UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE

FILOSOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Power Through Humour:

Thomas King's Strategies for Decolonizing Canada

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Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vykonal samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů literatury, svých poznatků a konzultací s vedoucím práce.

Jaroslav Tuček

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my professors and colleagues from both Charles University and Simon Fraser University for their sustained support, help and inspiration. Special thanks are extended to Mgr. Klára Kolínská, M.A., Ph.D., Prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc., Prof. Roy Miki, Dr. Sophie McCall, and Dr. Eldon Yellowhorn, as well as all those who guided me through the years of university studies.

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1. Introduction

"[…] it is a funny story but when you open your mouth to laugh, something like a hand squeezes your heart." (John Steinbeck)

This dissertation is about power, humour and various comic and ironic strategies contemporary Native writers and artists apply in their works to challenge the outdated Indian stereotypes and obsolete systems of cultural and aesthetic representation. The artists employ a combination of comedy and irony as favoured modes of expression in order to contest, subvert and critically deconstruct the oppressive hegemonic ideologies and power structures still present in Canada and the United States. Their novels, poetry, essays, films, documentaries, theatre performances, paintings and other works of art strive to emphasize the *marginalization* and *rights* of all Native people in North America who have suffered over the hundreds of years of colonization, acculturation and violent cultural appropriation.

In the last decade, there have been growing calls from academia, Native communities as well as the government, to reconceptualise the bi-cultural politics between the First Nation peoples and the Canadian nation-state. A great amount of models for an inclusionary and multifaceted identity politics have been proposed by several Canadian cultural analysts and critics, including for example Diana Brydon, Smaro Kamboureli, and Lily Cho. However, before they can be successfully implemented, a creation of an alternative space that blurs the limitations of racial, social, and economic boundaries, (re)negotiates the historical injustices, and engenders new possibilities for better relationships is necessary.

In my dissertation I will explore the possibilities such a space provides for Native artists and writers. I will propose a theory that through the use of humour and irony this alternative space can become a place of mediation and dialogue between the inhabitants of the so-called center and periphery in the Canadian highly ethicized society. This liminal and interstitial

space[1] creates through a process of cultural translation and transposition the unstable, unfixed hybrid subject which resists binary oppositions that define colonial order.

Therefore, one of the objectives of my dissertation is to depict and explain the combination of Native humour and irony as a potent force for destabilizing and transforming the power structures of the colonizer, while at the same time transcending the pain and absurdity of the harsh reality. In her monograph on Native humour Jennifer Andrews suggests:

> Humour can channel anger, celebrate survival, and even unite Native and non-Native readers by allowing otherwise disparate groups of people to laugh together. Irony, in turn, often tempers the playful elements of humour by reminding readers of the legacy of oppression that has shaped the lives of Native North Americans for centuries. (Andrews 200: 1)

Considering the abundance of prolific First Nation writers at present day, whose textual strategies always encompass at least some elements of comedy and irony, I have decided to concentrate primarily on the work of the currently best known Native author in Canada, Thomas King. My choice is based on the assumption that King's widespread national as well as international popularity, owing to his arguably accessible style of writing, together with his ability to transcend geographical boundaries and tribal distinctions in his work (a practice described by Davidson, Andrews and Walton in *Border Crossings: Thomas King's Cultural Inversions* as "pan-Indian self-positioning" (2003: 14)) situate the author into the role of a

[1] As Homi Bhabha explains in *The Location of Culture,* liminality is cultural, rather than a biological phenomenon. It is the location of subversive counter-discursive strategies which deconstruct fixed or essentialist identities, preventing them from "settling into primordial polarities" (4).

cultural speaker and advocate of Native values[2]. Additionally, King's prominent use of humour and irony as a political tool for subverting and disturbing dominant discourse fits into the context of this thesis, and will serve as a background for the theoretical and conceptual framework.

In her study *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, Linda Hutcheon points out that "[humour and irony] involve complex power relations and both depend upon social and situational context for their very coming into being" (1995: 26). In the introductory part of the dissertation the reader will first be introduced into the complex and historically problematic social nexus between the Canadian nation-state and the Native peoples residing within its borders. The difficult implications of the colonial era and its problematic legacy for both societies will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 – "Cultural politics". In Chapter 3 – "Native humour", I will focus on the concepts of 'humour,' 'comedy,' and 'irony,' which may be considered defining constituents of all Native cultures. To form a conceptual framework for delineating the above mentioned terms, I will refer to three studies written on humour. The first is a short but influential essay by Antonín Obrdlik, a sociologist who studied the effects of gallows humour in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. In "Gallows Humor - A Sociological Phenomenon" Obrdlik treats humour as both a social product and an agency with social functions and discusses the sociological functions of humour in precarious and dangerous situations. The second source, used for this dissertation, is a centennial work *Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (1999). This collection presents some of the

