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NATIVE LITERATURE IN CANADA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE COYOTE  
TRICKSTER IN THE LITERATURE OF THOMAS KING AND W.P. KINSELLA

par

STEPHEN FERGUSSON

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**Composition du jury**

M. Ronald Sutherland, directeur de recherche, Département des lettres et communications  
M. Gregory Reid, professeur, Département des lettres et communications  
M. Winfried Siemerling, professeur, Département des lettres et communications

## Acknowledgments

Seven years ago, I arrived at l'Université de Sherbrooke to teach in the Summer English Language Program for six weeks. Here I worked with a group of teachers who were pursuing Master degree programmes in Comparative Canadian Literature. After expressing an interest in the program, I met with Ronald Sutherland who interviewed me, checked my academic background and welcomed me aboard.

It has been a long struggle these past seven years. Instead of taking the quick route of a twelve-month degree, I chose the extended version of seven years, and took the time to sift through numerous documents for my thesis research. In the time between choosing my thesis topic and printing this final version, there have been important works published in the field of Native studies. It has not been an easy journey for me. By nature I am a team player and very motivated by team goals. It has been difficult to be as self-focused and self-disciplined as is required to fulfill the requirements of a thesis. Many people have offered help and encouragement along the way. I would like to take a moment to thank them, and to mention a few names in particular.

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assume a teaching position in Jean Marie River (a Native community in the Northwest Territories) while only two months into the program. With her encouragement, I approached my professors with the intention of combining my studies with a unique cultural and working experience, and was granted permission to continue my courses by correspondence.

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### My Initial Exposure to Native Literature

During my stay in Jean Marie River, I read my first work of Native Canadian fiction. I began reading entire collections of Native Myths and Legends, such as George Blondin's When the World Was New and works of an autobiographical nature, including Maria Campbell's Half-Breed, which explores the plight of modern Natives as they attempt to define their place in a white-dominated society. Later, I developed interest in novels with more global themes: Basil Johnston's Moose Meat and Wild Rice, Markoosie's Harpoon of The Hunter, Jeanette Armstrong's Slash and Ruby Slipperjack's Honour the Sun, to name a few.

Eventually, I read the novel Medicine River by Thomas King. Medicine River did not read like other novels. It was surprisingly rich in literary style, yet addressed the same themes present in the books identified above—the Native leaves the reserve for opportunities in the big urban centre, only to lose touch with his identity, and eventually chooses to give up the "big city life" for the richness of being with his people. I found the novel to be rich in literary style. It had a more complex plot than those works I had previously read.

At the same time, I had mentioned to a friend that I was researching novels in Native literature. She told me that she had read a very good collection of Native short stories during her studies at college. She then lent me her copy of W. P. Kinsella's The Moccasin Telegraph. Thus I was introduced to the works of King and Kinsella almost simultaneously.

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## Résumé

Jusqu'à maintenant, les critiques de la littérature canadienne n'ont pas clairement défini ce qui rend la littérature autochtone canadienne différente de la littérature française ou anglaise. Le but de cette thèse est de définir ce qui rend la littérature autochtone canadienne unique et de proposer, à travers des références à la littérature autochtone canadienne moderne, une définition plus détaillée de la littérature autochtone canadienne.

Comme la société canadienne se rapproche du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle, la population autochtone fait entendre sa voix. Dans le recensement de 1989, la population des autochtones au Canada était de 466 337. La grande majorité de ces autochtones appartiennent à des groupes communautaires appelés des bandes. En 1989, il y avait 596 bandes au Canada. Les membres de ces bandes résidaient dans un total de 2 283 réserves d'un océan à l'autre.

Alors que la migration a déterminé leur développement linguistique, leur endroit de repos final ou leur lieu géographique a eu la plus grande influence sur leur culture. Un excellent exemple de cette diversification se trouve chez les peuples des plaines, les nomades forcés à voyager à la poursuite des puissants troupeaux de bisons qui peuplaient autrefois les plaines. Des montagnes Rocheuses jusqu'à l'Ouest habitaient les gens de la première nation Haida du littoral du Pacifique. Ces autochtones se sont adaptés à leurs alentours géographiques en construisant des communautés permanentes de pêche et d'agriculture.

À travers le monde, il n'existe pas de meilleur hommage à une culture que la littérature, et la culture autochtone canadienne n'est pas une exception. La littérature autochtone canadienne suit la grande diversité des gens illustrés dans les



histoires. Des chansons et de la poésie mystiques des Inuit au théâtre moderne de Tomson Highway, les histoires sont toutes différentes. Un examen attentif révèle des thèmes semblables qui coulent dans les oeuvres comme un courant. Dans certains cas, le thème est axé sur les traditions d'une culture perdue, une période où la vie était plus facile. Dans d'autres cas, nous retrouvons le personnage principal dans une lutte contre la société moderne tandis qu'il essaie d'inclure les traditions perdues.

Durant les dix dernières années, une douzaine d'oeuvres d'auteurs et auteures autochtones du Canada ont été publiées au pays. Avec l'assaut de la littérature autochtone canadienne vient le besoin pour les critiques littéraires, les éditeurs de livres et les libraires de trouver une façon de définir ce qui rend la littérature autochtone canadienne unique.

Dans l'introduction de sa collection de nouvelles, All My Relations, l'auteur autochtone Thomas King écrit que la littérature autochtone peut simplement se définir comme une littérature produite par des personnes de descendance autochtone. Si cela est le cas, qu'arrive-t-il aux auteurs et auteures qui sont Métis ou autochtones de naissance mais qui ont grandi en milieu urbain et appris leur héritage autochtone en lisant les mêmes livres lus par de nombreux enfants canadiens et écrits par des auteurs blancs?

Regarder plus loin que la lignée de l'auteur demande l'instauration de critères qui vont permettre aux critiques littéraires de trouver des avenues pour examiner la littérature autochtone canadienne. Afin d'établir de tels critères, nous devons d'abord en prouver la justesse.

Le but de cette thèse est de détourner l'accent mis sur la lignée de l'auteur et de le concentrer plutôt sur l'étude thématique, c'est-à-dire le thème religieux basé sur le coyote filou. Dans cette étude, je comparerai le personnage du coyote filou décrit dans les diverses nouvelles et les divers romans et nouvelles. Je présenterai les oeuvres d'auteurs et auteures autochtones et non autochtones.

Cette thèse examinera les créations, les romans et les nouvelles autochtones modernes en mettant l'accent sur le rôle du personnage du coyote filou. Je comparerai le personnage du coyote filou décrit dans les oeuvres de ces auteurs et auteures au personnage du coyote filou décrit dans les oeuvres de W.P. Kinsella, un auteur non autochtone. Le but de cette comparaison est de déterminer les ressemblances et les contrastes qui existent entre Kinsella et les auteurs autochtones. Je vais par la suite essayer de déduire si les oeuvres de Kinsella peuvent être considérées comme de la littérature autochtone, tout en essayant de mieux préciser la définition de la littérature autochtone canadienne. La définition de la littérature autochtone canadienne comporte des problèmes. Existe-t-il une frontière géo-politique qui divise la littérature autochtone de l'Amérique du Nord en littérature autochtone canadienne, d'une part, et littérature autochtone américaine, d'autre part? Est-ce que la littérature autochtone doit être produite par des auteurs et auteures autochtones et si cela est le cas, qui peut se décrire comme auteur ou auteure autochtone?

La suggestion de Thomas King de définir simplement la littérature autochtone comme *“une littérature produite par des personnes de descendance autochtone”* ne suffit pas. Cette définition n'aborde pas la question du contenu. Il

semblerait y avoir une forte justification à inclure la littérature écrite sur les autochtones par des personnes n'ayant pas de descendance autochtone. Si nous devons examiner le *contenu* de la littérature autochtone qui répond à la définition de King (écrite par des personnes de descendance autochtone) et le comparer au contenu des oeuvres de Kinsella, nous devrions alors nécessairement conclure que l'ascendance n'est pas le seul facteur à considérer dans la définition. Si une personne qui n'est pas de descendance autochtone, comme Kinsella, peut représenter avec précision une vision autochtone du monde et la communiquer si bien dans ses oeuvres que l'on prend cette personne pour un auteur ou une auteure de descendance autochtone (ce point est documenté dans cette thèse), pourquoi alors ses oeuvres devraient-elles être exclues de la définition de la littérature autochtone? Si nous élargissons la définition de la littérature autochtone proposée par King en utilisant *l'analyse textuelle*, nous devons inclure de nombreuses oeuvres littéraires qui méritent la considération de la littérature autochtone mais qui en sont actuellement exclues.

Il est très important d'être clair sur la définition que je propose dans cette thèse. La définition suivante est comme une fondation à bâtir à l'aide de critères contextuels qui, je l'espère, vont continuer à être élaborés :

La littérature autochtone canadienne devrait se définir comme suit : *une littérature qui a pour thème les histoires des peuples autochtones vivant en territoire canadien et qui répond aux critères contextuels du genre autochtone*. Le genre devrait être divisé en deux catégories : *littérature écrite par des personnes autochtones et littérature écrite par des personnes non autochtones*.

Je crois qu'il est nécessaire pour les auteurs et auteures de la littérature autochtone de faire une distinction claire entre la fiction et la réalité pour prévenir la perpétuation des stéréotypes négatifs à travers des portraits injustifiés des personnes autochtones au Canada. Les histoires de Kinsella Ermineskin (Hobbema), par exemple, devraient commencer par un énoncé clair qui explique que la collection de nouvelles est une oeuvre de fiction. Kinsella pourrait aussi vouloir faire un énoncé concernant ses personnages et le fait que s'ils ressemblent à des vraies personnes, mortes ou vivantes, ce n'est qu'une pure coïncidence.

Je suggère aussi que Kinsella explique dans la préface de ses collections, comme il l'a fait dans des entrevues documentées dans cette thèse, pourquoi il a choisi l'humour pour exprimer la situation des personnes défavorisées.

Je vais présenter un aperçu du personnage du filou tel qu'il est représenté dans les nombreuses cultures autochtones d'Amérique du Nord. Je me réfère au "il" seulement pour la commodité grammaticale car le filou est androgène de nature, se présentant comme un homme ou une femme selon la situation. Dans le cycle du filou de Winnebego, par exemple, le filou se déguise en femme qui crée une vulve à partir de la carcasse d'un animal mort et qui courtise le fils du chef. Je vais aussi discuter des similarités avec le filou de la mythologie grecque et de la tradition folklorique européenne. De la mythologie du filou, je vais ensuite passer au rôle du filou dans la prose moderne écrite à propos des autochtones.

Avant d'examiner les oeuvres de W. P. Kinsella et de Thomas King, je vais examiner les arguments provenant des deux côtés d'un des débats politiques le plus acharnés dans les cercles littéraires modernes, c'est-à-dire, l'appropriation de la voix.

Je vais discuter la réaction à l'oeuvre de Kinsella par des personnes autochtones et non autochtones. Je vais aussi discuter de ce que je considère comme l'appropriation autochtone nord-américaine des mythes européens.

De nombreuses personnes autochtones et non autochtones sont inquiètes du fait que des auteurs ou auteures non autochtones ont publié avec succès des romans qui prennent place dans des collectivités autochtones et qui mettent l'accent sur le style de vie des personnes autochtones, tandis que, au même moment, de nombreux écrivains et écrivaines autochtones se démènent pour se faire publier. Aussi, de nombreuses personnes pensent que les auteurs et auteures non autochtones n'ont pas le droit d'écrire à propos du style de vie des personnes autochtones. L'expression la plus souvent utilisée est "l'appropriation de la voix". Qui peut légitimement parler d'une personne ou en son nom? Est-ce que seulement les oeuvres d'une nature autobiographique peuvent être considérées légitimes? Qu'arrive-t-il alors aux auteurs créatifs comme W. P. Kinsella?

Les arguments proviennent des deux côtés du débat politique de la question de l'appropriation de la voix. Malheureusement, tel qu'exposé dans les exemples précédents, les émotions ont joué un rôle important dans cet argument explosif. Ma suggestion est que les critiques de la littérature canadienne qui désirent déterminer ce qui sépare la littérature autochtone de la littérature canadienne devraient examiner le texte et non la lignée de l'auteur ou l'auteure. L'accent devrait passer de l'auteur ou l'auteure au contenu de l'écriture de l'auteur ou l'auteure. Il doit y avoir une analyse objective de la littérature autochtone éventuelle selon des critères littéraires objectifs comme le mythe du coyote filou.

Donc, avec l'acceptation de mon hypothèse, la seule progression logique est que les histoires d'Hobbema de W. P. Kinsella, ayant répondu aux critères établis d'évaluation de la littérature autochtone, devraient être considérées légitimement comme des oeuvres qui sont formulées dans une définition nouvelle et élargie de la littérature autochtone au Canada.

J'affirme qu'une personne ne doit pas trop rapidement donner une définition restreinte à la littérature autochtone au Canada, mais pour conclure cette thèse et en essayant d'ajouter une nouvelle dimension à ce que je considère être une définition en évolution, je vais donner ma définition de la littérature autochtone d'Amérique du Nord, les histoires sans frontières et leur sous-catégorie, la littérature autochtone canadienne. (J'utilise canadienne seulement comme un point de référence géopolitique). Avant de commencer, j'aimerais clarifier ce que je veux dire par une "définition en évolution". La littérature autochtone au Canada, tout comme les personnes qu'elle représente, est dans une période de transition. Le progrès d'évolution est venu très lentement pour certaines personnes autochtones et très vite pour d'autres personnes. Ce qui est constant dans chaque cas, ce sont les difficultés de croissance. Je pense que la littérature qui passe par ce processus évolutionniste a besoin d'avoir le plus de place possible, afin de pouvoir grandir et prendre la place qui lui revient à côté des autres littératures. En voulant définir trop rapidement la littérature autochtone, nous risquons de placer des limites sur son développement, dans un sens éteindre les lueurs de la créativité qui va, je l'espère, allumer la flamme d'un genre littéraire vraiment remarquable.

Cette thèse argumente que le personnage du filou devrait être considéré comme un critère et que nous cherchions à établir les autres. Je crois que les auteurs et auteures de la littérature autochtone peuvent être autochtones ou pas, tant et aussi longtemps que leurs oeuvres répondent aux critères contextuels établis. Je crois qu'en élargissant la définition de la littérature autochtone au Canada pour inclure les auteurs et auteures autochtones et non autochtones, les contributions des deux groupes se combineront pour enrichir la littérature canadienne. Je n'attache pas de valeurs d'importance à la littérature autochtone par les auteurs et auteures de descendance autochtone ou non. J'affirme simplement que ces deux groupes méritent de la considération quand leurs oeuvres sont évaluées et qu'elles répondent aux critères de la littérature autochtone au Canada.

Regarder plus loin que la lignée de l'auteur demande l'instauration de critères qui vont permettre aux critiques littéraires de trouver des avenues pour examiner la littérature autochtone canadienne. Afin d'établir de tels critères, nous devons d'abord en prouver la justesse.

Les auteurs et auteures peuvent être autochtones ou non, tant et aussi longtemps que leurs oeuvres répondent aux critères contextuels établis. Cette liste comprendrait Rudy Wiebe, George Ryga, Grey Owl, W.P. Kinsella et Thomas King.

Pour terminer, je fais une demande aux critiques littéraires qui lisent cette thèse : j'espère que les critiques littéraires vont s'ouvrir l'esprit à l'idée de juger la littérature autochtone selon les critères de contenu et que d'autres caractéristiques de la littérature autochtone canadienne seront établies et ajoutées à la qualité qui est exposée dans cette thèse, c'est-à-dire, le coyote filou.

