her Native characters seem to hold opinions about white culture, but few become involved in human relationship. German Judy and Rena in *Ravensong* have the only positive intercultural interaction, and that is a source of great puzzlement to Stacey. Even though the two women do share many other things, though, Rena and Stacey share laughs that neither German Judy nor Stacey's friend Carol, as non-Natives, can appreciate.

Stacey's friendship with Carol seems to hold great promise for both characters to learn about the other's

culture, but this potential for positive interaction is never realized. All the girls really share are Friday afternoon study sessions, which Stacey recognizes as shallow and unfulfilling as she begins to become more culturally self-aware. Carol nearly falls apart because of her parents' divorce, and looks to Stacey for sympathy. Stacey, however, having just faced the near-decimation of her entire community because of an avoidable flu epidemic, cannot sympathize with Carol's relatively inconsequential concerns. Again, a conflict of perspectives is the problem, and Stacey begins to appreciate her mother's view of Carol: "she's white so she don't count" (135).

The nature and degree of interaction among King and Maracle's Native and white characters provides some clue to the authors' invitations to intercultural dialogue. King's Native characters reverse the roles of historical interaction, in which white people were dominant, and exercise the upper hand in the limited interaction in which they choose to participate. Maracle's Native characters articulate clearly the differences between cultures, and show little interest in any extended interaction. King and Maracle seem to establish the recognition and emphasis of difference between cultures as the minimal and mandatory first step toward any intercultural dialogue between Native and white people.

While King's humorous narrative structure seems to cross cultural boundaries at times, as it encourages laughter at human frailties and miscommunications, there is no weakening of the differences drawn between the two cultures. Matchie and Larson suggest that King

emphasizes the 'balance' between cultures so as to 'expose both the truth and the falsity in each' (Weaver 56-57).... In the plot of Green Grass there are good and bad Indians as there are whites, both Indians and whites are as involved in money-making enterprises as they are in traditional ceremonies, and the dam at the center of the action is not of itself a positive or negative venture. The book is a complex interweaving of peoples' backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, and choices. (154)

While this interpretation might lead one to think that King sees whites and Natives as members of common humanity whose cultural lines are blurred, that would be inconsistent with the way his characters live their lives. He may allow that people share certain traits, but these manifest themselves very differently in his white and Native characters.

According to Tully, the "presupposition of shared, implicit norms is manifestly false... in any case of a culturally diverse society" (131). Intercultural constitutional negotiators (writers and readers in this case) need first to "recognise their differences and similarities," so that they can find a "form of association that accommodates their differences in appropriate institutions and their similarities in shared institutions"

(131). King's writing seems to provide investigative ground that allows people of both cultures to look for a mutually satisfying form of association.

Literature provides an avenue into the perceptions of reality by other people across cultures and generations. Native authors show their readers views of a reality far more complex than that which the European linear, causal mode of perception can accommodate. Native authors in Canada have access to cultural traditions that have enabled their ancestors to survive under extreme conditions and in ways that have enhanced the lives of all members of their respective societies.... (Lutz, Introduction *Challenges* 7-8)

King seems very clear about how far he is willing to go in his own attempts to cross cultural lines, however. He clearly has no desire to "'pit Indians against whites'"....

"[O]nce you get involved in 'whose culture is better?,' and in the politics of Native/non-Native relationships, I think you get suckered into beginning to look at the world through non-Native eyes. I think you run the risk of having to redefine yourself and justify yourself as a Native, and as a Native writer.... Another thing is that you make it sound as though the Native people spend their entire existence fighting against non-Native whatever. That just isn't true." (Lutz 111)

King writes his "'Native material... particularly for a Native community'" (Rooke 72), and while he is obviously aware of his white audience (he publishes with HarperCollins), he draws a line beyond which they cannot go in their appreciation of Native literature:

For the non-Native reader, this literature provides a limited and particular access to a Native world, allowing the reader to associate with that world without being encouraged to feel a part of it. It does

not pander to non-Native expectations concerning the glamour and/or horror of Native life....
(Godzilla 14)

The limited nature of King's interest in cross-cultural interaction seems clear, and this seems to set some boundaries to any invitation to intercultural dialogue that he might issue through his work. Non-Native readers are invited, it seems, to explore areas in which common humanity may be shared with Native peoples, but it is imperative that they remember that while the object of such exploration may be the discovery of some sort of mutual ground for discussion, the inherent differences will always remain.