[2] In an interview with Bryce Arthur "Wait for the Signs" (1998) King says that he "wants nothing of the role of spokesman for Canadian aboriginal people." King has been approached to speak on national Native issues, but most often says no, claiming he doesn't know enough about the issues. He'll only opine about the Nisga'a treaty in a general way—the tribes can speak for themselves, he says (1). However, King's public appearance at Massey Lectures (2003) and *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour* can contradict this relatively old statement.

most original examples of contemporary Native art produced over the last two decades in Canada. Over the period of more than 10 years Allan J. Ryan accumulated interviews, comments and conversations that in combination with the works of art create a comprehensive portrait of and into Native identity, cultural representation, political control and *presence* in the current global society. *Trickster Shift*, which is a book of art itself (contains 159 mostly full color photographs accompanied by long commentaries and interviews with the authors) and was originally Ryan's dissertation in anthropology from the University of British Columbia, supports the notion of Native humour as a distinct and living communal attitude. Among the most vocal artists are Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun (Salish), Jane Ash Poitras (Cree, Chipewyan), Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree), Edward Poitras (Gordon First Nation) and many others. Their exhibitions, performances, sculptures and paintings occupy a significant place in the process of subverting the systems of representation, power and control in the Canadian society and bringing back the Native 'voice'. Their unique artistic expressions and styles allow them to undermine and challenge the position and agency of the institutions, ideology and dominant discourse in a way that can be both humorous and highly political. The artists attempt to redeem and reinvest the depictions of Native people by subverting the clichés and romantic idealizations of their subject which necessarily presumes the extrication of the observer from the conventional interpretations. Their paintings are imbued with power to manipulate stereotypes, creating more real and authentic images. Using different modes of expression such as photography, mixed media, installations, performance art, and assemblage and incorporating new materials and technology, including past and present elements of First Nation culture, enables the artists to address and reflect upon contemporary issues of cultural identity, political realities and community life.

In the last chapter "Power, hybridity, binary oppositions, and the third space" I will engage with Homi Bhabha in a discussion on inhabiting the in-between, liminal spaces,

permeability of borders and the creation of alternative sites of enunciation where dialogue between cultures can form new possibilities. Thomas King's novel *Truth and Bright Water* will serve as an example of a literary work where the author creates and (re)imagines a world which does not depend so much on oppositions but rather on cooperation and where, in order to achieve the possibility for cultural reconciliation, some borders are erased and histories (re)negotiated.

Thomas King is a noted Canadian novelist, university professor, essayist, broadcaster, photographer, film-script writer, and politician. He has published a highly acclaimed trilogy (*Medicine River, Green Grass Running Water, Truth and Bright Water*), a book of children stories, short stories, anthologies and lectures. Lately, he has become around North America a well-know public figure for his controversial and sometimes irreverent CBS Radio show *The Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour*[3]. King's acceptance among both native and non-Native audience can be largely ascribed to his mixed-blood origin, as well as to his style of writing. The fact of being both Native (Cherokee) and non-Native (German-Greek) allows him to occupy a special place 'in-between' the two cultures, races and nations. His perspective is both of an outsider and insider: "I'm this Native writer who's out in the middle," King describes himself, "not of nowhere, but I don't have strong tribal affiliations. I wasn't raised on Cherokee lands." (Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 9) In his writing, King is interested in the condition of 'in-betweeness' that so inexorably shapes his own identity. Moreover, King places his narratives on the so-called 49th parallel, the border line that separates Canada from the U.S, as well as Native American tribes from the First Nations in Canada. He seeks to question and contest the meaning of the 'imaginary' line that delineates the Canadian nation with respect to

[3] Thomas King plays here with the allusion to the famous Nietzsche's aphorism, God is Dead and Vine Deloria's God is Red (see *God is Red*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973.)

its impact on Native peoples. Borders, whether they are figurative or literal, are an omnipresent and integral component of King's fiction.