Je perçois cette thèse comme un point de départ pour l'ouverture des portes qui ont été fermées à propos de la définition de la littérature autochtone au Canada. Cette thèse est une petite poussée pour entrouvrir la porte et éclaircir un peu ce sujet. La vérité est que cette porte restera ouverte tant et aussi longtemps que les auteurs et auteures, les lecteurs et lectrices, les enseignants et enseignantes et les critiques seront intéressés à apprendre des nouvelles idées. En tant qu'académiciens et académiciennes, nous avons l'obligation de laisser les portes ouvertes et d'encourager la liberté d'esprit.



## Introduction

### Purpose

This thesis examines the Coyote-trickster character roles in modern Native fiction novels and short stories from a variety of authors. The Coyote-trickster character found in these works will be compared with the Coyote-trickster character in the works of a non-Native author, W. P. Kinsella.

The purpose of the comparison is to challenge the current definition(s) of Native Canadian Literature by determining what similarities and/or contrasts exist between the works of Native writers and the non-Native Kinsella. I will conclude by offering another, more compelling definition of what Native Canadian Literature really is.

There are problems arriving at a definition of Native Canadian Literature. We may begin by considering the following questions: Is Native Literature only that which is created by Native writers? If so, who qualifies as a Native writer? Is there a geo-political border that separates North American Native Literature into Canadian and American Native Literature?

Many Natives and non-Natives are bothered because non-Native writers have successfully published works of fiction set in Native communities which focus on the Native way of life, while many Native writers are struggling to get published. As well, many feel that these authors, being non-Native, have no right to comment on Native life. The expression most often used is "appropriation of voice." Who can legitimately speak for

or about another people? Can only works of an autobiographical nature be considered legitimate? What happens then to creative writers such as W. P. Kinsella?

Appropriation of voice is one of the hottest political debates in present-day literary circles. Whether Kinsella's work has the right to be called Native North American fiction, of course, is a question of empathy and voice. I will discuss the reaction to Kinsella's work by both Natives and non-Natives. I will also discuss the North American Native appropriation of European myths.

Many Native readers are surprised when they discover that Kinsella is not a Native. (Twigg 139) The question I am raising is, admittedly, as politically sensitive as the question of appropriation of voice, but I believe it needs to be asked and the answer must be presented with objectivity: Can Kinsella's works as well as those of other non-Native writers such as Rudy Wiebe and Grey Owl be considered part of a new definition of Native Canadian literature that includes works of Native themes that are not necessarily written by Native authors?

According to the current criteria of political correctness, the answer is *no*. But, are these criteria sufficient? What if we were to establish other criteria based on the *content* as opposed to the author? This thesis explores this possibility with respect to Native Canadian literature.

I will first present an overview of the Trickster character as it is portrayed in various North American Native cultures. I will also discuss its

similarities with the Trickster of Greek mythology and European folklorist tradition. From there, I will examine the role of the Trickster in modern prose written about Natives.

### The Shift From Oral to Written Tradition

For this study, it is necessary to comment on the changes that have occurred in Native Canadian society in recent years. As Canadian society moves closer to the twenty-first century, Native people are finally making their voices heard. Phrases such as *Native land claims*, *self-government* and *self-determination* are now firmly entrenched in our vernacular. The Native voice in Canada is far from being a unified one, however. Images of the celebrations over a landmark settlement which gave self-rule to the Inuit of Northern Canada over a territory that amounts to more than one third of Canada's land mass, contrast sharply with those of the glue-sniffing teenagers of Davis Inlet, locked in a shed, plotting a mass suicide, or the famous 1990 Mohawk-Canadian military standoff in the pine forest at Oka. (Dickason 346)

In the 1989 census, the population of status Indians in Canada stood at 466,337. The majority of these Natives belong to Native community groups known as bands. In 1989, there were 596 bands in Canada. The members of these bands resided on 2,283 reserves stretching from sea to sea. The Canadian Natives' linguistic backgrounds are as diverse as their geographical locations. It is estimated that, at the time of the white man's first settlement of North America during the sixteenth century, there were over 2,200 Native languages spoken. In Canada today there are 54 languages spoken by aboriginal people, the Cree having the largest number of speakers. (Canada)

Adaptation to white culture has been both the Native strength and, to a large extent, the cause of their demise. In many Native groups, adaptation has resulted in assimilation. Much of the rich culture and heritage has been lost as the elders, who held the wealth of their oral traditional knowledge, died without transcribing their stories. Today, North American Native cultures are all but extinct. Emerging from these dying flames is a prolific Native writing community in Canada.

The Native voice is now being heard not only in prose, but through drama, poetry and song. Names such as Susan Aglukark, Buffy Ste-Marie, Kashtin, Tom Jackson, Daniel David Moses and Thomson Highway have entered the ranks of Canadian celebrity. They are not only helping to revive a pride among Native Canadians, but are helping to educate non-Natives about Native culture.

### The Evolution of Native Literature

To carefully examine the works of literature presented in this thesis, it is necessary to have an understanding of the changes that are occurring in Native Canadian literature as a whole. Until now, Native literature in Canada has presumably been defined as *literature written by Natives and about Natives in Canada*. This definition is dependent on the writer first and the text second, but I believe that a definition that focuses on the text as opposed to the author is the only objective way to analyse literature.

Canadian Native literature follows the broad diversity of the people whose story it tells. From the mystical songs and poetry of the Inuit, to the modern drama of Tomson Highway, there is considerable diversity. Yet, a closer look reveals similar themes that flow through Native literature. These themes often return the reader to a similar time—a time when more mysteries were left unexplained and each day was a struggle for survival, a time when, no matter whether one's stomach was empty or full, one always had pride.

Literary critic Charles Ballard combines all of North American Native literature and mythology under one heading, "Native American Literature," thus removing the border between Canada and the United States. Thomas King's "Borders" from his collection All My Relations, focuses on a member of the Blackfoot nation, who is caught in no man's land between the Canadian and United States borders after she responds to the border guards' questions concerning her citizenship by saying that she is neither Canadian nor American, but Blackfoot. She makes her point that there are no political borders for North American Natives. When her people followed the herds of buffalo, they would not stop at the border crossing or return to their side of origin. Why should they change now? King, through the irony of this situation, exemplifies his belief that geographical borders have no traditional place in Native life.

Thomas King, in an interview with Harmut Lutz (1991), was asked the following question, "...given the reception of your book and the novel you published here, the people would label you as a 'Canadian Native Author.'

How do you see that?" (107). King replied with the same perspective that is presented in his short story, "Borders":

There's only one problem in the sense that I am not originally from Canada, and the Cherokee certainly aren't a Canadian tribe. Now that becomes a problem if you agree with the assumptions that that line makes.

I think of myself as a Native writer and a Canadian writer. I doubt if I could call myself a Canadian Native writer, just because I'm not from one of the tribes from up here. But all of my short stories, and the novel, and the anthologies, and the critical book that I co-edited, were published here in Canada, and they all have to do with Canadian material. I have done nothing in the US to speak of. So, yes, I consider myself to be a Canadian writer. (107-8)

It is important to note that King considers the fact that his works are set in Canada to be a factor in determining whether they are Canadian literature. King admits that he is not a Canadian Native writer, because he is not from a Canadian tribe, but he is a writer of Canadian literature about Natives. I believe that King is not only a writer of Canadian literature about Natives, but more importantly, he is a writer of Native Canadian literature.

The purpose of this thesis is to establish criteria for determining a newer broader definition of Native Canadian literature, one that addresses the issue of Canadian literature written about Natives and Native Canadian literature written by Natives. I will argue that W.P. Kinsella, also admittedly a

non-Native in Canada, is, like King, a Canadian writer of literature about Natives and that Kinsella's short stories possess qualities that are undeniably Native in nature.

This thesis focuses on works of Modern Native Fiction from North America. Ballard, in the article mentioned above, places a reference to the beginning of Modern North American Native literature that, for the purpose of this study, is important to mention:

The modern period in Native American literature, is assigned by Andrew Wiget to the year 1927 when Christal Quintasket, or Mourning Dove, published her novel *Cogewa, the Half-Blood*. It can be considered a rough beginning, although it will still remain a period piece not without some interest, as well as a predictable and rather folksy western romance that is admirable because of the literary struggle it represents. Mourning Dove's novel meant, albeit dimly or intentionally, that a change in direction for Native American literature had been made. Other writers were to follow her lead, moving away once and for all from the silent centers of ritual and myth — yet, significantly still within philosophical range of the regular way. (Ballard 12)

Dozens of works by Canadian Native authors have been published across the country in the last ten years. With this comes the need for literary critics, book publishers and librarians to find a way to define what constitutes Canadian Native literature and, more particularly perhaps, to establish which writers should be included in this category.

In All My Relations, Thomas King states that, "when we talk about Native literature, we talk as if we already have a definition for this body of literature when, in fact, we do not" (4).

King suggests that Native literature may be defined simply as: *literature produced by those of Native ancestry*. But this is not sufficient. There would appear to be ample justification to include literature written about Natives by those of non-Native ancestry. If we were to examine the *content* of Native literature which answers to King's definition (written by those of Native ancestry), and compare it to the content of Kinsella's work, we must necessarily conclude that ancestry is not the only factor that must be considered in the definition. If an author of non-Native ancestry, like Kinsella, can accurately represent a Native world view and communicate it so well in his works as to be mistaken as a writer of Native ancestry, why then should his work be excluded from that which is defined as Native literature? If we broaden the definition of Native Literature proposed by King using *textual analysis*, we must include many literary works that merit consideration as Native literature, but are excluded.

Looking beyond an author's blood lineage requires the establishment of criteria that will allow literary critics avenues to examine Canadian Native literature. In order to establish such criteria, one must first prove the validity of these new criteria.

Ronald Sutherland (1977) makes an interesting argument for the sphere of consciousness present in Canadian literature. Sutherland poses



some very important questions that, although published in 1977, still reverberate in halls of universities across Canada today: "Does citizenship matter? Does it matter whether a writer came to this country after growing up elsewhere, or went elsewhere after growing up here?... Do we really have to stick to national labels on creative writers at all?" (84-85)

To answer these questions, Sutherland "suggest(s) that the determining factor is not where he (the writer) was brought up or where he has chosen to live, but rather the sphere of consciousness in which he has created his works, the result of his total cultural conditioning and especially the dominant influences" (87).

Sphere of consciousness is defined by Sutherland as that knowledge which is within the author's range of understanding. He argues:

...one must presume that a writer can express only what is within his awareness, however vague this awareness might be and whatever unforeseen or unrealized implications the writing might turn out to have. Consequently, the work of every writer must perforce be informed by the sphere and range of his consciousness, which in turn is the product of what might be called cultural conditioning. People think, feel, react and express themselves in certain ways because of cultural conditioning and how this conditioning has shaped their hereditary potentials.  
(86)

Thus, we can conclude from Sutherland's comments that authors' writing is not solely affected by their blood lineage, but also by events that affect their lives, leaving impressions that influence their thinking. Native writers raised in a Native community would, arguably, be exposed to Native influences and one would expect their writing to reflect this exposure. But I believe being a Native author does not give an individual exclusive insight into the 'Native world.' I believe that it is possible for non-Natives to enter this "sphere of consciousness" as defined by Sutherland through their exposure to influences similar to those that have affected the literature of a Native writer who is raised in a Native culture. In turn, I believe that this exposure and the subsequent influences that they have on non-Native writers have a direct impact on their writing, even to the point where their literary work possesses many of the same qualities as Native writers who are also writing about Natives.

Penny Petrone states in the introduction to her survey of Native Literature entitled Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present:

The study of the vast and rich body of the literature of the Native people of Canada has been too long neglected and ignored. Whether it has been the oral literature that transcends the European concepts of genre—speeches, letters, sermons, reports, petitions, diary entries, essays, history, journals, autobiography, poetry, short stories, and novels—very few literary scholars are familiar with it. (1)

While defining the parameters of Native literature in Canada, one would logically presume that the category would first be open to literary works created by writers of Native ancestry. In addition, however, it seems reasonable to presume that it should also include those works, whether or not written by full-blooded Native authors, which share the characteristic themes, codes and conventions of the literature of Native people. In other words, the corpus of Native Canadian literature should be determined by content as much as heredity and geography.

I believe that the only unbiased approach to the study of literature is based on textual analysis. I also believe that when literary critics begin to include their interpretation of the author's intention, they lose any objectivity that may have existed in their analysis.

By excluding all works of literature that have not been written by Natives from the corpus of Native literature, we are unfairly limiting this body of works and making the statement that one must be born into an environment in order to understand it well enough to write about it. I believe this is not the case and that an author can write within a genre from a "sphere of consciousness" that has been acquired. In other words, a writer does not have to be born Native to write with an empathy and understanding of Native life. I believe that if a literary work satisfies predetermined criteria for Native literature, it should be accepted as Native literature, no matter whether the author is Native or non-Native.

I propose that a clear line be drawn between literature that is Native in origin, written by a Native author, and literature that is Native in theme.

literature written about Natives. Namely, that we separate Native literature into two categories: literature that satisfies predetermined criteria for works of the Native genre written by Natives and written by non-Natives. I suggest that the first category be referred to as 'literature about Natives written by Natives' and the second, 'Native literature about Natives'.

I believe that in an ideal situation the writing and the writer should be judged separately. I believe that it is important to differentiate between Native literature written by Natives and Native literature written about Natives not for the purpose of judging the validity of the text, but with the intention of keeping the avenue open for the Native writer's voice to heard and recognized as such. The Native writer's stories should be told, but not at the expense of silencing the non-Native creative writer of literature about Natives.

## Chapter 1

### Public Reaction to Kinsella's Writing

In 1977, the Native community of Canada was in the midst of establishing itself with a newfound identity and pride. Native political activists were fighting for land claims settlements and making every possible attempt to improve the lives of many Canadian Natives across the country.

It was at this time that W. P. Kinsella's first collection of Native short stories, Dance Me Outside, was published. These short stories, also known as the Ermineskin stories after the narrator, Silas Ermineskin, are set on the Hobbema Reserve in southern Alberta. The stories are a satirical commentary about life on a Native reserve, but Kinsella pokes fun at Natives and Non-Natives equally. No one is spared, including the agents of government, the local RCMP officers, the officials from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the chief and local band council. (Hustak, "Absurdities" 46)

W. P. Kinsella is a Canadian author known for his short stories and novels about American baseball. Probably the most famous is Shoeless Joe which was made into the successful Hollywood film, Field of Dreams. He has also produced a large collection of short stories that are set in a Native community in Canada. Between 1977 and 1994, Kinsella published seven chronicles of humorous short stories set on the Hobbema Reserve, 40 miles south of Edmonton, Alberta. One of these collections, The Fence-post Chronicles, earned him the coveted Leacock Award for Humour.

When Kinsella's works set on the Hobbema Reserve first appeared, they were met by protest both from the Native and the non-Native communities. He was condemned for portraying his characters as rude stereotypes of Canadian Native and non-Native society. He was also criticized because he was a white man speaking about Native issues. As a non-Native did he have the right to do this? The 1983 review of The Moccasin Telegraph, states: "Stan McKay, the United Church of Canada's coordinator of Native ministries and a Cree, said he didn't find Mr. Kinsella's work offensive, but possibly open to mis-interpretation by those not familiar with Natives" (46).

Not every critic has been as kind as Mr. McKay. The January 22, 1990 issue of the Alberta Report features an article in which an Alberta Native who happens to have the same last name as a dubious character in one of Kinsella's short stories, launched a law suit against Kinsella for defamation of character. Kinsella claims that this occurrence was purely coincidental. It is interesting to note that the plaintiff, Mr. Smallface, has only one complaint about Kinsella's work—the use of his name. Smallface "admits he finds many of Kinsella's stories 'hilarious'" (Rempel 35).