Lee Maracle, too, is very strong in her delineation of difference between white and Native cultures. There is little sense of shared humanity in her writing, and virtually all of her humour can be associated with the enormous gap between the two lifestyles. Maracle speaks out against white people

"who think they can understand us... they are looking for the white person who is the expert on us as though by somehow taking your binoculars and peeking in our houses you can figure out what we're up to.... We're complex people, just like any other human beings in the world, and people have to come to grips with us. Particularly when half of us don't want to talk to white people, and the other half likes to tell them stories that may or may not be true. We're not a simple people." (Kelly, 82-83)

Maracle is very clear in her belief that white and Native literature must remain separate as well, since it emanates

from and reflects Native culture, and therefore cannot be fully understood by non-Natives: "Your perception of my Raven, even when approached honestly by your own imagination, is still European" (Myths 185). According to Lundgren, Maracle's "mastering the discourse of the colonizers is not... an 'attempt to convince them'; rather, achieving competence within the system is always subsidiary to the goal of subverting it" (69). Maracle's writing is Native-centered and directed toward benefiting Native culture, but Maracle claims that "'it doesn't bother [her] that white folks read it.'" This is because she "'woke up one morning in 1988, really, and thought it was time Raven came out of the house'" (Kelly 76).

Linda Warley comments on Maracle's use of the image of the house, both as personal and collective framework for the Native self. In her conversation with Kelly, Maracle says that we "'need to come out of our house, out of our village, out of our self-imposed era of segregation... and into the white communities'" (74). Warley suggests that "people of both communities have to get their individual lives in order and reach beyond them to forge alliances across racial and cultural differences.... As Maracle states at the end of the essay written at the Oka peace camp, 'The life of Bobbi Lee is about why we must talk'" (Warley 74). Although laughter is not used as a bridge in Maracle's work, her Raven

character does desire that Native peoples themselves, as part of their transformation, cross the bridge into the white community (RS 43-44). Therefore, there does seem to be an invitation to intercultural dialogue implicit in Maracle's work, but like King's it is clearly defined along boundaries of cultural difference and it rejects the notion of cross-cultural interaction.

If these authors then entertain within limits, rather than reject altogether, the notion of intercultural dialogue, can one identify the nature of their qualified invitations? According to Linda Hutcheon:

Talk is not 'intellectualizing'; talk is what both the writing and the reading share; talk is what creates what we call identity. Without talk, without words - the words of our writers, but also of ourselves as readers and thoughtful citizens - Canada will never mean anything to anybody. (Furor 17)

Perhaps King and Maracle's writing itself, as "talk" offered to (although not written for) both Native and non-Native audiences, functions as a preliminary invitation to intercultural exchange. Within King's presentation of common ground between cultures, recognizable as human nature, and within Maracle's limited allowance that dialogue is necessary, one can see potential for movement toward such talk between cultures. If an invitation, qualified by recognition of difference, is in fact implicit in King and Maracle's work, it then remains to try to identify some of

the ways in which their very different uses of humour inform and relate to this invitation.

The focus of King's humour seems to be in its presentation of a perspective that acknowledges human strengths and weaknesses, and encourages recognition of equality among cultures. Much of this humour seems to emanate from King's personality itself, and seems to be informed by his own perspective and abilities.

His apparent "sense of humour," that one would expect to discover in conversations or lectures as well as in his writing, seems to suggest an attitude toward life that includes the irreverence shown in his novels and short stories. King's ability to find humour in any situation seems more strongly directed toward white culture; perhaps because he finds there more to disagree with and to expose to ridicule than he does in Native culture. King attacks directly the pillars of white civilization (Christianity, for example), and makes fun of them by juxtaposing alternatives drawn from Native culture. These alternatives are not necessarily intended to replace the pillars of white civilization, but function rather as a nudge to white people, and perhaps a reminder to Native people, to recognize the existence of other perspectives: to broaden their own world views, and to consider that historians have not necessarily always gotten the story "right." King seems

to suggest that there is always another side to a story, in writing or in dialogue, and he presents his alternatives in such a way that white readers may have to chuckle before the significance catches up with them.

Chuckling unselfconsciously may open minds and allow both white and Native people to put white culture into a more realistic perspective that is influenced by voices other than those of dominance. This seems to be an important part of King's invitation: a reminder that white culture is no longer so important that it cannot be ignored. King does, in fact, frequently ignore white culture in his writing, and focuses instead on presenting a view that has room for multiple versions of a story, and for storytelling as a cooperative effort.

The linguistic nature of King's humour seems to demonstrate a facility with language (in this case English) that allows him to play with words, and to use word games as part of his irreverent approach. Although there are similarities here to Maracle, whose use of "settler language" has been associated with an attempt to "subvert" white culture (Lundgren 69), King's use of English seems more strongly associated with his personal ability than with his political statement. King does not "borrow" English in order to make a point: he simply manipulates his own language until it says what he wants it to say.

By using his sense of humour and his ability with language, then, King deconstructs and reconstructs the historical perspective of Native-white relations. His invitation to intercultural dialogue seems to include the incentive to find something about which to laugh, even in tense and serious situations, and to allow that laughter to influence one's approach to cultures less familiar than one's own.