Another reason for his popularity in North America is his use of strategies for getting 'the message' across to the audience. "It has been said," writes Drew Hayden Taylor, an Ojibway playwright and comedian, in his collection of essays *Me Funny* (2006):

> […] that simply being born Native in Canada is a political act. You're a walking shadow of the unfinished business that hangs over the country, and uncomfortable reminder of the reality that gives lie to Canada's cherished self-image as a fair and just country. You're Canada's living, breathing, dirty little secret. (51)

Even though Thomas King, for this matter, was not born in Canada, his writing is political and addresses contemporary issues of First Nations in Canada. The political 'message,' encompassed in his stories is, however, conveyed to the reader in an inimitable manner. King does not dismiss completely the textual strategies common for the 'protest literature' during the Native Renaissance in the 1960's and 70's; however, he rather turns to the use of humour and irony as the most basic, yet complex tool for educating and subverting the omnipresent 'white' constructs of the Indians. Mark Twain writes in his unfinished work *The Mysterious Stranger*:

> [Humanity] has unquestionably one really effective weapon—laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug—push it a little—weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand. (1916: Ch. 10)

To explain and describe the comic aspect of King's work I chose his latter novel *Truth and Bright Water* as the most suitable text for reference. It incorporates all themes mentioned

above, i.e. de/construction, border crossing, and identity redefinition. *Truth and Bright Water* is a multifaceted novel, which combines narratives of mystery, comedy, drama and tragedy. Its complex symbolism attempts to address both tribal issues, such as re-creation of identity, community problems, land claims, as well as global or hemispheric ones.

What is the position of Native communities on the verge of 21th century within the Canadian society? How can a Native author address issues of prejudice, assimilation, acculturation, and ghettoization while keeping the attention of non-Native audience? How can the Canadian society get rid of binary oppositions such as perceiving identity as "either/or" system (either exclusively 'white' or exclusively Indian)? Is it possible to erase the image of homogeneous "Indian" and the ongoing process of homogenization from the national discourse? My thesis will explore the different strategies used by Native artists to negotiate these questions. Native artists take on specific position to refrain from assuming any fixed perspectives; it is up to the observer to absorb the information and deconstruct it in his/her best ability. As Gerald McMaster claims, "seeing is mandatory, conclusions are optional." (McMaster 1992: 1)

2. Thomas King – scholar, politician, storyteller

"Tragedy is my topic. Comedy is my strategy." (King 'Definitely' 1993: 60)

Before 1990 and the publication of *Medicine River*, Thomas King was a fairly un-known figure in the literary and public circles. In the following seventeen years, King has written four novels, several children's books, numerous short stories, scripts for television, film and a weekly CBC Radio program. What begun as an innocent act of courting in 1980 (King started writing poetry and short stories to impress his new colleague professor Helen Hoy at the Department of English at Lethbridge University in Alberta) turned into a life-long obsession. Commenting on the driving force that makes him continue writing novels, King says: "It's something else. I suppose it's an addiction; maybe it's a desire to re-create the world" (qtd. in "A Writer without Reservations" 1). King desire to change people's perception of the Native world/universe permeates throughout his whole oeuvre. From his storytelling and essays, to photography, broadcasting, and lately even politics, King has focused his artistic skills on addressing the contemporary realities of First Nation peoples in Canada without slipping to the common cultural clichés or pontifications about the 'plight of the Indian'. Even though King is nowadays actively involved with the National Democratic Party in Ontario (although he was already vaguely involved with the American Indian Movement in his younger years[4]) and was awarded many literary prizes, including the offer to deliver a lecture in the famous Massey

[4] In his interview for Alberni Valley Times, Port Alberni, King comments on his role in AIM: "Some of that stuff scared the shit out of me and I wasn't the guy on the front lines, I was the guy in back making coffee. What I have done is take my social activism into my writing. Don't clap – I'm not the guy who's going to change the world. I admire the people who are out there making things happen. We need those people. I don't think my stories change anything, but still, every day when I get up and go to the computer to write, I hope they will. As somebody has pointed out, the first thing dictator does when coming to power is kill all the writers" (Scott 2005: 1).

Lectures series in 2003[5], he still considers himself primarily a storyteller. King supports this statement in an interview for CBC Radio:

> The truth, as far as I'm concerned, is that stories are all we are," King says. "That's it. Nothing more. If we didn't have the stories that we tell each other, that people told about us, I don't know what we'd be. I can't imagine myself as an entity without telling a story. (King, Storyteller 2003: 1)

2.1 Stories – in the centre of universe and oneself

"You can't understand the world without telling a story," says the Anishinabe writer and theorist Gerald Vizenor. He adds: "There isn't any center to the world but a story" (qtd. in King, Truth 2003: 32). For Native people it is the story that makes the world and forms their own identity. Knowledge and cognition are embedded within the stories and their telling. Native American storytelling is the key to their way of theorizing the individual body, nature, and universe. Each story is somehow connected to the others creating a highly contextualized discourse where the "storied characters converse with one another to create the world" (Ridington 1999: 25). In the heart of Native American poetics is the creation story that