Author and academic, Rudy Wiebe, claims that Kinsella has defaced the integrity of the Alberta Cree by continuing "to use the Ermineskin people over and over again in the stereotypes of the Indian as a total non-achiever in white society, the Indian as chronic liar, the Indian as buffoon" (A15). Kinsella responds with the argument that no one has the right to impose on an author the place where he can or cannot locate his novel.

What is most interesting in this debate is that Rudy Wiebe himself has written numerous novels about Natives which contain real names of Natives and real places. His most famous novel is The Temptations of Big Bear, which won the Governor-General's Award for fiction.

In his own defense, Kinsella states that he understands the mentality of the oppressed and that he captures this feeling with compassion. Wiebe's sole argument rests on Kinsella's use of the Hobbema name and common Indian names such as Buffalo and Coyote. He does not question Kinsella's right as a non-Native author to describe the Native situation on reserves in Canada, nor does he claim that these authors should not write about Native situations because there are already too many Native writers who cannot get published.

Concerning Kinsella and his portrayal of Natives, the opinions are mixed. At the BACS Conference in 1995, I discussed this topic with Arnold Davidson of Duke University. Dr. Davidson had recently published a book on fiction of Western Canada entitled, Coyote Country. In his book, Davidson discusses the writing of W. P. Kinsella and Thomas King at length. While discussing the topic of my paper, he informed me that his brother-in-law is a Cree chief in southern Alberta and is vehemently opposed to Kinsella's short stories set on the Hobbema Reserve. Yet he also stated that, throughout his literature teaching experience in midwestern American prisons, he had used Kinsella's Ermineskin tales to teach English to Native American Indians, and students had loved the stories.

Another comment on this subject comes from Gordon Johnston. In his article, "An Intolerable Burden of Meaning: Native Peoples in White Fiction", he states:

The symbolic use of Indians by White authors is not in itself racist, but the use of anomalous symbolic Indian figures in a realist context is in danger of being racist since they are separated from the humanity of the other characters and obliged to carry an intolerable burden of meaning. Their symbolic force must derive not from what Whites make of them but from who they are. (King, Carver, Hoy 65)

In his article, part of the collection of papers delivered at the 1985 Lethbridge Conference, Johnston makes a pro-Kinsella argument. He argues that Kinsella's stories do not attempt to show "ultimate meaning," but instead "are part of a larger, looser, communal reality" (65). He later comments:

Sometimes endings are purposely not provided by Silas the storyteller or by Kinsella the author. The effect is of destabilized expectations and reactions; we have no final sense of how funny or how disturbing a story is. What seems tragic in one context will seem hilarious in another, and we struggle uncomfortably with morally ambivalent events, as in life, without the simplifications of symbolic structures. (62)



Finally, Johnston praises Kinsella with a series of commentaries that are certainly unexpected by an academic at a conference on Native literature, especially in an essay that examines the portrayal of Natives in fiction by non-Native authors. Johnstone states:

Silas Ermineskin is himself an example of a centrally important method of breaking down racist symbolic roles for Native characters—that is the manipulation of point of view by White authors ... Kinsella, with Silas Ermineskin, takes the bold step of creating a first-person Native point of view ... Silas, by contrast, seems, on the whole, to stay within the realm of the possible, of what he might have experienced. (62-63)

Now that it has been determined that Kinsella's work is not offensive to all Natives and critics of Canadian literature, the question remains, *Is it authentic Native Canadian literature? What makes a work authentically Native Canadian?* These are questions that even Thomas King himself has difficulties answering:

Authenticity can be a slippery and limiting term when applied to Native literature for it suggests cultural and political boundaries past which we should not let our writing wander. And, if we wish to stay within these boundaries, we must not only write about Indian people and Indian culture, we must also deal with the concept of "Indian-ness", a nebulous term that implies a set of expectations that are used to mark out that which is Indian and that which is not. (King, Calver, Hoy xv)

In March of 1985, a conference entitled *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives* was held at the University of Lethbridge. From this conference emerged a dialogue concerning Native Canadian literature.

In his introduction to the collection of essays presented at the University of Lethbridge Conference, Thomas King states that Native literature is going through a period of exploration. It is much like an inner exploration or self-examination. In his words:

These essays, then, are explorations, and exploration is seldom an orderly affair. There is always the chance of taking a wrong turn or getting lost - or falling off the edge. So it is with exploration. The territory that these essays leave untouched is huge, and it is still there, an invitation to other scholars. What is marked out here is one beginning, a series of excursions into a new land. (14)

Taking contemporary attitudes into consideration, certainly the works of Kinsella cannot be excluded from the corpus of Native Canadian literature without further examination. It is my belief that by extending the widely-accepted definition of Native literature in Canada from literature written by Natives to include literature written about Natives, Kinsella's works may be examined according to their content as opposed to the origins or motivations of the author.

## Chapter 2

### The Question of Appropriation of Voice

By examining the works of W. P. Kinsella and Thomas King, it will become clear that Kinsella has successfully portrayed the Coyote-trickster archetype through his character Frank Fence-post, and that this character is as true to the mythological trickster hero of Native mythology as the Coyote-tricksters found in Thomas King's works of fiction. But what about the question of appropriation of voice? Is the non-Native Kinsella infringing on the rights of Natives by writing about them? There are two sides to this argument, and I would like to briefly present them.

Looking at their respective backgrounds, King and Kinsella both write from ambiguous perspectives. One major difference between them is that King is accepted by the Canadian literary community as a Native writer of Native Canadian literature, while Kinsella is considered a humourist who sets many of his works of fiction in Native reserves.

King is an author of Canadian literature, but is American by birth. He has only recently taken Canadian citizenship. While spending several years in Canada teaching at the University of Lethbridge, he became influenced by Canadian Native culture and set his works of fiction in southern Alberta Native communities. Kinsella, on the other hand, is an Albertan who has become influenced by the Native culture, inspiring him to set his works in a central Alberta Native community. The fundamental difference between the two situations is that King is part Native, and Kinsella is non-Native.

Kinsella never claims to be appropriating the Native voice. He "has proudly declared that he has done no research into the Hobbema reserve, and has created all of his dialogue and characters from the raw material of his mind" (Rempel 35).

The question of appropriation of voice is currently debated in Canadian literary circles. It appears that there is no consensus regarding who has the right to write about any particular group of people. Some academics would have us believe that the only acceptable form of literature must be of an autobiographical nature, because we do not have the "politically correct right" to speak about an experience that we have not had, nor speak from a point of view of a people with whom we share no ancestral background. On the other hand literature, of course, is a reflection of our civilization and, as our civilization evolves through outside influences, so should our literature.

In its most extreme form, anti-appropriationists argue that non-Native writers have no right to write as if they were Natives, or even to write about Native issues, or put Native characters into their books. Anti-appropriationists claim that Natives are tired of being defined and spoken for by non-Natives; only Natives should be able to speak about and characterize them-selves. (This would, of course, render Native people invisible in works of non-Native writers). However, Native writers such as Thomas King and Tomson Highway do not endorse this point of view since the argument is reversible and they want to feel free to include non-Natives in their own work. (Atwood 36)

My question is: *What remains of the creative writer if s/he is limited to writing about his or her own personal experiences? Where is the creativity in that type of writing?*

Historically speaking, "the appropriation of voice" has appeared in various forms since the first written word was published. The Bible is a fine example. The number of people who have spoken the word of God is too great to even attempt a head count! A more modern example is George Elliot, a woman who wrote with a male pseudonym. In Canadian literature, we find Sinclair Ross writing from the perspective of a female, specifically, the wife of a rural prairie minister in As for Me and My House.

On a more personal level, a few years ago I had a conversation with an exchange student from England who was studying at the school where I was teaching. When I asked him what his father did for a living, he told me that he was a romance novelist. He said that his father wrote under a female pseudonym, Emma Blair, and that he successfully published seventeen novels before he revealed his identity. Up until that time, no one suspected that he was a man, and he regularly received mail from female readers addressed to him as a woman. It is obvious that he had succeeded in appropriating a woman's voice—apparently a serious "crime" in today's politically-correct times. When he revealed himself, it was a scandal at first. He was a hit on the British talk show circuit for a while. Eventually the dust settled, and his books are now popular as ever.

Another short anecdote is set a little closer to home and concerns the great Canadian singer of Maritime folk music, Stan Rogers. During the spring of 1995, CBC's Morningside broadcast a special program from Halifax in tribute to Stan Rogers. Various Maritime musicians performed Stan's compositions. The broadcast made me think back to the 1995 BACS Conference where I attended a paper presentation on the music of Stan Rogers. Sitting next to me was a man who had been a personal friend of Stan's. He told me that he was from Stan's home town, which I expected to be somewhere in Nova Scotia. It turns out that Stan was from Hamilton, Ontario. His parents had moved there from Nova Scotia to find work. Stan grew up in Hamilton, listening to his parents' stories of the better life in the Maritimes. He made a few summer trips to stay with his Nova Scotia relatives, but remained an Upper Canadian until later in life. I am not the only one who was under the impression that Stan was a Maritimer.

I was born and raised in Nova Scotia where there has been a history of resentment of Upper Canada since confederation. One can imagine what happened when this man sitting beside me visited friends in Cape Breton a number of years ago and let the truth of Stan's heritage slip out. He remembers sitting in the kitchen at a family-type social gathering. They were all listening to Stan Rogers on the record player. He leaned over to the father of the family and said, "Well you know Stan's from Ontario, eh. Hamilton, actually. I know him personally." The old man broke down weeping. The fact that Stan was not a true Maritimer, but an Upper Canadian at that, was too much for him to handle. It didn't matter to the man that Stan's songs were set in the Maritimes and that he was the greatest singer of Maritime folk music, this was all an appropriation of culture from an outsider. I don't

believe that Stan Rogers was wrong in adopting maritime culture. His music has become renowned as a cornerstone of the Maritime folk music scene and in the summer of 1997, a tribute was paid to him in the form of the first annual Stan Rogers Music Festival. It was held in Canso, Nova Scotia. Although Stan Rogers was not a Maritimer by birth, his music satisfied the criteria of the Maritime folk music tradition. I don't believe that Stan Rogers was wrong in writing Maritime folk music. He entertained and provided enjoyment for thousands of people. It doesn't matter where he was born. The music is what we should focus on, not the artist, just as we should focus on an author's writing, not his or her blood lineage.

Hartmut Lutz in the preface to his collection of conversations with Canadian Native authors, Contemporary Challenges (1991), addresses the question of the appropriation of the Native voice by non-Native authors. Lutz, a German who closely examined Native Canadian culture and the recent rise in Native literature over the past ten years, maintains the point of view of an outsider looking in at this highly debated question. He draws parallels to the discussion in the United States that occurred in the latter 1970's when non-Native authors were accused of creating "White Shamanism."

... Gary Snyder's "shamanist poetry," Ruth Beebe Hill's novel/film *Hanta Yo!/Mystic Warrior* and even Hyemeyohsts Storm's beautiful new-age and hippie cult novel *Seven Arrows* came under heavy attack from Native Americans, precisely because these authors appropriated and then sold aspects of Native spirituality in their works. Regardless of whether they

distorted them or presented them with degrees of authenticity, regardless even of whether the authors could claim some Indian ancestry, many Native people were outraged by the fact that after centuries of material dispossession, relocation, and genocide, the colonizers were finally reaching for Native spirituality, the essence of their identity.

(Lutz 4)

Lutz states that in Canada, the reaction to the Native outcry over appropriation of voice by non-Native writers has been mixed. Author Anne Cameron, for example, has stopped writing in the Native voice since being confronted by the Native community. While authors such as Lynn Andrews, Betty Jane Wylie and George Bowering, to mention a few, have continued their writing with cries of the "Native censorship of non-Native voices."

Lutz feels that Native authors are justified in their demands on non-Native writers, and cites the Native oral tradition of storytelling as an example. In this time-honoured tradition "the teller would make sure to give credit to whoever [sic] owned and told the story before" (Lutz 5). Lutz believes that certain non-Native writers who tell Native stories are not giving credit to the Natives who possess these stories.

On the other hand, W. P. Kinsella argues that he writes works of fiction that are not based on a Native story. They are simply invented from his own mind. In a 1988 interview with Alan Twigg for the collection Strong Voices. Conversations With Fifty Canadian Authors, Kinsella confessed that he had



never visited the Hobbema reserve. He stated, "I don't want to go. Because everything I write is fiction. I don't want to be confused by fact" (137).

Kinsella is a self-confessed creative writer. I believe that a creative writer should be given the liberty to explore issues without the fear of being accused of appropriation of voice. If we are going to ascertain that in certain situations there is justification for the censorship of a creative writer's work of fiction because it is deemed to be offensive then these 'certain situations' need to be argued and the standards should be proven to be acceptable by our society through independent bodies such as government legislators or the judiciary.

### European Influences on Native Myths and Legends

Continuing with the topic of appropriation of voice I would like to give historical examples of Native appropriation of the European literary tradition. My purpose is to show that the argument against Kinsella for misappropriating the Native voice should be dismissed. The following examples will show that the appropriation of voice is a natural process that may easily result from cross-cultural contact.

Throughout history, cultural groups have borrowed from other cultural groups. The Roman acquisition of Greek culture or the Japanese borrowing from the Chinese are two prominent examples of cultural assimilation throughout the ages. A double standard is emerging and it is interesting to note as the debate continues over who has the right to appropriate another cultures' voice, that Native North Americans have been

guilty of borrowing and adapting European myths to make them take on a Native Indian identity.

Stith Thompson in his article, "European Tales Among the North American Indians, A Study in the Migration of Folk-Tales" states:

Three centuries of uninterrupted contact with European settlers of North America have brought to the Native Indian inhabitants a notable modification in their entire civilization. Socially and economically, they are approaching yearly to the white man's standard. It is in the life of imagination—in art and literature—that peoples are most conservative. Yet, even in their folk tales, the Indians have gradually taken over a large admixture of European material. (321)

If we are going to accept the argument that non-Natives writing stories about Natives is a misappropriation, Natives must be, in turn, charged for their appropriation of European tales.

Thompson also states that "these familiar stories have come to the Indian at various times and from several sources. The two or three centuries' contact with the French in Canada has been the most powerful influence; it has introduced the largest number of different tales to the Natives" (321).

### Ti-Jean and the Seven-Headed Dragon

At the University of Lethbridge Conference, Jarold Ramsey delivered a paper entitled "Ti-Jean and the Seven-Headed Dragon: Instances of Native American Assimilation Of European Folklore". In this paper Ramsey argued that the European myth "Le Petit Jean and The Seven-Headed Dragon " became assimilated into North American Native Mythology. The myth is a story about a young boy, who although disadvantaged, works hard to overcome this situation. In the end, he succeeds in slaying the seven-headed dragon and marries the maiden princess. Ti-Jean's success comes about "because he is alert, intelligent, fearless, and tricky, and has some good magical connections" (King, Calver, Hoy 207).

The French fur traders are responsible for bringing the tales of Ti-Jean to the North American Indians. According to Jarold Ramsey, the French traders and explorers had a wide influence, covering a vast territory of North America.

Versions of this rousing story appear in collections of almost every collector or transcriber who was open to collecting ...impure as well as narratives from Native sources, and the geographical and cultural range of texts is extraordinary—from the Tlingit, Thompson river, Shuswap, Okanagan, and Kalapuya in the Northwest; to the Zuni in the Southwest; to the Nez Percé, Kutenai, Cree, and Blackfoot in the Great Plateau and Rockies to the Osage, Ponka and Omaha in the Midwest; to the

Biloxi of Southwest Indiana; to the Ojibwa and Mohawk of the northeast woodlands. (King, Calver, Hoy 207)

The Myth of Ti-Jean was adapted by the various Native groups mentioned to suit their own myths and legends. The character Ti-Jean was not totally assimilated into Native culture, but always remained an outsider. Among the Nez Percé, he was given a Native name, Laptissan. Ramsey suggests one possible explanation for the lack of assimilation is that the contact with the "white man" came, in many instances, only three or four generations prior to the stories being transcribed by collectors.