Rather than emanating from her personality, the humour in Maracle's work seems to be part of a carefully considered, two-sided construct of contemporary Native life. First, humour binds Native peoples, particularly women, together and acts as a language in itself. This form of communication functions in intimate situations that threaten to become embarrassing; it gives voice to and combats boredom; and it connects Native women in such a way that speech often becomes unnecessary. Rather than encouraging dialogue, this aspect of Maracle's humour actually reduces its necessity.

Second, the other, harsher side of Maracle's humour operates under the shadow of continuing white colonialism: a problem that Maracle considers as significant for contemporary Native culture as it was historically. This humour provides an outlet: an alternative to violence born

of frustration and anger, and a coping and strengthening mechanism that encourages independence and survival.

Maracle seems to invite her readers to consider both aspects of her humour in order to find connection to her invitation to intercultural dialogue. Both the inwardly and the outwardly directed types of humour seem to send the clear message that Native culture, although influenced by white culture, is actually independent of it. Native women share inside jokes: culturally specific understandings that need no voice but a chuckle. Similarly, Maracle's Native characters share a strategy through which they can cope with the difficulties of dealing with white culture. The fact that they seem to enjoy this part of their humour as much as that of their less conflicted camaraderie seems to emphasize their independence. Maracle invites white readers to explore Native humour: to consider why her characters might find things in white culture funny, or to think about why they might react with laughter to a hopeless situation. Maracle invites readers to try to understand Native humour as part of accepting and learning about the complexities of Native culture.

Like King's, Maracle's invitation, as evident in her use of humour, does not seem to emphasize physical action, at least initially, as much as it encourages re-examination of perspective. Maracle invites white readers to examine

the closeness enjoyed by her female characters, and to consider the function of humour as non-verbal communication: as an acceptance of silence, as well as of speech, in the process of dialogue. Maracle also insists that white people consider what it means to choose laughter over violence, to use humour when faced with insurmountable obstacles: part of her intention to bring people to another way of seeing, and part of her vision to present Native values as an alternative to those of white culture.

Although they function very differently, and their applications require different appreciation, King and Maracle's uses of humour are very much a part of their invitations to intercultural dialogue. Both invite white readers to listen, to think, and to adjust their perspectives. Like the non-Haida characters in Reid's sculpture, white readers are positioned so that they can find new common ground with those different from themselves.

The "didactic purpose of storytelling," according to James Tully, whether through sculpture or through fiction, "is not to set out categorical imperatives but to develop the listeners' ability to think for themselves" (32). Those who read King and Maracle's work are brought into a long and diverse history of storytelling, in which the listener/reader is expected to participate. In her preface

to *Sojourner's Truth*, Maracle discusses reader involvement in Native literature. "Each story," she says,

is layered with unresolved human dilemmas; each story will require the engaged imagination of the reader.... Most of our stories don't have orthodox 'conclusions'; that is left to the listeners, who we trust will draw useful lessons from the story.... The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it.... As listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose. (SJT 11-13)

"To 'be the Trickster'," according to Susie O'Brien, "is not just to celebrate the dissolution of discursive boundaries, but to engage, as Maracle does," and as King does, "with the complexities and contradictions of history" (94). This suggests that white readers interested in engaging in intercultural dialogue must first read this history from the Native point of view, and whether they understand it completely or not, must accept it as an alternative to their own. Then, with two versions of the stories in mind, they can consider their [readers' and listeners'] own responses and move to some sort of action influenced by this consideration. "The test of understanding a story," according to Tully, "is... how it affects their attitude and how they go on in various circumstances to conduct their life in light of what they have learned from reflection on the story.... There are a multitude of ways of being guided" (33).

Matchie and Larson suggest that *Green Grass, Running Water* holds a clue to one of the ways readers may be guided, and challenged. Myths are told and retold in this work, with the goal of "getting it right." Coyote and the other trickster figures who are out to repair the world are involved in these retellings, all of which suggests that "[i]f we are going to fix the world anew with Coyote, we need to fix our myths. We do so by reflecting upon them, updating them, bringing them into balance.... We need to tell and retell our stories until we form a healthier relationship with each other and all of nature" (165-66).

Progress, according to Tully, "consists in learning to recognise, converse with and be mutually accommodating to the culturally diverse neighbours in the city we inhabit here and now" (186). King and Maracle seem to suggest that humour can and should play a significant role in this learning process. As is evident in their work, laughter can illuminate realities of daily existence and reveal cultural characteristics such as strength and tenacity. It can also provide a bridge upon which those who are willing can meet, exchange information, and enrich their previous perspectives. King and Maracle's uses of humour facilitate the types of intracultural and intercultural connections that are vital to the enhancement of Native/non-Native relations in our modern age.

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