[5] Massey Lectures are a prestigious annual event in Canada co-sponsored by CBC Radio, House of Anansi Press and Massey College in the University of Toronto, in which a noted Canadian or international scholar gives a week-long series of lectures on a political, cultural or philosophical topic at universities all over Canada. Thomas King's Massey Lecture was delivered in 2003 under the title *Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. King in his original style weaves his way through literature and history, religion and politics, popular culture and social protest trying to make sense of North America's relationship with its Aboriginal peoples. King initially wanted to turn down the offer for Massey lectures, since he has never seen himself as a public individual. On a second thought he decided to approach the lectures as a storyteller: "I thought to myself, 'Well, all I can do is tell stories and try to say something about those stories and what they suggest for us as a people, as a culture'" (King, Storyteller 2003). King is the first Massey lecturer of aboriginal descent.

contrasts in many aspects with the Judeo-Christian account of the world creation. King's 'alter-narratives' gently and almost unnoticeably manipulate the reader to detach, at least temporarily, from the monologism of the dominant Christian based world-view and embrace or recognize the pluralistic and liberal Native perspective that excludes racial and gender prejudices. King's god (or dog/coyote) differs from the Judeo-Christian God in many ways. For instance, in short story "One Good Story That One"(1993) King pictures god not as a single, autocratic and rigid deity, as portrayed in Genesis, but rather he/she/it seems to posses qualities of 'one and multiple' being:

> Only *one* person walk around. Call him god. So. *They* look around, and there is nothing. No grass. No fish. No trees. No mountains. No Indians, like I say. No whiteman either. […] That *one* god walk around, but pretty soon *they* get tired. Maybe that *one* says, *we* will get some stars. So *he* does. (Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 5, *my italics*)

The dichotomy between the singularity and plurality of Judeo-Christian God and King's god is further shown in King's novel *Green Grass Running Water* (1993), in which the author employs several figures who cooperate in shifting and affecting the Christian notion of the universal order. Furthermore, these figures share limited power in comparison to those in Genesis, in which all the creative power is reserved for the single deity of God. Even though King's god is posited as a source, "Maybe that one says, we will get some stars. So he does" (5), the author continually makes every effort to undercut his authority. For instance, in "One Good Story That One", it is the central character of the tale named Evening, who is in possession of the garden. It is not the character "A(h)dam(n)" but a female figure who moves and controls the story. In this story, she is the embodiment of oral Native culture. Furthermore, her association with nature stands in contrast to the materialistic, imperious god and the ridiculed, diffident and dependent Ah-damn:

> That Ah-damn not so smart. Like Harley James, whiteman, those. Evening, she be Indian woman, I guess.
>
> […]
>
> She looks around her garden. Pretty nice place, that one. Good tree. Good deer. Good rock. Good water. Good sky. Good wind. No grocery store, no television.
>
> […]
>
> Pretty soon that one, god, come by. He is pretty mad. You ate my mee-soo, he says. Don't be upset, says Evening, that one, first woman […] Calm down, watch some television. (9)

King's god struggles to assert his power, since Evening disregards his issuing commands about not eating the mee-so ("whiteman call them apples"). However, he finally declares his superiority by expelling Evening and Ah-damn out of their garden. King cannot refrain from commenting on this altered biblical allusion and true to his sarcastically political humour he remarks: "Just like Indians today" (9).

King's narratives, as well as Native narratives in general, bring the world into being not through a monologue, which is a technique pertinent to narrative of Judeo-Christian tradition, but rather through a dialogue. Mikhail Bakhtin states that, "life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue" (Bakhtin 1984: 292). Here, King draws upon the stories of the Okanagan storyteller, Harry Robinson.[6] In a same way as Robinson, King's narratives create a dialogue between the oral and the written, between Native and Christian creation stories, and between literary and historical discourses. In *Green Grass Running Water*, which some

[6] See *Write It On Your Heart* (1990) and Nature Power (2004)

critics deem a post-modern (Chester 1999: 45) or neo-premodern[7] (Ridington 1999: 19) novel, King employs theory as a narrative to show the difference in seeing and knowing the world from Native and non-Native perspective. His narrative applies Western theory (e.g. Northrop Frye's[8] highly schematized concept of structuralist literary poetics first published in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), *The Great Code* (1982), and *The Bush Garden* (1995)) and Native theory creating a dialogue between the two. Moreover, King's storytelling performance in *Green Grass Running Water* can be to a certain extent considered pan-Indian. The novel translates and recreates stories and characters from several cultural traditions. Within his cultural dialogue King combines Robinson's Okanagan *Coyote*, Blackfoot stories from Alberta, Pueblo traditions of *Thought Woman*, Navajo's *First Woman*, Blackfoot and Dunne-za figure of *Old Woman*, and Navajo's *Changing Woman* (Chester 1999: 46). *Green Grass Running Water* also plays with chaos. By constantly challenging the knowledge of various historical and contemporary characters, events and discourses the reader is slowly lured into the state of confusion and disarray. The author's performance suggests that meaning is always consensual and dialogical. As Frye advocates, "knowledge," for Native people, "is embedded within stories