#### Assimilation of the Bible into Native Mythology

Various stories from the Bible have also found their way into Native myths and legends. It was the Catholic and Protestant missionaries who brought the teachings of the Bible to Native North Americans and were often responsible for their adaptation into Native myths. The missionaries' theory was that if the stories in the Bible were based somewhat on Natives' prior knowledge, they would thus be more easily understood. However, many biblical teachings were radically altered by the Natives to "get back" at the missionaries whom they deeply resented for intruding on their lives. In the following quotation, Ramsey cites an example of such "deliberate sabotage":

In a Northern Paiute version of Genesis 1-2., for example, it was Coyote who gave the apple tree to the Pauite, but a snake with the eyes of a white man crawled into the tree and drove the Indians away. The story ends, Just because there were snakes

and they came here, the White people took everything away. They asked these Indians where they had come from.' (King, Calver, Hoy 207)

Other biblically-based myths include: a variation of the Adam and Eve creation story and Noah's flood from the Thompson Indians, the Choctaw version of the Tower of Babel, and the Cheyenne story which represents the Crossing of the Red Sea. Of these four myths, the Adam and Eve creation story resembles the biblical story the closest. The two main characters of this myth are the first man, A'tam and the first woman, Im. There were also two powerful forces on the Earth, the Chief (God) who resided in the upper world, and the Outcast (Devil) who occupied the lower world.

Trouble arose in the new world when the Devil appeared pretending to be God. He gave Im a large long fruit from the white Pine. Previously, God had told them not to eat the fruit, but they mistakenly believed that the Devil was God and they both ate the Pine fruit. The Devil then disappeared and all the fruit withered up and became hard cones. The big difference between this myth and traditional biblical story is that when God discovered what had transpired, he sent Im down to live with the Devil.

The preceding examples of European influences on North American Native myths show that there has been a historical tradition of cultural borrowing in North American literature.

Recently, the focus has been on non-Natives being accused of cultural appropriation when writing about Natives, and little has been said about

Natives and the influence of Europeans on their literary works. This analysis shows that cultural appropriation between Natives and non-Natives is not a "one-way street."

### Native Appropriation of the English Writing Tradition

Continuing the analysis of Native Literature that has been influenced by European Literature or writing tradition, is the case of Canadian poet E. Pauline Johnson. When examining the poetry of Johnson, I asked myself the following question: Is it possible that E. Pauline Johnson, the famous Mohawk poet, essayist and orator, appropriated the Victorian style of poetry when writing what amounted to the beginning of Canadian Native literature?

### E. Pauline Johnson—Mohawk Princess or Victorian Lady?

E. Pauline Johnson was known as much for her public performances as her poetry. She first began to perform in order to raise the funds necessary to publish her first book of poetry, and remained a performer for fifteen years. During this period, she performed in front of royalty and prime ministers in the finest halls and most elegant salons on either side of the Atlantic, as well as to miners, lumberjacks and Native Canadians in church halls across the emerging frontier of the Canadian West. Johnson's recitals featured at times the reading of high-brow poetry written in the Victorian tradition. For this, she dressed in the elegant finery of this Victorian period. For the second part

of her performances, she donned Native dress and mesmerized audiences with her poetry, short plays and essays that celebrated the "Noble Savage."

Her transformation into the Mohawk Princess was not only in dress, she also added to her speech war cries and spellbinding evocation of past romantic images.

Betty Keller, author of the definitive biography of Miss Johnson, describes her as a proud member of the Mohawk nation even though she had more white blood flowing in her veins than Native. Johnson was a romantic writer in the tradition of Victorian poets of her day and sometimes received criticism for her display of this English influence in her writing. In 1913, she defended herself stating:

There are those who think they pay me a compliment in saying that I am just like a white woman. My aim, my joy, my pride is to sing the glories of my own people. Ours was the race that gave the world its measure of heroism, its standard of physical prowess. Ours was the race that gave, that taught the world that avarice veiled by any name is a crime. Ours were the people of the blue air and the green woods, and ours the faith that taught men to live without greed and die without fear. Ours were the fighting men that, man to man—yes, one to three—could meet and win against the world. But for our few numbers, our simple faith that others were as true as we to keep their honour bright and hold as bond inviolate their plighted word, we should have owned America today. (Keller 5)

It is interesting to note that Johnson refers to her people's strength and accomplishments in the past tense. As well, she clearly romanticizes the Native experience in much the same way as the "Noble Savage" found in the works of such writers as James Fennimore Cooper and James Richardson. A final comment concerning this quote is that, despite the romantic Victorian language Johnson uses, the message is no different than that which is coming from today's Canadian Native leaders—It is a rallying cry for Native people to rediscover a pride in their heritage.

#### Victorian Poetry and Poetry of E. Pauline Johnson—A Comparative Analysis

Pauline Johnson was successful in living with a balance of her Native and white cultural ancestry. She achieved this balance in a manner which many Natives of mixed blood strive for today. Although some might argue that Johnson compromised her Native heritage by romanticizing the "Noble Savage" qualities of Indian lore, one must remember that she was, foremost, an entertainer; and to satisfy the Victorian audience, it was necessary to play upon their sentiments. Johnson was not creating a new image for her audience, only embellishing upon what they believed and what she was proud of. While Johnson, the elocutionist, divided her performance into Native and non-Native components, Johnson the poet merged these two traditions by writing Native content within Victorian literary structure. In an interview with writer Isabel Ecclestone MacKay, Johnson explained that she was the only Native of her time writing poetry with Native content.



... at heart almost every Indian is a poet. He is quick to respond to the call of poetry, often where many white people would be quite untouched. The language of the many tribes in its true form is the very language of poetry. I would have needed but little to transform some of my grandfather's speeches into sonorous blank verse. (MacKay 273)

Johnson attributed her poetic prowess to her mother's influence. She stated that the desire to write was in her blood as much as the stories of her Native forebears who flowed through her veins. What occurred when the two forces met was an emergence of Native sentiments on paper that had previously only existed in oral tradition. Commenting on Johnson's Victorian and aboriginal influences, a long time companion and performing partner, Walter McRae, states:

During her most impressionable years, the literary influences upon her were similar to those upon dozens of other versifiers of the eighteen-seventies. And, despite her insistence upon her father's importance in her learning 'the legends, the traditions, the culture and the etiquette' of the Indian, her literary education was English. (Shrive 28)

Johnson saw herself as a champion of her people, a person who had the ability to communicate the Native voice in a medium that was understandable by the masses.

When I talk of the Indian being inarticulate... I refer of course only to his inability to express himself by the written word, and this after all is natural enough. Writing was never the Indian's mode of expression. It was the speech, the oration which was his greatest achievement. And that, like all the old customs, is dying out. (McKay 274)

A. J. M. Smith, Canadian poet and a strong critic of Johnson, attacked her poor imitation of Victorian romantic poetry, and questioned Johnson's use of her Native heritage in her writing and performances:

The romantic fact of her Indian birth, played up by critics and journalists, has been accepted as convincing proof that she spoke with the authentic voice of the Red Man. Pauline Johnson, he continues, had a vigorous personality and an excellent sense of theatre, as well as the good fortune to be praised by 'a fashionable London critic,' Theodore Watts-Dunton. 'But', says Professor Smith, 'the claim that her work is genuine primitive poetry, or that it speaks with the true voice of the North American Indian will hardly be made by responsible criticism . . . Her best work is not to be found in her Indian poetry at all but in one or two pretty and very artificial little lyrics.' (Shrive 26-27)

To conclude, I would like to address the arguments made by those critics who condemned Johnson as a poet who exploited her Native traditions in the salons of the Victorian aristocracy. I believe that it is very difficult to determine whether Johnson is a non-Native poet who appropriated the

Native voice, or a Native who appropriated the non-Native voice. In either case, Johnson could easily be found guilty of appropriating a voice for she wrote both as Native Mohawk and a Victorian romantic.

I believe that if these critics were to approach Johnson as a creative writer, like Kinsella, accusations of cross-cultural appropriation could be tossed aside. At this moment, we could examine the works of a Canadian creative writer who had the unique opportunity to have her “sphere of consciousness” influenced by two very different traditions, the North American Native and the Victorian romantic.

## Chapter 3

### The Mythological Coyote-Trickster Character

For the purpose of substantiating the claim that W.P. Kinsella is a creative writer who has written works of the Native Canadian genre, it is important to define what constitutes Canadian Native literature. One prominent quality of Native literature in Canada and throughout North America is the mythological trickster character. Although the Trickster is found in various forms, for the purpose of this study, we will focus on the Coyote-Trickster. The Coyote-Trickster myths fall into the wider category of myths known as Trickster Myths. In American Indian Literature, Alice Marriot and Carol K. Rachlin state: "The Trickster *per se* is used to explain natural phenomena, especially those from which a moral can be drawn. He makes trouble. He displays disagreeable traits, like greediness" (Velie 15).

According to editor Alan R. Velie:

The Trickster is one of the oldest and most widespread of mythological and literary figures. He is found almost universally among American Indian tribes, and he appears in European, Asian and African folklore as well. As the name implies, the Trickster is on one level—probably the most important—an amoral practical joker who wanders about playing pranks on unsuspecting victims. But he is far more complex than that. The same figure, in the same set of tales, appears to be alternately an evil spirit and a benevolent deity, a mortal and a god, a creator

and a destroyer, a culture hero and a villain. At times he is an ideal citizen, a model to tribal members; at others he is a totally amoral being who flouts the most sacred taboos with impunity. With all the fluctuation, certain things about the Trickster are predictable: he is always a wanderer, always hungry and usually oversexed. (44)

In his anthology, Velie presents the tale of the Winnebago Trickster Cycle. This is a 49-sequence cyclic story about Wakdjunkaga, the Winnebago word for "the tricky one." The Winnebago are a Siouan people of Wisconsin. According to Paul Radin, this myth is found in various forms throughout the Native groups in North America. "The similarity of the exploits attributed to Wakdjunkaga and all other Trickster-heroes in North America is quite astounding. The only possible inference to be drawn is that this myth cycle is an old cultural possession of all the American Indians, which has remained, as far as the general plot is concerned, relatively unchanged" (132).

At the beginning of the story we meet Wakdjunkaga, a Winnebago chief, as he prepares to go on the warpath. What is strange about this sequence is that it was tradition for chiefs to be forbidden from battle. Even while on the war expedition, the Trickster Chief continues to wreak havoc by destroying a canoe and the sacred war bundle.

It appears that the Trickster represents the spirit of anarchy and disorder—or perhaps, since he breaks the most important Winnebago taboos not only with impunity but also with the sympathy, and to the amusement, of the Winnebago audience,

he represents the esprit of saturnalia, or licensed anarchy. (Velie 45)

According to Paul Radin in his extensive study of the Winnebago Trickster Figure, The Trickster, A Study in American Mythology, the Wakdjunkaga cycle is a fine example of satire. Radin speaks of the double paradox found in the chief's invitation to a war feast when all those in attendance are well aware that he is unable, by tradition, to go to battle yet "everyone must attend because he is the chief and he must be obeyed" (151).

Velie's comments concerning the Trickster displaying the qualities of Saturnalia are paralleled in the writings of Radin.

What we really have here is something equivalent to certain semi-religious medieval performances where the participants feel that no harm can come to them and where they can pretend to themselves that they cannot be accused of sacrilege or of ridiculing the traditionally accepted order. [I]n short, an outlet for voicing a protest against the many, often onerous, obligations connected with the Winnebago social order and their religion and ritual. (152)

Marriot and Rachlin (1968) discuss the Trickster specifically in respect to his appearance as the Trickster-Hero character and his function in Native myths:

Known under many names in many tribes, he sometimes does good intentionally, sometimes by accident. In his Trickster manifestation the Trickster-Hero deliberately wreaks mischief, havoc, and in extreme cases, chaos. In his heroic manifestation he defeats death, or brings food to the people. (15)

As Velie writes, the Trickster figure takes on many forms depending on the Native group or geographical region. In the Northwest he was often portrayed as a Raven, the Ojibways called him *Nanabush, the Hare*, the Blackfoot, *Old Man*, and the Arapahos called him *Wihoor* or White Man. According to Radin, "In all these tribes we find the same break between Trickster conceived of as a divine being and as a buffoon... [I]ndividuals among the Haida (British Columbia) ... insisted that the deity Nankilstlas, with whom *Raven* is identified, put on the skin of a raven when he wanted to act like a buffoon" (162).

Jarold Ramsey in his essay "Coyote and Friends: An Experiment in Interpretive Bricolage" from the collection Reading the Fire, presents a Trickster gazetteer for the Natives of Western North America that includes the above-mentioned Trickster figures and more. Following the name of the mythological character are the names of the tribal groups that adopted this character as their Trickster figure:

COYOTE: Plateau, Great Basin, and Rocky Mountain groups, but also some traditional coastal areas, and most of California-Chinook, Sahaptin, Interior Salish, Navajo, Karok, Maidu, Mojave

RAVEN: North coast groups of British Columbia and Alaska-Haida, Nootka, Tsimshian

BLUE JAY: some northwest Chinookan groups

RACCOON: Columbia River Chinookan

DRAGONFLY: (Daldal) Takelmal (Oregon Athabaskan)

SOUTH WIND: (As'ai'yahahl) peculiar to the Salish-speaking Oregon Tillamooks

KAMUKAMTS: Klamath and Modoc

IKTOMI: Sioux

OLD MAN (Na'pi): Blackfoot and Crow

WAKDJUNKAGA: Winnebago

Ramsey also makes an addition to the list of Non-Native Tricksters to include "Shakespeare's *Autolycus*, Ted Hughes' *Crow*, Ken Kesey's *Randal McMurphy*, Ralph Ellison's *Rinehart*, and Faulkner's *Flem Slopes; Anansi, Ture, Loki, Hermes, Tyll*," (25).

Karl Kerényi, an expert in Greek mythology, makes an astute observation regarding the universality of the Trickster figure. He states in his chapter, "The Trickster In Relation to Greek Mythology" from the pages of Paul Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Mythology*:

The arch-Trickster himself, no matter whether he appeared in human form, or as a cunning animal, the prototype of Reynard



the Fox, whose equivalent for some tribes, the Coyote, for others the raven, but who in all manifestations was a primordial being of the same order as the gods and heroes of mythology. (174-75)

Kerényi believes that the Trickster figure present in Native American mythology does not possess the divine qualities of Greek mythological heroes. His character is, for example, more akin to that of Heracles, who is known for his gluttony, woman chasing and ability to be easily outwitted than the famous Trickster-god Hermes. According to Kerényi, the redeeming quality that the Trickster does possess in relationship to Greek Mythology is his consistency. Kerényi, however, presents the negative aspect of this quality by stating that it appears that for the Trickster character "consistency is more important than his character" (176).

Although it is believed that the Trickster does not compete at the same level as the Greek gods, there is substantiated opinion confirming that the Trickster plays a prominent role in Native mythology. Kerényi comments on the importance of the Coyote Trickster of the American Indian tribe, the Wichita, who "credit the Coyote with the faculty of telling endless roguish stories about himself, the animal equivalent of the Trickster. From this it does not follow that the Coyote is only a second class figure in Wichita mythology, falsely invented and somehow limited in being" (176).

In William Bright's The Coyote Reader, the author divides the study of Coyote, the American Native Indian mythological character, into groups according to character traits. The categories include: Coyote the Wanderer, Glutton, Lecher, Thief, Cheat, Outlaw, Spoiler, Loser, Clown, Pragmatist, Dirty

Old Man, and finally, Survivor. By examining these Coyote-trickster qualities as exemplified by characters found in works of fiction written about North American Natives, I will show that Frank Fence-post in W.P. Kinsella's *Ermineskin* collection of short stories satisfies these qualities.

## Chapter 4

### The Coyote Trickster in W. P. Kinsella's Ermineskin

#### Collection of Short Stories

#### Background

The character Frank Fence-post plays a predominant role in W. P. Kinsella's collection of short stories set on the Hobbema Reserve. Although not a Coyote by name, Frank Fence-post fits into many of the above-mentioned categories. Frank is best described as a survivor, who, through his wit and sheer audacity, is able to come through incredibly comical situations where he shows his lecherous, thieving, cheating, outlaw, and gluttonous traits all in such a clown-like manner that he is easily forgiven for any wrong doing.

The short stories are presented as anecdotes written by the fictitious character, Silas Ermineskin, a treaty Cree Native Indian living on the Hobbema Reserve south of Edmonton. Kinsella claims that the character Silas was created from his experience working with Alberta Natives. Throughout the collection of short stories, Frank is found leading Silas into comical situations. Kinsella never lived on an Indian reserve, or cohabited with Native Canadians. He attributes his knowledge to his experience driving a taxi in Victoria and Edmonton, "with young Indian cab passengers, kids who were so funny although they had little to laugh about. And so that is how Silas Ermineskin was born" (Murray 7).

Silas, while a student at a local vocational school, is encouraged by the English teacher to write short stories about his life on the reserve. The stories are written in a very rough form with many grammatical and structural errors left in. What we read is more like a narrative in the oral tradition rather than prose.

### Frank Fence-post as Coyote the Cheat

In The Moccasin Telegraph and Other Stories (1983), Frank demonstrates his fine ability to feed the White Man with fantastic stories of his creation based on the White Man's own myths and stereotypes of Native culture. Frank is a very happy-go-lucky person. He is quick-witted and wastes no time in taking full advantage of a potentially profitable situation when it comes his way. In this collection of short stories, the fourth in the series, he shows the characteristics of Bright's Coyote the Cheat. While addressing a group of CBC reporters gathered in the nearby town of Wetaskiwin for the funeral of an Indian outlaw who was shot by the police, Frank explains his people's communication system, the moccasin telegraph:

The moccasin telegraph is how white men say us Indians get messages to Indians a long ways away. I let you in on a secret. You know how prairie chickens drum in the underbrush in the fall, and how that sound travel for miles? Well a wise old medicine man name of Buffalo-who-walks-like-a-man, long time ago mix up some herbs and roots in a porcupine bladder, and use it to tan prairie chicken hides. When them hides is stretched over a special drum why the sound travel for maybe a

hundred miles. And it don't make a bump-bump-bump sound like a regular drum, but a quiet hum like the telegraph wires do way out in the country on a quiet night. (25-26)

In the story "Where the Wild Things Are," Frank Fence-post continues to demonstrate his Coyote the Clown style with the White Man. When two wealthy Americans, Cal and Bobo, arrive in the nearby town of Rocky Mountain House looking for guides to take them hunting, Frank is quick to monopolize on the situation:

'You are in luck, White Man,' Frank say slow and clear. 'I am Fence-post, chief of the Onagotchies. We are mountain people, all born to hunt and guide.' Frank keep his shoulders back and stare down on the guy who is looking out the car window. (79)

Frank and Silas promptly accept to take the Americans' \$2,000 plus expenses for their services. The fact that they have never guided before becomes apparent to the Americans a bit later, when the two "Onagotchies" can't stay on their horses. Later, while the four are camping out, Frank tries to trick the Americans into coughing up some more cash for his services. He tells them that they are in the depths of bear country and, for a small fee of \$100, he can drive the bears away. In order to stir up their desire to part with the money, he mentions that two hunters were killed by bears in these parts just a month earlier. Frank doesn't seem to be too convincing however:

Cal and Bobo ain't quick to part with more money, so Frank tell another story about finding parts of hunters scattered over a

half-mile area 'just like a plane crash,' he say and look real sad. 'But if you short of cash, for only \$50 I put the evil eye on the bears,' Then he stand up, fold his arms across his chest and turn slowly around, staring mean at the forest. (91)

When asked if this really works, Frank replies, "Do you see any bears?" Convinced of his powers, the two finally give in to Frank's convincing tales of horror. Between them they produce one hundred dollars to ward off the bears. In the end, Frank and Silas do succeed in proving their guiding abilities. Silas drives the American's Safari truck off a cliff and falls directly onto a herd of elk, killing one.

#### Frank Fence-post as Coyote the Clown

In Kinsella's short story "Tricks," from the collection The Miss Hobbema Pageant, published in 1989, Frank divulges his philosophy of the Trickster:

'There's never too many tricks,' yell Frank, take off his black ten-gallon hat, bow and smile as if there's 10,000 people in front of him. 'Tricks make the world go round. Tricks give people something to be happy about. Tricks keep people talking. When you ain't seen somebody for a long time, first thing you do is spend time remembering the silly things you done together. You don't talk about the time you was sick, you laugh about the time you tore the culvert out of the road and somebody important drove into the hole.' (84)

In this particular short story, Frank bets everyone in the pool hall one evening that he can play a trick on all ten of them within ten days. He strikes a deal with the group. They each agree to pay him ten dollars if he succeeds and, if he loses, he will "pay everybody's pool game for a whole evening, with Frito chips and Pepsis all around" (85).

For the entire ten-day period that the bet is on, Silas acts like a paranoid wreck, sneaking around and looking out for Frank, who he believes is hiding behind every corner ready to catch him in a practical joke. When midnight on the ninth day finally comes around, Silas is convinced that he is the only one of the ten who has escaped Frank's tricks. He strolls into the pool hall demanding his Pepsi and Fritos, and says how much he's looking forward to the free pool, only to discover the truth about the bet. "'There never was a contest,' say Frank, smile like he just been freshly oiled. 'It was just a few of us figured you was getting to take life too seriously' " (96).

It turns out that the only one Frank was playing a trick on was Silas. The other nine involved were not tricked at all. They were simply pretending to have been tricked, all a part of the carefully conceived Frank Fence-post plan to catch Silas.

#### Frank Fence-post as Coyote the Loser

Bright comments on the "abundance of evidence of how Coyote's tricks frequently backfire; he becomes 'der zerspottete', Spotter. ... Coyote also frequently winds up a loser simply because of his own bad judgment and unrealistic optimism" (121).

In Marion Wood's Spirits, Heroes and Hunters from North American Indian Mythology, Coyote the Loser is presented. Wood states:

According to the Ute, Wolf originally wanted people to have more than one death, but Coyote disagreed, saying that when someone died, that should be the end. Coyote won the argument and a single death had become the rule but, as so often happened, Coyote's scheme worked to his own disadvantage and caused him great misery. His own son died and, when he asked Wolf to change the rule, Wolf refused, reminding him that it was Coyote himself who had insisted on death being final. (115)

Bright writes about Coyote the Clown: "the appeal of Coyote's adventures is frequently in their humour." He clarifies, explaining that when the Coyote's tricks backfire, the reader "laughs not only at the Coyote, but with him—his tricks, whether successful or not, are clearly designed in many cases both to secure some goal (as in the theft of fire) and for the sheer joy of prankishness" (131).

As in Bright's description of Coyote the Loser and Coyote the Clown, Frank's tricks sometimes backfire. In the 1994 collection, Brother Frank's Gospel Hour and Other Stories, published in 1994, Silas and Frank find themselves bored and looking for a creative way to make some money while staying with a friend in Seattle, Washington. They are staying in an area known as *The Pit*, near the Seattle waterfront in the industrial district.



Frank decides to use his artistic talent to produce the image of the Virgin Mary on an old refrigerator in the backyard of the tenement house where they are staying. He chips the paint off the refrigerator around a pattern that he sketches in to make it appear as if the image had appeared there naturally during the years it was left unattended in the backyard. Frank devises a scheme, first to have the refrigerator discovered, and then to charge admission to witness this "miracle". He succeeds in amassing a small fortune in a few weeks. People are lined up for hours to get a glimpse of the Virgin Mary. Silas explains the phenomena of the icon stating,

Frank have this theory that you don't have to know what you're doing, that you only have to look the part. That seem to apply to the Virgin of the Refrigerator. Me and Frank and all our friends know the whole operation is phony, but they want really badly to believe, so they pay their money, pray their prayers, and come away believing their back pain or blurred vision has been cured by the Virgin. Scary. (35)

Just as Frank and Silas are about to leave Seattle on a first-class ticket home with a shopping bag full of cash, immigration officers arrive at the apartment door and drag them off. Frank is forced to leave the bag of cash behind, much to the enjoyment of the matriarch of the family whose hospitality he had been enjoying. You see, Frank had not been very forthcoming in the sharing of his new-found wealth.

In Kinsella's The Fence-post Chronicles, again Frank gets his "comeuppance." He succeeds in rigging a contest in order to win a brand new

truck from a car dealership only to leave the car lot in such reckless excitement that he drives the new truck into an eighteen-wheeler, destroying the new truck. Silas describes the incident,

On the other side of all the mess Frank is sitting on the road, he has lost his cowboy hat, one boot is off, and he got a look on his face as if someone just asked him a question that was too hard for him... For once in his life Frank don't have anything smart to say. Connie kiss his face a few times and walk with one arm around his waist. (24-25)

#### Frank Fence-post as Coyote the Lecher

As Coyote the Lecher, Frank Fence-post rises to the occasion. Frank's insatiable sexual appetite is only surpassed by his ability to brag about his conquests. In "The Rain Birds" from Brother Frank's Gospel Hour and Other Stories (1994), Frank tells Silas "'I'd sure like one of them computers... I'd get me a program called Mac Sperm, help me keep track of all the rug rats I've fathered. My motto is 'A Fence-post in every oven'" (75).

Bright sizes up the lecher as follows, "The insatiable and indiscriminate horniness of Coyote is well known. He copulates with married women, with virgins as their puberty rites, and with crones" (65).

In the Winnebago Trickster Cycle as described by Alan R. Velie (1991), Wajdjunkaga, the tricky one, shows himself to be a lecher in the style of Coyote. The worse thing is that the chief leaves the pre-warpath feast and is

discovered having intercourse with a woman, a practice that was strictly taboo on the eve of battle.

When they had finished their feast, the chief suddenly arose and left them and proceeded towards his own lodge. The guests remained there waiting for him to return. When, after a while, he did not reappear, some of them went over to his lodge to see what had happened. There to their chagrin and horror they found him cohabiting with a woman. So they returned to the feasting-place and informed the others, whereupon everyone dispersed. (47)

In episode 15, Wajdjunkaga discovers his penis and puts it to use with the chief's daughter in episode 16. "After that he walked down a slope and finally came to a lake. On the opposite side he saw a number of women swimming, the chief's daughter and her friends. 'Now', exclaimed the Trickster, 'is the opportune time: now I'm going to have intercourse'" (57).

Returning to Kinsella's Frank Fence-post's lechery, we find examples in the 1978 collection, Scars. In the short story, representatives from Culture Canada arrive on the Hobbema Reserve. Frank and Silas are there to greet them, and when they ask for directions to the Blue Quills Hall they break up laughing while they give them "real serious directions to get their car caught in a slough" (31). One of the passengers, a woman by the name of Miss Cartright, responded by saying that she understood Cree and they shouldn't try to pull a fast one over on them. When Frank responded in Cree with, "Go fry your boots and eat them for lunch" (31), she returned with a blank stare of

incomprehension. Then Frank the lecher emerged. He knew that the woman's ability to understand Cree was quite limited so he let loose. Silas describes the moment stating, "Then Frank get a look of mischief in his eye and he tell her real slow in Cree about some things that he think her and him should do to each other in bed" (32). The woman returned with the admission that, "I guess maybe that I don't understand as well as I thought I did. It was only a two-week crash course" (32).

Despite the fact that Frank's girlfriend, Connie Bigcharles, is present and obviously not impressed by Frank's lechery, "Connie Bigcharles gave Frank a hard hit on the arm" (32). Frank continues to flirt with the woman from Culture Canada, "'For twenty dollars I teach you what it was I said,' Frank say, and he grin to show his couple of missing teeth and he feel real proud of himself. He step toward her but she jump back in that car real quick and so do the whole bunch of them, though the driver lady give Frank a pretty sharp look and she drag real hard on that cigarette of hers" (32).

At the end of the short story we find the woman succumbing to Frank's lechery as he meets her in his cabin to practice the rape scene from the movie they are filming. Silas had led her to the cabin and prepared her for the scene by tying her wrists to the top of the bed. He then left the cabin but stayed within an eye's glance in order to witness Frank's arrival.

As I go out the door Frank jump up from the trees. He got a headband hold back his long hair, blue paint on his cheeks, no shirt and he wipe some red and green paint on his chest.

He jump up into the doorway and I hear Miss Cartright kind of gasp but not loud enough so's anybody else would hear.

I close the door, but before I go, I take one little peek in the window at Frank as he do a little war dance. I go away when I see him undo his belt, the one with the green buckle say Lethbridge Pale Ale on it. (42)

Frank the lecher strikes again. He shows no respect for the relationship with his girlfriend or any woman for that matter. His only concern is making another sexual conquest.

Frank the Lecher is not ashamed to display his sexual prowess in a public venue. A public performance only helps to enhance his image as a stud. In the short story, "The Four-Sky-Thunder Bundle", Silas, Frank and the gang end up in Calgary for the Calgary Stampede. They all decide to stay at Silas's sister's high-rise apartment, much to the dislike of Silas's brother-in-law, Bob McVey. Early in the morning, after the gang has been partying it up all night long, the phone rings. It's the police complaining that two people are fornicating on the apartment balcony.

I hand the phone over to Brother Bob. Then I go over and pull back the curtains. That guy ain't wrong. Connie got her legs wrapped right tight around Frank and I sure hope they ain't gonna shift and take that balcony off the building. There is another apartment building straight across the parking lot from us and people there be out on their balconies look over here at Frank and Connie. 'Way to go fella,' someone yell. 'Atta boy,'

say someone else. Lots of them people got their binoculars. Some others don't say nothing but just clap their hands. I bang on the glass to get Frank's attention, but he just wave his hand to say hello and just keep right on with what he is doing. (134-35)

Frank the Lecher gets as much enjoyment in the public recognition of his sexual conquests as committing the acts themselves. In the 1981 collection, Born Indian, Silas tells of two "Indian Struck" white girls who engage Frank and his buddies in various sexual activities for an afternoon. This occurs in a neighbouring town during a baseball tournament. Silas recounts how "Frank Fence-post meet me grinning big through the hole in his face where he had his teeth knocked out in a fight in the Alice Hotel Bar. He tell me how he been with each one of them about as many ways as a man and a woman can be together, grin some more and I can see that it make him feel really big to tell me this" (19).

Finally, in the short story "Election", from the collection, The Miss Hobbema Pageant (1990), Frank Fence-post combines his Coyote the Lecher with Coyote the Clown when discussing his political ambitions. In fact, when the idea of Frank running for political office is mentioned, Silas comments, "When we feeling happy, we joke that Frank would make a great politician because we know right from the start that he is lazy, incompetent and dishonest" (142).

These are three definite character traits of the Trickster Coyote. Frank returns with the comment, "I've got one indispensable quality. I've been with over half the women under thirty on this here reserve, and a few over thirty,

too. That the best preparation for political office I know of. If you're a politician you spend all of your time screwing people" (142).

### Frank Fence-post as Coyote the Wanderer

The mythological Coyote-trickster as described by William Bright in The Coyote Reader is a wanderer. Bright makes specific references to the Karuk Indian nation of California and their Coyote myths. He comments on the Coyote Wanderer, stating "No other mythic character so traverses the entire length of the Karuk universe" (24).

Frank Fence-post is not so much an aimless wanderer as an opportunist who travels to experience new things, make new conquests and boost his ego. His qualities are similar to those of the Coyote described at the end of Bright's Coyote the Wanderer chapter.