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[7] Robin Ridington does not agree with the qualification of King's work as post-modern for several reasons: "People who lived before the "modern" era obviously did not think of themselves as pre-modern. While they cannot have known about us, we can know about them. We can recognize a resonance between ourselves and people who never experienced the modernist agenda. Tom King plays upon this possibility. His Old Indians are pre-moderns held captive by American modernism, but they are also the thoroughly anachronistic Thought Woman, Old Woman, First Woman and Changing Woman. Their time transcends our own and circles back to touch it. By masking them in the icons of modernism, King reveals himself to be a neo-premodernist." (Ridington 1999: 19)

[8] Northrop Frye is known for his notion of "garrison mentality" that permeates Canadian literature. In Frye's eyes the Canadian space is chaotic and wild. In order to bring some order into the potential literary chaos he creates highly classified and schematized concept of literature. His structuralist theory is based on oppositions, archetypes and myths and their correlation in the closed system. Frye's theory stands in a strong contradiction to the central figure of Native mythology. Contrary to Frye's "literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogic"(King 1993: 324) modes of literary expression, the Aboriginal trickster always works from out of chaos rather than within closed, ordered, carefully constructed system.

and their telling" (1995: 145). Native stories do not only narrate the world but they actually talk it into being. First Nation stories function as metonyms, i.e. parts that stand for wholes (Ridington 1999: 19). King's stories in particular cross the borders of the oral and the written, challenge the assumption of written culture superiority, and (re)create the world as we (non-Native readers) recognize it:

> "Okay, okay, here goes," says Coyote. "In the beginning, there was nothing." "Nothing?" "That's right," says Coyote. "Nothing." "No," I says. "In the beginning, there was just the water." [. . .] "Okay," says Coyote, "if you say so. But where did all the water come from?" "Sit down," I says to Coyote. "But there is water everywhere," says Coyote. "That's true," I says. "And here's how it happened." (King 1993: 469)

2.2 Balancing on the border(s)

Being of mixed origin, German-Greek on his mother side, and Cherokee on his father's, King inhabits the in-between space; a position that allows him to be both insider and outsider. In a society that has vehemently proclaimed its multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, King's work can operate in-between the borders of Native and non-Native identity without de-centering his own position. King's unique style and perspective earned him an audience that stretches far beyond the Canadian and U.S. borders. In his works King addresses a wide spectrum of questions including genre (comedy vs. tragedy, oral forms vs. the written ones), national identity and citizenship (Canada vs. U.S. vs. First Nations), culture (white vs. Native) and others (Sugars 2004: 180). Some scholars and even members of Native communities accused King of not describing more vocally the endemic Native problems that linger both on

and off reserves[9] (i.e. drugs, alcoholism, diabetes etc.) They were missing the 'authentic' images of drunk, oppressed, drug addicted, poverty striven Natives (Hochbruck 1996:24). They[10] questioned King's political engagement and the lack of its representation in his novels. However, as King explained in various interviews (Lutz 1991, Canton 1994, Gzowski 1999), he regards his strategy of addressing political issues through humour more powerful than direct accusations of white society. "Stories are dangerous," King proclaims, "stories told one way can heal, stories told other way can injure" (King, Truth 2003: 55).

The strategies of using humour to convey the tragedies of Native life, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, allow the author to get 'the message' across more effectively. King believes, that it is particularly the specific use of humour, (usually called by scholars 'trickster discourse[11]'), which helps him "attract broader readership, and, thus expose a wider audience to the plight of Native peoples" (Sugars 2004: 180). Despite the immense international popularity of King's novels and lately his CBC Radio show *The Dead Dog Comedy Café Hour*, which is in its third year of production, he belongs to the first wave of Native writers who achieved a certain position in the North American literary canon. Because of the oral tradition of Native 'literature', the first serious literary work by Native writer was John Richardson's (Métis) oft-cited novel *Wacousta*, published in Edinburg in 1832. However, the very first book that received both national and international acclaim, and even earned the

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[9] 'Reserve' is a term used exclusively for First Nation lands in Canada. In the U.S., the term 'reservation' is used instead.

[10]For instance, one of the 'accusers' was the Carleton University professor Robin Mathews at the 2002 Victoria Conference.

[11] Gerald Vizenor coined the term 'Trickster discourse' to emphasize the Native American trickster's relationship to form and style. He translates the trickster's characteristics into features of language, making the trickster a "disembodied in a narrative . . . a communal sign, a comic holotrope and a discourse" (Vizenor 1990: 196).