Here, Bright states that "Coyote's mobility seems easily relatable to both his eternal curiosity and his scavenging nature" (34). Frank's "eternal curiosity and his scavenging nature" abound in the majority of Kinsella's short stories, but are never more evident than in the stories where Silas and Frank travel.

There are eight main travel stories in the collections. On each trip, Silas and Frank embark on a Coyote the Wanderer style of adventure. These trips include two trips to the Northwest Territories and Vancouver, and single trips to Las Vegas, London, England, Montana and Seattle. No matter what the destination, each trip has common elements—Silas and Frank find

themselves in a very difficult situation which often requires Frank's wit, charm, and outright audacity to save the day.

In the short story "To look at the Queen," Frank and Silas scam their way to a constitutional affairs conference in London, England. Here they stumble onto the grounds of Buckingham Palace and into the Queen's bedroom. After their lengthy conversation with the Queen, they are arrested by the police and sent back to Canada. Frank takes great pride in his arrest record. When the English law enforcement officials are questioning their identity, Silas first comments, "We all been arrested in Canada plenty of times, if you want to send our fingerprints to the Alberta RCMP..." (96). Then Frank has his word, consistent in its comic upstaging of Silas, "'Or BC. or Saskatchewan,' say Frank, 'Or North Dakota or Utah' " (96).

When they receive their Indian Cultural Exchange funding to visit Pandemonium Bay, a Native Reserve 300 miles south of the North Pole, the group leader, Bedelia Coyote, tells the two that they may find themselves a bit bored up in this isolated community. Frank's response is, "Hey we make our own fun. I've never been arrested in the Northwest Territories" (104). Making their own fun is what they do best and, while Silas is consistently faithful to his girlfriend, Sadie One-Wound, Frank takes every opportunity that presents itself to exercise his libido outside of his permanent relationship.

Traveling offers Frank many such occasions. On their first trip to Vancouver, Frank flirts with the receptionist at the hotel with his girlfriend standing at his side. Frank tries to use his charm so that their group of nine



can all stay in Silas's room. Afterwards, he asks her what time she gets off work. He tells her, "You just drop up to my friend's room. If I ain't in make yourself at home. It'll be worth the wait" (134). When Frank's girlfriend Connie protests, "Frank turn around to her and whisper, 'Hey I'm just doin' a good deed. I'm gonna sacrifice my body so we all have a place to stay' " (134).

In "Managers," Silas and Frank go to Montana to check out a minor league baseball team that the Ermineskin band wants to purchase. They go to a baseball game and Frank ends up bringing the concessions girl back to his hotel room for the night.

On their trip to London, Frank and Silas meet two girls in a nightclub. Silas abstains from adulterous endeavors while Frank, true to his lecherous form, hops right into bed with his newfound friend. Silas's account of the evening describes Frank in true Coyote style,

From behind the screen, the pink-haired girl say something to Frank about birth control.

'Hey in Canada we got a new contraceptive for men. I use it all the time; it's a pill. I just put it in my shoe. When I walk on it, it makes me limp.'

The girls don't want us to stay all night.

'Use my body and then tell me to get lost, you women are all alike,' say Frank. (86)

The preceding textual evidence shows that Kinsella's Frank Fence-post clearly fits into the majority of the categories of Coyote Trickster as described

by William Bright. The obvious question arises from this study as to whether Kinsella's creation of a Frank Fence-post, the archetypal Coyote-Trickster character, came through careful planning, or was purely a coincidence.

Although this is an interesting question, for the purpose of this study, it should be left unexplored. Whatever Kinsella's intentions were in creating Frank Fence-post and whatever influences helped him in this creative process are immaterial when one adopts the content-based approach to analyzing the literature.

## Chapter 5

### The Coyote Trickster in Literature by Native Canadians

To substantiate the claim that Kinsella's Frank Fence-post is a Coyote Trickster in keeping with the tradition of North American Native myths and literature, the Coyote-trickster character in literature written by Native Canadians must be presented to draw a comparison. I begin below with the Tricksters in the works of Jeannette Armstrong and Peter Blue Cloud, and conclude this section by citing various examples of the Trickster character in the works of Thomas King.

### The Coyotes of Jeannette Armstrong and Peter Blue Cloud

Jeannette Armstrong's "This is a Story" and Peter Blue Cloud's "Weaver Spider's Web" are two more examples of modern-day short stories with the Coyote Trickster-creator as the main character.

Armstrong's story tells of Koyti (Coyote) returning to the Okanagan region in search of salmon. Instead, he finds the rivers dammed by the "Swallow" people, (The White Man), and the salmon are unable to return to their homes. Koyti discovers a people that have greatly changed since his last trip. They live in "Swallow" homes, eat "Swallow" food and speak "Swallow" talk. (White men are referred to as "Swallow" because, when they mess up a place, they just fly off and start again). The Natives he meets are not capable of speaking the language of the Okanagan People. This bothers the Koyti a great

deal, who then assumes the job of restoring the strength of the old ways to the Okanagan people. He decides to battle the evil-monster, "Swallow" people. "... I am back... I am going to break the dams. I'm hungry and that young one at the river has waited long enough. All my children will eat salmon again" (King, Relations 134).

In Peter Blue Cloud's "Weaver Spider's Web," Coyote becomes hypnotized by Weaver Spider as he is building a web in the entrance to his cave. The spider is doing this with the intention of causing Coyote to starve to death. Instead, Coyote is saved from this untimely fate by his cousin, Grey Fox. Grey Fox scares off Weaver Spider and then takes it upon himself to make Coyote smart. He cuts him in half, slicing him right down the middle. From his better half emerges Coyote Woman. As Grey Fox puts it to Coyote, "Now you are twice as smart" (King, Relations 47).

It is this nature of the world and the relationships between all living things that act as a foundation for Native spirituality. Just as it can be argued that without evil there can be no good, without the disorder of the Trickster there can be no order. His consistent presence acts as a point of reference in Native mythology that allows the reader to place him easily into context.

### The Coyotes of Thomas King

The Coyotes of Thomas King are not necessarily human characters. In many instances, King's Coyote is presented as a form of the North American mythological Trickster figure. Whereas Frank Fence-post is a personification of the Trickster—possessing many of its qualities in human form—King's

Coyote is often a variation of the mythological character, appearing as a non-human.

In Thomas King's short story, "The One About Coyote Going West," the Coyote character is referred to as "the tricky one." She is compared to the Raven, "...another tricky one" (95).

In the Central Plains, Southwest and Pacific Coast, the Trickster often came in the form of a Coyote, and it is the Coyote Trickster character that is most commonly reproduced in modern Native Literature. In many legends, such as the Shoshoni myth of the Old Man Coyote and Buffalo Power, the Coyote appears as the character Old Man Coyote:

Old Man Coyote is omnipresent among the Plains Indians. He is the universal Trickster and troublemaker; probably the most annoying being on earth. Strangely enough, although Coyotes in the buffalo days ran in packs, not, as they do now, living in single family dens, Old Man is always presented as a loner; a one-to-himself character. (Marriott and Rachlin 72)

The Coyote, although possessing similar qualities in many Native myths, often had a unique role or representation depending on the Native group in question. Within the tribes of the Western United States desert region, the Coyote had a prominent role. The Natives of this region had a common mythological belief that two brothers were responsible for the good and evil on earth. The older brother was responsible for all the good in the world, while the younger introduced suffering and turmoil to people's lives:

In the desert area the good brother was usually associated with an animal spirit such as an Eagle, Puma or Wolf. In California, he was a rather more remote being. To the Yuki he was *Taikomol*, He Who Walks Alone, to the Cahto, *Nagaicho*, the Great Traveler, to the Wintum, *Olelbis*, He Who Sits Above and to the Maidu, *Kodoyanpe*, the Earth Namer. (Wood 114-115)

The younger brother is always Coyote, the most prominent character in the mythology of this area, constantly meddling and causing trouble.

Many of the other Plains and southern North American Indians saw the Coyote as a creator. In the Navajo emergence myth, a myth of creation and the most important of their myths, we encounter "In the First World... three beings in the darkness: First Man, First Woman and Coyote (the Trickster creator)" (Bertrand 89). The Coyote takes on a similar role with the northern Pacific Natives. In Coyote Stories, by Mourning Dove, an Okanagan Indian,

Spirit Chief gives Coyote the responsibility of making the world ready for man and ridding the world of 'People-Devouring Monsters.' But more often he appears as the Trickster, getting into mischief and stirring up trouble. Magic and the ability to restore life play a large part in restoring the action. (Ullom 41)

According to Radin, although the majority of Trickster myths "have a hero who is always wandering, who is always hungry, who is either playing

tricks on people or having them played on him and who is highly sexed" (155), the myths in question also "give an account of the creation of the earth, or at least the transforming of the world" (155).

Marion Wood comments on the Coyote as a creator figure:

According to the Crow (Montana) myth, for example, the whole world had originally been covered with a sheet of water. There had been nothing at all until Old Man Coyote sent down birds into the depths to fetch mud from which he formed the earth. (81)

Radin also comments on this famous story, he refers to Old Man Coyote as "Old Man" and clarifies that the birds in question are ducks:

He came down to meet the ducks and said to them, 'My brothers, there is no earth below us. It is not good for us to be alone.' Thereupon Old Man makes them dive and one of them reappears with some mud in webbed feet. Out of this Old Man creates the earth. Then, when he has made it, he exclaims, 'Now that we have made the earth there are others who wish to be alive.' Immediately a wolf is heard howling in the east. In this manner everything in the world was created. (162)

Thomas King's Coyote, the creator from "The One About Coyote Going West," is a Coyote who travels west fixing up things so that they are perfect. The only problem is that Coyote creates a Mistake. While Coyote travels

fixing up the world, the Mistake sets about messing it up. The Mistake creates televisions, air humidifiers, portable gas barbecues, vacuum cleaners and golf carts. The Mistake creates a certain harmony and brings us to the modern reality of man's mistakes that balance nature's wonders. The final line of the story explains Coyote's character: "When that Coyote is wandering around looking for things to fix up, nobody in this world is safe" (King, Water 106).

### Harlen Bigbear, the Coyote Trickster in Thomas King's Medicine River

Prior to the publishing of King's first novel, Medicine River, the characters of Harlen Bigbear and Will appeared in the short story "Bingo Bigbear and the Tie and Choker Bone Game." This short story was published in the Canadian Fiction Magazine in 1987 and focuses on a traditional hand games gambling contest that is hosted by Harlen Bigbear. The same scene appears in a slightly modified form in King's novel.

Medicine River tells the story of Will, a non-status Blackfoot Indian who grew up in a southern Alberta town, Medicine River. At a young age, Will left Medicine River and became a successful photographer in Toronto. Will finds himself being coerced into returning to Medicine River after the death of his mother. It's at his mother's funeral where Will first meets Harlen Bigbear. It is "through Harlen's never-ending desire to help the Blackfoot community—to resolve conflicts, to get couples married, to recruit members for the Medicine River Friendship Centre Warrior's Basketball Team—that we meet the people of Medicine River" (King, River 50-51).

Thomas King describes Harlen as his favorite character. King states:



Harlen rarely reacts the way you expect a typical male to react. His whole notion is that the world is a fragile place and he says, "You know, it's like a spider's web, and it's like a starfish because a starfish can grow a new arm." And so Harlen's job, as he sees it is to make sure that the world is in good health... Harlen is very much a traditional character. He's the trickster figure rearranged in some ways. One of the roles of the trickster is to set the world right... He's creator and destroyer. 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. (Rooke 68)

Harlen Bigbear rarely says what he means. He is constantly devising schemes and seems to have an ulterior motive for all his actions. When Harlen sees Will off on the plane back to Toronto after his mother's funeral, he tries to convince him to stay and set up a photography studio in Medicine River. Harlen tells him how important it is for there to be a Native photographer to take the pictures of the Native people, "Real embarrassing for us to go to a White for something intimate like a picture" (King, River 94).

Will is not in the mood for any of Harlen's tricks, and he does not allow himself to become sentimental over the Native community's needs for him. Just the same, Harlen never gives up and, before the plane takes off, he leaves Will with an information folder from the Medicine River Chamber of

Commerce. Among the documents are several photocopied sheets from the local phone book.

It was the photography section, and Harlen had made notations next to each advertisement. Alongside Lynn's Photography, he had written 'too expensive.' Next to Fred Dillar's Photographic Studio, he had written 'not too friendly on the phone.' Across the large advertisement that Pierre du Gua's Photography and salon had paid for, Harlen had scribbled, 'Eddie says the guy doesn't like Indians.' On the last page, after Terry's studio, Harlen had printed in bold, block letters, 'No competition for an Indian photographer.' (95)

Will returns to Toronto to find that he has been laid off from his job. After an unsuccessful three-month attempt at surviving on free-lance jobs, he decides to take Harlen's suggestion and return "home." He sets up a photography studio and moves in with Harlen until he can find his own place. Later that year, just before Christmas, Harlen comes by the studio carrying a paper bag and wearing a basketball jersey pulled over his coat. Harlen explains that the Friendship Centre has lost its basketball coach and that he has volunteered to take over. Will then asks what is in the brown paper bag. In true Coyote-trickster style, Harlen replies:

'Your uniform, Will.' And Harlen opened the bag and took out a blue jersey just like the one he was wearing, orange shorts, and a pair of white socks with two yellow stripes around the top. 'Medicine River Friendship Centre Warriors, all Native team,

Will, and we need a centre. ...We need a centre. Someone big like you. Be a lot of fun. You got a talent for it. I can tell.' (11-12)

Harlen's influence on Will's life doesn't stop at helping him to set up shop and coercing him into playing basketball. He encourages Will to get romantically involved with Louise Heavyman, Harlen's accountant who "just happens to be two months pregnant with the kid of some Cree guy who recently left her. 'Real smart though, Will,' said Harlen. 'Even in boarding school, she was real smart. Has a great sense of humour. Good personality, too. What do you think?'" (26)

Once again, Will is reluctant to get involved in one of Harlen's schemes. Harlen doesn't give up the battle so easily, though. He returns to Will with comments such as: "[A] man's not complete until he has a woman by his side" (27), 'Nothing more important than the family" (22), and "A son of yours would probably be a sports star of some sort" (27). Finally, after incessant badgering, Will agrees to see Louise and ask her out on a date.

When the two of them finally do start dating, Harlen can't be satisfied until he proves himself one-hundred percent right. Harlen often means well. The problem arises when he is not consistently forthcoming with the truth concerning his schemes. Instead he is often found sneaking around and trying to fix everything behind the scenes. He continues pestering Will in the Coyote fashion, making such comments as, "You know, Will, I'm not one to butt into other people's business, but you and Louise should probably get married" (136). Though he is not one to interfere in other people's affairs, it is

obvious to Will (and the reader) that he is interfering. Will states earlier on that:

Helping was Harlen's specialty. He was like a spider on a web. Every so often, someone would come along and tear off a piece of the web or poke a hole in it, and Harlen would come scuttling along and throw filament after filament until the damage was repaired. Bertha over at the Friendship Centre called it meddling. Harlen would have thought of it as general maintenance. (30)

Harlen's comment can be viewed as more of a satirical understatement than an honest self-examination. He is trying to mask his intention by stating the obvious. He wants to be seen as being useful by repairing what he considers to be problems in the lives of Louise and Will. Louise has just given birth to a child out of wedlock; her boyfriend conveniently left town when he discovered that she was pregnant. Harlen believes that Louise and her little girl, South Wing, need a man in their lives and that, combined with Will, an eligible bachelor who's a bit lonely, they will make a perfect match. Harlen is convinced that he has the plan that will solve everyone's problems even if they don't agree that they have problems, "I know you like being single, but everybody can see how much you love South Wing. Bertha figures you're pretty fond of Louise, too" (136). Even when Will replies that he prefers the single life as does Louise, Harlen continues straight on his course: "Harlen shook his head. 'Maybe you two could try living together'" (136).

Harlen is much like Coyote the Bricoleur or Trickster-fixer as described in chapter five of William Bright's The Coyote Reader. In his introductory paragraph to the chapter, Bright explains the role of Coyote the Bricoleur in Native mythology, "...the Trickster is not an ideal heroic type: If he slays monsters, it is through guile rather than bravery. He does not create the world of The First People, but rather "fixes it up" so that it becomes the world of humanity" (35).

Harlen has a difficult time staying out of people's personal affairs. He is similar to the Creator Coyote of Thomas King's "The One About the Coyote Going West" and to the Kyoti of Jeannette Armstrong's "This is a Story." King's Coyote appears on the narrator's doorstep while traveling west to visit her relations such as the Trickster Raven. The narrator states:

Coyote comes by my place. She wag her tail. Make them happy  
with noises. Sit on my porch. Look around. With them teeth.  
With that smile. Coyote put her nose in my tea. My good tea.  
Get that nose out of my tea, I says.

I'm going to see my friends, she says. Tell those stories. Fix this  
world. Straighten it up.

Oh boy, pretty scary that, Coyote fix the world again. (King, One  
67)

Armstrong's Kyoti is a mythological character who has been awakened from a sleep to help the Native people.

Kyoti could see that them Swallows (White Man) were still a Monster people. They were pretty tricky making themselves act like they were people but all the while underneath, being really selfish Monsters that destroy People and things like rivers and mountains. Now Kyoti could see the reason for being awakened early. There was work to be done. It was time to change the Swallows from Monsters into something that didn't destroy things. Kyoti was Kyoti and that was the work that Kyoti had to do. (King, Relations 132)

Even though Coyote is a pest, his comic relief is usually appreciated. Harlen Bigbear shares these qualities and his friends recognize this, "Harlen Bigbear was my friend and being Harlen's friend was hard. I can tell you that" (King, River 11). Harlen's friends, like those of Coyote from "The One About the Coyote Going West", "This is a Story" and Green Grass, Running Water, make allowances for him because his humour often brightens up what might otherwise be a dull day.

Thomas King refers to Harlen as a constant meddler. In describing Harlen, King states, that "nobody knows what Harlen does. He's got to do something for a living, but no one ever sees him working at a regular job. He just sort of appears. There's a certain surrealistic quality to Harlen... Harlen is just there. He's there all the time. He's like the land and the sky" (Rooke 68).

A possible explanation for Harlen's need to continually "fix things" comes from Floyd, one of the veteran basketball players on Will and Harlen's team.

"... Harlen was one hell of a dancer. Won all sorts of prizes at the powwows. Used to hoop dance, too. . . exhibition. Elwood's auntie says that there was no one could work those hoops like Harlen... [b]ut he don't do it any more. One night at Gladstone, he was giving an exhibition. He'd had a little to drink, and half-way through, he fell. Hard. ...Hurt his foot, but mostly it was his pride. That's why he's always trying to compensate... Harlen's trying to compensate, make up for that mistake with the hoops."  
(King, River 19)

In "The One About the Coyote Going West" the narrator tells the visiting Coyote Trickster a story about another Coyote, a Coyote that resembles Harlen Bigbear by the way she also tried to compensate for a mistake that she had created.

While on her journey west to create things and fix up the world, Coyote falls in a hole. She inadvertently lets a mistake leave her head and slip out into the hole. What follows is a confrontation between the mistake and Coyote. In the end, the mistake gets the best of Coyote and jumps out of the hole. Coyote eventually gets out of the hole as well. She continues on her journey west only to meet up with a group of ducks. When Coyote asks the ducks where they come from, they explain that they got tired of waiting and created themselves. It is from the ducks that the first Indians are created.

The Trickster in "The Winnebago Trickster Cycle" also meets a group of ducks. There are many similarities between the two stories. In "The

Winnebago Trickster Cycle Parts 12-16", the Trickster is encouraged by the ducks to sing them songs so that they can sing.

Then the ducks spoke to each other and said, 'Come, what if we ask him to sing? Then we could dance couldn't we?' So one of them called out, 'Well, let it be so. I enjoy dancing very much and it has been a very long time since I last danced.'

So they spoke to Trickster, 'Older brother, yes, if you will sing to us we will dance. We have been yearning to dance for some time, but could not do so because we had no songs. (Velie 55)

In Thomas King's version, there is also singing and dancing initiated by the ducks: "Come on says those ducks. We got to sing a song. We got to do a dance. So they do. Coyote and that big mistake and those four ducks dance around the eggs. So they dance for a long time and pretty soon Coyote gets hungry" (King, Water 76).

When Coyote gets hungry he loses his self control. He convinces the ducks to close their eyes while he sings and they dance. True to his Trickster Coyote fashion, he starts grabbing ducks around the neck and putting them down his throat. The mistake saves the day by pulling the ducks out of the Coyote before any harm comes to them. In the Trickster Winnebago Myth, the ducks are not so fortunate. Again the Trickster convinces the ducks to close their eyes during the dance. "When he was ready to sing, he said, 'My younger brothers, this is the way in which you must act. When I sing, when I have people dance for me, the dancers must, from the very beginning never open their eyes' " (Velie 54).



Just as in King's story, when the mistake rescued the ducks after he opened his eyes, so were the many of the Trickster's ducks saved when one duck defied the order to keep his eyes closed. "Finally a little duck whose name was Little-Red-Eyed-Duck secretly opened his eyes, just the least little bit it opened them. To its surprise, Trickster was wringing the necks of his fellow ducks. ... Little-Red-Eyed-Duck shouted. 'Alas he is killing us! Let those who can, save themselves'" (54).

This myth is also paralleled in the Comanche legend, "Coyote and the Hoodwinked Dancers." In this story, the ducks are replaced by prairie dogs. "Immediately upon his arrival, Coyote springs into action with a plan to trick and eat the prairie dogs. His scheme is simple but effective. He has them dance with their eyes closed, and as they are dancing unprotected he snatches up a few for dinner" (Swann 253).

It is clear from these three examples, two from Native mythology and one from modern Native fiction, that the Trickster has not only made a transition from myth to fiction, but is sometimes sidetracked by his vices while on his creation journey.

Harlen Bigbear is no stranger to this predicament. A fine example is his interest in bingo, a modern Native gambling contest, and in hand games, a traditional Native gambling contest. He is famous in the community for the hand games he hosts. Will (the narrator) comments, "Almost anyone could come to Harlen Bigbear's once every-so-often, pot-luck-eating, cash-and-other valuables hand game" (King, River, 60).

Deception, or the ability to carefully hide the truth, is another quality that Harlen Bigbear shares with both the Winnebago Trickster and Coyote. Will summarizes Harlen's attitude in the following analysis: "Harlen, who had a great respect for the truth, though on occasion he had difficulty finding all the parts, tended to be more temperate in his insistence on the whole truth all at once" (176). In other words, the truth was necessary only when it was convenient for Harlen. Often Harlen found it necessary to stretch the truth while in the process of "fixing things." Harlen admits that he manipulates truths in order to achieve a necessary end result and uses an interesting analogy to explain this:

'... you know, the truth's like a green-broke horse. You can come running out of the barn and throw on a saddle, leap on its back and plant your heels in its side, but you never know which way it's going to run or who's going to kick. Sometimes it's better to walk up slow you know and, with a carrot or an apple. Let it smell the saddle for a while, before you pull the cinch and saddle up' (176-177).

Although Harlen usually has the best intentions in mind when he starts to "fix things up" maybe everyone would be better off if he took the advice offered to Coyote by the narrator in "The One About the Coyote Going West": "That's what happens when you try to fix this world. This world is pretty good all by itself. Best to leave it alone. Stop messing around with it" (80).

But Coyote, like Harlen Bigbear, always believes that she is right and replies, "I better get going... I will tell Raven your good story. We going to fix this world for sure. We know how to do it now. We know how to do it right" (80).

Harlen the Bricoleur also shares characteristics with the Comanche Coyote Trickster. In Comanche mythology Kiowus (Coyote), was a Cultural transformer. "Coyote Transforms that Utopian world created by his elder brother, the Wolf, into a human or 'cultural world'" (Swann 24).

The Edenic world is not for one man—the fall of man must occur for man to be what he is and do what he must do. Thus, Kiowus is a teacher. Moreover, he is a Promethean Giver, and ultimately, Savior. On the other side of the same coin, however, he is a bungler. He offers the Comanche listeners comic relief from the harshness of this world that surrounds them daily. The audience laughs as he attempts to become what he is not, or to do what he should not do, but through the laughter, the story's listener sees, through his unconscious eye, a movement from chaos to order. Because Coyote doesn't always live within his limits, physically or psychologically, his misfortunes tend often to be short lessons in the morality of being one's self. (247-248)

The Coyote in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*

Coyote the Trickster fixer is the most common Coyote figure in Thomas King's writing. In his 1992 novel, *Green Grass, Running Water*, Coyote returns to his mythological form. He is much the same mischievous, silly Trickster-creator found in King's short story, "The One About Coyote Going West." He is also a fine example of the Coyote described by William Bright, in *The Coyote Reader*.

Bright comments on the various forms of the Coyote and his connection to other famous Trickster types like Bugs Bunny. Bright writes about Joel Chandler Harris's Bre'r Rabbit stories which were adapted from nineteenth century Black American folk tales. He believes these tales were influenced by the Trickster myths of the southwestern Natives. Bright surmises that, after Disney had appropriated, or, better said, borrowed Bre'r Rabbit, "Competing producers may also have drawn on the Harris stories in their creation of Bugs Bunny—perhaps the most successful approximation to a folkloric Trickster figure that our anglo-American culture has yet acquired" (1).

In his preface, Bright places the Coyote in the context of Native North American mythology and asks the reader not to confuse the Coyote with modern animal characters that we are familiar with, such as Warner Brothers' Wile E. Coyote or the characters from the European tradition's Aesop's Fables. He states that the mythological characters of Native North Americans, although possessing animal names such as Bluejay, Frog, Bear and Coyote, did not necessarily possess these animals' forms.

They are First People, members of a race of mythic prototypes who lived before humans existed. They had tremendous powers; they created the World as we know it; they instituted human life and culture--but they were also capable of being brave or cowardly, conservative or innovative, wise or stupid. They had names that we now associate with animals, and they sometimes had features physical or psychological, that we now associate with those animals. When humans came into existence, The First People were transformed into the species of animals that still bear their names. All this is to say that The First People were not animals. They more resembled gods although they were not much like any gods worshipped in Europe. (vi-vii)

C. G. Jung's commentary entitled "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" in his chapter from Paul Radin's The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology, substantiates the above statement. In this article, the Trickster: "... is a forerunner of the savior, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness" (Radin 271).

Swann substantiates this statement commenting, "The Trickster is a primitive "cosmic" being of divine-animal nature, on the one hand superior to man because of superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him of his unreason and unconsciousness." (246)

In Green Grass, Running Water, Coyote is found with other creation characters such as *The Changing Woman*, the mixed-up dog, (GOD), who began as a dream that escaped from Coyote, and various characters of biblical and literary reference. They include: Noah, Hawkeye from the Last of the Mohicans, Ishmael from Moby Dick, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and The Lone Ranger. Coyote encounters these characters and has various adventures in a journey that attempts to explain the evolution of mankind from creation to modern day. Here we find a mixing of Judeo-Christian myths of creation with those of North American Native legends. Throughout the novel, Coyote is continually playing games when the other characters are taking a problematic situation seriously. He reacts like the class clown— throwing out foolish comments as a diversionary tactic in an attempt to shift attention away from the seriousness of the subject.

When Ishmael is explaining the creation myth to Coyote, Coyote reacts like a spoiled child:

In the beginning there was nothing. Just the water. Everywhere you looked that's where the water was. It was pretty water, too.

"Was it like that wonderful, misty water in California," says Coyote, "with all those friendly bubbles and interesting stuff that falls into the bottom of your glass?"

"No," I says, "this water is clear."

"Was it like that lovely red water in Oklahoma" says Coyote, "with all those friendly bubbles and interesting stuff that falls into the bottom of your glass?"

"No," I says, "this water is blue."

"Was it like the water in Toronto..."

"Pay attention," I says, "or we're going to have to do this again.

(King 88)

The novel follows a multi-plot sequence of myth and reality. Finally, all characters meet at the annual Sun Dance in Blossom, a small Native community in southern Alberta. It is a mixture of magic realism comparable to W. P. Kinsella's Shoeless Joe Comes to Iowa. Instead of ghosts of baseball players coming out of the corn field, there are Natives, incarcerated at Fort Marion, Florida in 1874. They were transferred to a hospital in 1891 and miraculously lived to 1993. They escaped from the hospital and are making their way to the Sun Dance. Following them are the hospital officials, Dr. Hovaugh and Babo. En route to the Sun Dance, the four Natives meet up with Coyote, Old Coyote and Changing Woman. When the mythological Coyote and the four Natives meet, Coyote shows his talents as a creator:

In the east the sky softened and the sun broke free and the day rolled over and took a breath.

"Okay," said the Lone Ranger. "Did Coyote turn on the light?"

"Yes," said Robinson Crusoe. "I believe he did."

"Are we ready?" asked Ishmael.

The light ran west, flowing through the coulees and down the cutbanks and into the river. In the distance a star settled on the horizon and waited.

"Yes," said the Lone Ranger. " It is time to begin. It is time we got started" (233).

The other main plot follows the trials and tribulations of Lionel, a home-town Native lacking motivation in his life. Instead of pursuing a university education or college trade course, he finds himself enticed by the opportunity to earn a lot of fast cash working as a salesman in Bill Bursum's electronics store. The job is not without perks. Along with watching all the television one would ever want, he gets to wear the store's famous gold blazer. He's also caught in a love triangle. Lionel is dating a young Native woman, Alberta. She's a university professor of Native studies and seems to have her life quite together except for the fact that she can't choose between Lionel and Charlie Running Bear.

As if Lionel doesn't have enough problems, on his birthday he is paid a surprise visit at the electronics store by Charlie Running Bear, his Uncle Eli, the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye. Tagging along in his silly mischievous manner is the Coyote. Coyote can be characterized as good natured, but silly. He has a difficult time knowing when to stop, and because of this he has the tendency to take things a bit too far.

"Okay," I says. "Let's get started."

"Is it time to apologize?" says Coyote.

"Not yet," I says.

"Is it time to be helpful?" says Coyote. "I can be very helpful."

"Forget being helpful," I says. "Sit down and listen." (229)

When Coyote is in the store, he tries to make conversation, but no one responds to him. He appears as an attention-seeking, silly child-like character although quite harmless and certainly amusing:



Lionel felt as though he was anchored in one spot, and that if he didn't do something soon, he was going to have to stand there all day and listen to Eli and Bursum and the Old Indians exchange greetings.

"Somebody ask me how I am," says Coyote. "Go ahead. Ask me."

"Uncles are pretty important," said the Lone Ranger. "I hope you listen to your uncle."

"You bet," said Lionel. "All the time."

"I'm fine," says Coyote. "That's how I am" (298).

The real magic appears when Lionel's birthday party goes gather around the video display to watch a clip from an old John Wayne and Richard Widmark western. Leading the Indians' attack against the cavalry is none other than Portland Running Bear. Portland was a once-famous Native actor playing the role of the Indian chief who always died at the hands of the much more famous white actors. He was also Charlie's father, a fact that Charlie was not especially proud of.

In the classic scene where Portland faces down John Wayne and Richard Widmark, refusing to yield to their troop of cavalry that had them clearly outnumbered, something goes amuck. It appears as if the Coyote's tricks have rubbed off on the four old Indians. They have somehow fixed the film so that the Indians win the battle.