Pulitzer Prize, was Scott's Momaday (Kiowa) *House Made of Dawn* (1968). This seminal novel in the history of Native literature symbolized the outcome of the literary and cultural development that started in the 1950's as a 'civil rights movement' and continued as the 'ethnic movement' in 1960's. Not only that Momaday satisfied the demand for 'ethnic literature,' but he also gave it a 'canonical' touch. His novel is an extraordinarily literary work, with allusions to Faulkner, Hemingway and New England Transcendentalism.

The following era, characteristically named Native American Renaissance[12], saw a proliferation of Native authors (Silko, Welsch, Robinson and later King), who quickly introduced themselves to the literary forum, usually through poetry. Most of them were not interested to write about the past and the history of the American Indian, which was interwoven with numberless stereotypes, clichés and constructs. Rather, they were looking into the present, depicting the contemporary struggles and problems of Native communities vis-à-vis the white society. In their work, the authors exchanged the feather and buckskin wearing stock characters for a more round, living, human beings. Instead of using the images of Indians as a background for 'white' characters, they placed them in the center. This gave rise to the most common Native genre, which is autobiography. Both Maria Campbell's (Métis) *Halfbreed* (1982) and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier (Métis) *In Search of April Raintree* (1987) use a strong, individualistic Native woman as the central character. Most of these early novels addressed the harsh realities of Native life both on and off reserve and expressed the long-hidden and deeply-rooted feelings of the difficulties to co-exist in the ´hostile´ Canadian society. Vivid images of assaults, raping, and subjugation dominated the fiction. Lee Maracle's (Salish) *Bobbi Lee*: *Indian Rebel*, Janette Armstrong's (Okanagan) *Slash,* or the already mentioned novels by Campbell and Culletton Mosionier can be attributed to the militant phase

[12] See Kenneth Lincoln "Native American Renaissance." U of California P, 1985.

or ‘protest literature’ trend in the 1960’s and 1970’s that was closely connected to the civil rights movement in the U.S. As Marta Dvorak explains in her essay on the discursive strategies of Native literature, “this polemic phase corresponds to an oppositional discursive strategy, in which the central issues of the texts are power, ideology, resistance to and subversion of hegemonic forces”(2002: 214). Using similar models often resulted in binary and contestatory poetic and in purely counter-hegemonic texts that focused on adversarial resistance to dominant socio-political structures and cultural codes.

3. Native humour and its social functions

"The kind of humour I like is the thing that makes me laugh for five seconds and think for ten minutes." (William Davis)

"Humour is tragedy plus time." (Mark Twain)

The term 'humour' did not gain its contemporary meaning until the 17th century. In antiquity the common referral to things funny was 'comedy'. Humour's original meaning ascribed to bodily fluids from whose distribution Hippocrates judged the individual's temperament. During the renaissance and baroque era the term 'humour' became used to describe a certain type of psychological mood. Until today the English language keeps using the term 'humour' for referring to both general mood and temperament. In French, the distinction is made by differentiating between *l'humeur* for mood and *l'humour* for something humorous. There is a good deal of theories which all strive to depict, categorize, and qualify different types of humour. Some of them associate humour with irony, naivety, absurdity and define it as a subcategory of comedy. Other theories distinguish many subcategories of humour itself. It is not the purpose of this essay to navigate the reader through the complex world of theories. Rather, I will try to focus on the different roles of humour aesthetics for Native people in the relationship with dominant society.

Every interacting social group develops, over time, a joking culture: a set of humorous references that are only known to members of the particular group and that serve as the basis for further interaction. Therefore, joking, teasing and mockery have a historical, retrospective, and reflexive character. Group joking is embedded, interactive, and referential, and these features give it power within the group context. Elements of the joking culture serve to smooth group interaction, share affiliation, separate the group from outsiders, and secure the compliance of group members through social control (Fine and De Soucey 2005: 1). These

processes can be demonstrated on the example of Native communities, in which humour has played an integral and indispensable role. In the following chapter I will attempt to characterize the different roles of Native humour and its social function for Native people in contemporary Canada. The following part of my thesis, which deals with the concept of power and the social and political status of Native society within the Canadian nation-state, will connect and explain the acquired information about humour and irony.

3.1 Inventing the Indian

Prior to the 19th century, the prevalent image of the Indian had been that of an inferior, dehumanized being. During the era of Romanticism, Indians were considered a dying race that will sooner or later disappear from the face of the Earth. However, even in this desolate state, the white writers and painters were still able to find a sense of nobility. The Indigenous characters of James Fennimore Cooper, John Augustus Stone, or Henry Wadsworth Longfellow serve as a good example of the cliché image of the North American Indian. They all share the common characteristics of a single, heroic, stoic, noble Indian, who is, of course, preferably male. This artificially constructed representation of Indigenous identity penetrated so deeply into the white colonial imagination that even in present time, more than five centuries after what postcolonial studies refer to as 'contact', one may encounter images of Native people not very different from those created in 16th or 18th century. How is it possible that something that has "never existed – *The* Indian," has form and power still in the 21st century, while something that is "alive and kicking – Indians," is invisible? (King 2003: 54) One of the key factors was the monolithic categorization of the Indians as the non-white Other in the interests of imperial dominance. The institutional act of labelling all North American Native peoples as one homogenous group under the umbrella term 'Indians' not only triggered the

process of identity fragmentation but also pigeonholed all members of the group into the old, stereotypical categories of heroic, stoic, romantic, and problematic. Moreover, the reproduction and fostering (e.g. in media, movies etc.) of "the image of the granite-faced grunting redskin" (Deloria qtd. in Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 29) was responsible for turning the 'alive and kicking' Indians into dehumanized, feather and buckskin wearing, stock characters.

Deconstructing these stereotypical images through humour is a complex and laborious task. Native artists are dealing with an audience that has been conditioned to see the people and their culture in a certain, prescribed monolithic way. For them, Native person is usually either an awe-inspiring, blood-curdling savage, as seen in many Hollywood movies, a sacrosanct holy victim or possibly a deprived urban homeless outcast. How can the white society now abandon the negative perceptions of the Native person after several decades of stereotypifying conditioning? Another problem with non-Native audience often comes from the deep compassion towards the oppressed, desolated and dying race. One may sometimes wonder about the source of all the positive energy. It is rather surprising to experience the common and frequent laughter notwithstanding the shortcomings and suffered pain. The implied depression is, with exceptions, missing. These would be the common white perspectives which are based on the omnipresent stereotypical images of Native peoples in non-Native writing and other media that still view Native culture simply as a tragic one. The public failure to perceive and appreciate Native humour prevailed for centuries despite a few testimonies that challenged the common view. For instance, Washington Irving commented on Indian humour after he returned from his trip to the Prairies in 1932:

> When Indians are among themselves […] there cannot be greater gossip […] they are great mimics and buffoons, also, and entertain themselves excessively at the expense of

> the whites […] reserving all comments until they are alone. Then they give full scope to criticism, satire, mimicry, and mirth. (qtd. in Taylor 2006: 100)

Humour, or laughter, was a part of Native cultures long before "Columbus was discovered by Aboriginal people"[13]. In the pre-contact era humour served mainly the role of a complex teaching tool within the community. Later, in the colonial years, and especially after the proliferation of Native authors into the Canadian literary forum, the Indian humour acquired characteristics of a powerful political instrument for subverting the dominant beliefs and values. In this chapter, I shall focus on several roles of Native humour, i.e. the subversive/political role used for repatriating the status of Native people within Canada, the healing/teaching role of humour, survival 'gallows' humour, and self-deprecating humour.

3.2 Humour as a weapon

> [King stories] ambush the reader. They get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny. Humour can be aggressive and oppressive, as in keep-'em-in-their-place sexist and racist jokes. But it can also be a subversive weapon, as it has often been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical, weapons. (Atwood 1990: 244)

> If they stop and laugh I got their attention, and then maybe they'll take the time to look around at it a little bit more and see what's going on. (Ron Noganosh qtd. in Ryan 2001: 101)

[13] Thomas King plays with the idea of Native people discovering Christopher Columbus in his short story "A Coyote Columbus Story," which was transformed into a children's book that was ultimately nominated for a Governor-General's Award.

In this chapter I will focus on the "aggressive" and "oppressive" roles of humour, i.e. the political and subversive function of humour and irony in Native literature, as well as on the theoretical explanation of the difference between the two discursive strategies. The current interest of academia in Native literature is symbolized by strong focus on its counter discursive and anti-hegemonic purpose, mostly ignoring other important aspects. In an interview with Hartmut Lutz, King objects: "[such readings] can make it sound as though the Native people spend their entire existence fighting against non-Native whatever. That just isn't true." (King 1991: 3) To refrain from limiting the role of humour in Native literature only to its capacity to subvert white society and counter the process of colonization and ongoing stereotypification, I will focus as well on the function of humour as a mediator between the two societies. Using humour in Native writing opens and alternative space of enunciation where the relationship between colonizer and colonized can be transformed and remodelled. However, the plurality and fragmentation of this space, as we will explore later in relation to the postmodern literary criticism, can influence the current struggles to politically stabilize the position of the Native subject within the Canadian nation-state. As Jennifer Andrews pointedly asserts in her essay on Native humour "In the Belly of a Laughing God":