The soldiers ran back to their logs and holes and rocks, shooting as they went. But as Lionel and Charlie and Eli and the old

Indians and Bill and Coyote watched, none of the Indians fell. John Wayne looked at his gun. Richard Widmark was pulling the trigger on empty chambers. The front of his fancy pants was dark and wet.

"Boy," said Eli, "they're going to have to do a lot better than that."

And then Portland and the rest of the Indians began to shoot back, and the soldiers began falling over. Sometimes two or three soldiers would drop at once, clutching their chests or their heads or their stomachs. (321)

The climax of the novel's plot comes when a dam bursts. It was built by white developers at the center of a Native land claim dispute.

"Oh, oh," said the Lone Ranger. "Things are getting bent again."

"You haven't been dancing again, Coyote?" said Ishmael.

"Just a little," says Coyote.

"You haven't been singing again, Coyote," said Robinson Crusoe.

"Just a little," says Coyote.

"Oh, boy," said Hawkeye. "Here we go again" (409).

The dam was destroyed. The old visitors' mission was complete. The four old Indians, Hawkeye, Ishmael, the Lone Ranger and Robinson Crusoe returned to their hospital, Lionel set about rebuilding the family cabin that was destroyed by the flood, and Coyote just kept on doing what Coyotes do best—telling stories and getting into mischief.

Through his misadventures in this novel, Coyote shows himself to be in character with Kiowus, the Commanche Coyote. Just as Kiowus led the Commanche out of their Edenic paradise with the intent of improving the situation, King's Coyote has bungled while trying to "fix things up." King's Coyote provides as much a scapegoat for the problems around him as the Commanche's Kiowus. According to Gallen Buller,

The Commanches had paid the price for leaving Wolf's Edenic paradise. Thus life was a hard one, but the "puha" (medicine) given them by the Spirits living all around them provided a way of dealing with the problems, and Coyote tended from time to time, to be a handy scapegoat for problems which are probably inevitable for all cultures worldwide. (Swann 248)

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to prove that literature written about the Natives in Canada should be analysed according to its content, not the ancestry or life experiences of the author. The Coyote-trickster was chosen as an example of a quality that is consistently portrayed in Native writing and an argument was made in support of this quality being accepted as a method of determining what makes Native Canadian literature uniquely Native.

Despite the fact that I believe Kinsella has been wrongly accused of appropriating the Native voice while he was practicing the craft of a creative fiction writer, it is important to include this criticism in the thesis in order that the reader may be presented with both sides of the argument and the specific criticism may be addressed.

In an interview with Harmut Lutz, Thomas King was asked for a definition of Native literature. His reply was, "[Y]ou can say that Native literature is literature produced by Native people, as long as you don't ask 'who is Native?' Because that would open a whole can of worms. And it's a pretty nasty can of worms too" (Lutz 108).

The problem lies in the fact that there are varying degrees of "Nativity." By "Nativity," I mean the degree which the combined Native lineage and Native culture have influenced his or her writing. Just as it is difficult to determine what percentage of Native ancestry is required to qualify a writer as "Native," it is problematic when attempting to measure effectively the amount to which a writer has been influenced by a cultural

group. King himself possesses more non-Native than Native blood. But what King is adamantly opposed to is non-Natives speaking for Natives.

I believe that Kinsella has no desire to speak for Natives, but instead is writing about the disenfranchised people in the world who share common misfortunes. He just chooses to base these stories on a Native reserve in southern Alberta.

In an interview with Alan Twigg, Kinsella explained his purpose for writing the Ermineskin stories:

I write about people that just happen to be Indians. It's the oppressed and the oppressor that I write about. The way that oppressed people survive is by making fun of the people who oppress them. That is essentially what my Indian stories are all about.

Silas and his friends understand the absurdity of the world around them. They survive by making fun of the bureaucrats and the do-gooders and the churches and all these idiots who have absolutely no idea what is going on in the world but who are in positions of power.

Nine out of ten people in positions of power are hopelessly incompetent. It's that one person out of ten that keeps the country running. Silas sees the absurdity of all this. And that's what I have always done. I know the mentality of the oppressed minority. As a writer I am certainly an oppressed minority.

(Twigg 142)

If one accepts, as I have presented in this thesis, that the portrayal of a Coyote-trickster character is a common aspect of Native literature in North America, then Kinsella's Frank Fence-post must fit into this category. I see no fundamental difference between the Coyote-trickster characters of King's Harlen Bigbear and Kinsella's Frank Fence-post. Harlen and Frank are two characters that are necessary for the success of their respective works of fiction, and these two characters share a common ancestor, namely, the Coyote-Trickster. Clearly these two modern Tricksters are responsible for developing the lighter side of their communities. There is a purpose to their humorous escapades—to relieve the tension and hardships of the modern Native struggling in the White Man's world. The Coyote-trickster keeps the community's morale afloat with its humour.

As well, it is of no real importance whether the figure of Frank Fence-post, the Coyote-trickster, appears either as a well-planned personification of the North American mythological archetype, or as simply a character injected into the stories to provide some comic relief. Perhaps Kinsella is unaware of the parallels between Frank Fence-post and the Coyote-trickster; but, if this is true, it should have no bearing on the acceptance of Frank Fence-post as the Coyote-trickster character. What is important is the end result of Kinsella's creative writing process. He has created, whether by choice or by accident, a modern example of the Coyote-trickster in a Native setting, and this character is as legitimate a Coyote-trickster as Thomas King's Coyote-trickster character that is accepted by the Canadian Native community.

For the purpose of establishing new criteria for Native literature, I chose to focus on the similarities between Frank Fence-post and Harlen Bigbear, but there are many other themes that I left unexplored. Native life, emergence from white domination, and rediscovery of self-pride are only but a few examples. Together, these qualities may combine to make a truly encompassing definition.

One quality of Native literature is the Coyote-Trickster character, and his presence in Kinsella's works legitimizes his right to be considered a writer of Native literature. I am resigned to accepting that, as long as there are writers and academics, there will be debates over such hot topics as what should be considered Native literature in Canada and North America. On the subject of the debate over what is or is not Native Canadian literature, The Alberta Report of October 22, 1990 commented:

Last year a virulent debate began in Canada's literary community over non-Indians writing about Natives. Indians claimed that non-Native writers perpetuated negative stereotypes of Indians. They also asserted that publishers discriminated against Native writers so the "real voice" of Natives was never heard.

(Hutchinson 65)

Agnes Grant, the editor of Our Bit Of Truth: An Anthology Of Canadian Literature, wrote in her article "Canadian Native Literature: The Drama of George Ryga and Thomson Highway,"

Suddenly, a comparatively large body of Native Literature is available for study and casual reading. To date, critical study of Native literature has been difficult for scholars coming from Western Literary circles but Native writers themselves are now beginning to point the way to how they would wish their literature to be approached. (38)

This comment shows the extent to which 'political correctness' has entered the study of Native literature. Is there another study of literature that exists in which the others set the guidelines for the critical analysis of their literature? It appears as if the critics themselves, those of a non-Native origin, are so afraid of being deemed "non-credible" because of their absence of Native blood, that they resort to toeing the line of political correctness.

Neil Bissoondath, a Trinidad-born author now residing in Montreal, supports the notion that no one has the right to censor creative writing on the grounds that it is appropriating a voice that the author has no right to express. He states:

I reject the idea of cultural appropriation completely. I reject anything that limits the imagination. No one has the right to tell me who I should or should not write about, and telling me what or how I do that amounts to censorship. I don't believe that anyone can steal the culture of another....Fiction is an exploration of the other, and the only thing that matters is whether you do it badly or well, not whether you collaborate or ask for any kind of permission. (qtd. Godfrey, C15).



From the research presented in this thesis, it is apparent that the debate over who is a writer of Native literature is far from over. Some non-Native writers have been embraced by members of the Native literary community for various reasons, the most common being that they don't offend Natives or attempt to write in a "Native voice."

The belief that only Natives have the right to tell stories about Natives was reiterated in the January/February 1996 issue of Aboriginal Voices by Richard Wagamese, who, in his commentary on the portrayal of Natives in TV and cinema, called for the need to have more Native writers, producers and directors involved in the production of stories about Native people.

We need to move behind the camera. We need to head our own story departments and provide our own research. If our television lives are to more accurately reflect our daily lives, Native people need to provide the direction. Only we can tell our stories accurately. Only we know the details that make us vibrant and unique. It's the height of conceit for them to think otherwise. (50)

Also appearing in this issue is a review of the new CBC series The Rez, airing its first segment of six episodes in February, 1996. This series is an offshoot of the widely acclaimed Bruce MacDonald/Norman Jewison film Dance Me Outside produced in 1994. It is based on the novel of the same name by W.P. Kinsella. I was very pleased to see the characters of Silas, Sadie, and of course, Frank Fence-post making it onto the big screen and now onto the

small screen. The opportunity has arisen again for Kinsella's work to be critiqued by the aboriginal and non-Native communities in Canada. Two of the half-hour "Rez" episodes were written by Jordan Wheeler, a member of the Cree nation. The Aboriginal Voices article states that Wheeler "found The Rez a breath of fresh air compared to his regular job." (He wrote for North of Sixty— a dramatic series based in a fictional Dené community in the southwestern Northwest Territories). (McConnell 28).

Wheeler is quoted, "[The Rez] doesn't take itself too seriously, he says. I didn't have to run people's hearts through the mill. It's more true to Aboriginal sensibility—the way we survive is through humour" (28).

At first glance, the film productions inspired by Kinsella's collections of short stories have had a positive impact on the Canadian aboriginal community. They have provided work for Native Canadians as writers and actors. Ryan Black, who plays Silas in both the film and the series, states how he is able to relate to the new film project. "It reaches out to Native people like myself who don't have a problem with alcohol and drugs and feel like our problems aren't worth anything" (30).

Another actor, Shirly Cheechoo, who plays Ma, speaks about her use of her mother tongue, Cree, in the episodes. "When you speak in your own language it comes from the whole body," she says. "And knowing that your own people are listening to you feels really good" (29).

I believe the most important comment from this article concerns the need for Natives to be able to laugh at themselves and to discover and

embellish the fun in life and not to dwell on the problems that exist on the Reservation. It is easy to become dragged down by all the negative aspects of Rez life—alcoholism, family violence and teen suicide just to mention a few. There needs to be a comfortable balance established by emphasizing the joys found when residing in an aboriginal community. In a sense, this new series offers this healthy balance to the harsh realities explored in the dramatic series North of Sixty.

Returning to the argument of authorship of Native stories, it is interesting to note that, although The Rez was inspired by W. P. Kinsella, episodes are being written by a Native. This compilation adds authenticity to Kinsella's work. I believe that the acceptance of his work by the aboriginal community, whether interpreted by a Native writer or not, goes a long way in recognizing Kinsella as a writer of Native literature. Only time will tell if this series will be successful in eradicating some of the ill feeling that exists towards him from numerous members of the Canadian Native and literary community. As in many cases, it is the people who hold the power in the change of opinion, not a select group of academics and politicians.

I agree with the argument put forth by Jeanette Armstrong, an Okanagan novelist and poet, stating according to Margaret Atwood's interpretation, "that non-Natives—whether writers or anthropologists—should not retell Native myths and legends without understanding them" (Atwood, Strange Things 36). The reasons stated by Atwood include the importance of being accurate in reporting oral tradition so as not to change or alter the story and, most importantly, to respect the Native tradition of storytelling.

Earlier in this thesis I quoted Harmut Lutz commenting on the Native ownership in storytelling. I would like to add to these comments the following quote from Margaret Atwood and some first-hand knowledge that I have accumulated during my stay in an aboriginal community. There is a fundamental difference between Euro-Canadian and Native culture with regard to ownership, that is, what can and cannot be bought or sold; and storytelling falls into this category. As Atwood explains, "[F]or whites, physical objects such as houses and land and money are owned individually, whereas imaginative or spiritual ones such as mythical stories are not. But for traditional Native peoples, land is controlled tribally or communally, and property such as food is shared according to need, whereas certain sacred stories are controlled or 'owned' by individuals through their families. These people must guard their story, telling it only to those who are entitled by custom to hear it. Such differences in notions of 'ownership' have caused much misunderstanding, with non-Natives raising cries of censorship and Natives accusing them of stealing" (36).

It is unfortunate that Kinsella chose an actual Native reserve community in southern Alberta as a setting, and that there are Natives residing in this community who possess the same names as characters in his book. I think that if he had chosen instead a fictional name for the community, he would have been met with less hostility from Native groups; but, at the same time, I think that the issues presented in his book are so sensitive that, no matter where the stories were set, he would have been met with a certain amount of opposition.

Arguments have arisen on both sides of the political debate over the question of appropriation of voice. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by previous examples, emotions have played a role in this volatile argument. The focus should be moved from the writing's author, to the writing's content. There needs to be an objective analysis of prospective Native literature based on objective literary criteria such as the Coyote Trickster myth.

The Trickster character is a hallmark of Native stories and is clearly a Native convention. If we were to establish criteria for Native literature with respect to content, the Trickster character would surely be included as one criterion. It follows that the Hobbema stories of W. P. Kinsella, because of their accurate portrayal of the Trickster character in its many forms, should be considered works of Native literature.

One should not be too quick to give a narrow definition to Native literature in Canada. In an attempt to add a new dimension to what I consider a definition in evolution, I will give my definition of Native North American literature, stories without borders and its subcategory, Native Canadian literature. (I use Canadian solely as geo-political reference point.) Before doing so, I would like to clarify what I mean by "a definition in evolution."

Like Native literature in Canada, the people whose stories it represents are in a period of transition. This evolutionary progress has come very slowly for some Natives and very quickly for others. What is consistent for each Native group is "growing pain." The literature that is being born through this

evolutionary process needs to be given as much space as possible, to enable it to grow and take its rightful place alongside other literature. By being too hasty to define Native literature as simply 'literature written by Natives about Natives', we risk placing limitations on its development, in a sense smothering the sparks of creativity that will hopefully light the fire of a truly remarkable literary genre.

The following definition stands as a foundation to be built upon by contextual criteria that I hope will continue to be developed:

Native Canadian literature should be defined as: *literature that takes as its theme the story of Native peoples living on Canadian territory and satisfies established contextual criteria of the Native genre.* It should be divided into two categories: *literature written by Natives and literature written by non-Natives.*

I believe that it is necessary for the author of Native literature to make a clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction to prevent the perpetuation of negative stereotypes through wrongful portrayals of Native life in Canada. Kinsella's *Ermineskin* (Hobbema) stories, for example, should be prefaced by a clear statement that the collection of short stories is a work of fiction. Kinsella might also want to make a statement concerning his characters and the fact that should they bear any resemblance to a real person, dead or living, this would merely be a coincidence.

I also suggest that Kinsella explain in a preface to his collections, as he has in interviews documented in this thesis, why he has chosen humour to express the plight of the disadvantaged.

This thesis argues that the Trickster character be considered one criterion, and that we seek to establish others. I believe that writers of Native literature could be Native or non-Native, as long as their work satisfies what is established as the contextual criteria. I believe that by enlarging the definition of Native literature in Canada to include both Native and non-Native writers, the contributions of both groups will combine to enrich Canadian literature as a whole. I believe that both groups deserve consideration when their works are being evaluated as satisfying the criteria for Native literature in Canada.

My hope is that literary critics will open up their minds to judging Native literature according to content criteria, and that other characteristics of Native Canadian literature will eventually be established and added to the quality of the Coyote-trickster.

This is a departure point for opening the door that has been closed on defining Native literature in Canada. This thesis is a small push to open that door a crack and let some light in on this subject. The truth is that this door will remain open only as long as writers, readers, students, teachers and critics are interested in listening to new ideas. As academics, I think we have an obligation to leave the doors open and to encourage freedom of thought.

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