> Negotiating an individual or group identity through humour and irony in a society that has ignored and degraded certain segments of the population based on race, sexual orientation, gender, or class is a tricky business, fraught with its own set of challenges. (2000: 203)

Additionally, community relations have been always high on the agenda in present Canadian society. Canada considers itself a model society with great interest in racialized and ethnic

minorities.[14] However, a 2006 report written for Statistics Canada by University of Toronto sociologists Jeffrey Reitz and Rupa Banerjee confirmed that visible-minority immigrants feel more excluded than white immigrants; second-generation visible minorities also feel less identification with Canada than whites do. This makes for an increasingly fragile political culture (MacGregor 2007: 239)[15]. In reality, many new immigrants in Canada have generally thrived and played an integral role in shaping the national identity. For some immigrant groups and their children, however, living here longer does not necessarily lead to a greater sense of belonging or a higher degree of social integration. Therefore, we can propound that unless the walls of racial exclusion and cultural marginalization come down the center cannot hold, not even in the model Canadian society. In *Canadians: A Portrait of a Country and Its People,* Richard Gwyn comments on the eternal and elusive Canadian identity:

> If we ceased to be a community, others would notice and would regret the passing of a distinctive idea about how different people can live together." (qtd. in MacGregor 2007: 239)

The strong interest of academia in Native humour and its uniqueness originates from the powerful combination/opposition of playful joking and rich tradition of self-deprecation with the drastic legacy of colonization and cultural devastation. When these two elements of humour and death come together in a work of art, "[they] create a metamorphosis in the reader, if the reader can understand what's being said and what's not being said" (Coltelli

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[14] John Stackhouse, in his review of *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour* comments on Canada's very delicate stance towards racial difference: "Call Canadian naive, don't call them racist" (Stackhouse 2001: 4).

[15] See Jeffrey G. Reitz and Rupa Banerjee, "Racial Inequality, Social Cohesion, and Policy Issues in Canada." In Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada, edited by Keith Banting, Thomas J. Courchene, and F. Leslie Seidle. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2007. Pp. 489-545.

1990: 22). Throughout the centuries of colonial rule, Native communities, otherwise divided nations, have been bonded together on the basis of comedy, laughter and storytelling. Humour, in a broader sense, not only erases differences within the tribes but also serves as a healing mechanism to the legacy of colonization and racial destruction. The ability to look back and joke about their history as inferior people who have been 'living as an exile in one's own land' gives Native people an enormous power to challenge their status as Other in relation to the majoritarian society. The strategy of addressing tragic issues with the use of comedy and irony enables Native writers to de-center white claims to authority. Native writers employ humour to undermine stereotypes and constructs, as well as to show a different conception of world based on more fluid notion of time and space. Moreover, humour may serve to negotiate the difficulties and limitations of the discourse of the colonizer, i.e. the English language. The significance of humour and irony for Indian communities is therefore immense, as Vine Deloria suggests in *Custer Died for Your Sins*:

> I sometimes wonder how anything is accomplished by Indians because of the apparent overemphasis on humour within the Indian world. Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem and the experiences of life have generally been so well defined through joke and stories that they have become a thing in themselves. (Deloria 1969: 146-7)

As we mentioned before, humour may serve not only for subverting the colonizer but also it may help creating a bridge between non-Native and Native communities. Thomas King is a good example of an author who focuses on describing a contemporary life in Native communities without forgetting the hardship of their histories. He uses his own comic vision that is based on mixing Native traditions with certain aspects of Western genre in order to be palatable for both audiences. King believes that repeating the traditional poetic stereotype of

the 'Indian's lament', i.e. victimizing Native people *ad absurdum* and reiterating the various kinds of oppression, does not make the fiction more powerful. He advocates other methods of dealing with the historical injustices and gives Native writers a simple suggestion: "Do not let the message, if you have a message that you want to play with, get out of hand!" (King 1991: 112) In his fiction, although being sometimes criticized specifically for this, the reader will not find a prevalence of negative images of Indians. Neither will the reader find any romantic images. King strategy is to show "very calm, very ordinary images, Indians doing ordinary things" (114). King's texts, in first place, do not aim to scare off the potential non-Native reader. Rather, they invite him/her to experience the common life on the reservation as being lived today, not 300 years ago. The reader is welcomed to take part in the text and laugh together with its characters. Only 'thereafter' does King place various textual traps for the unknowing reader who is suddenly exposed to a completely different perspective of the world. As Linda Hutcheon points out, meaning is not supposed to be passively and objectively revealed but actively and subjectively "perform[ed]" (1995: 67).

3.3 Theorizing humour and irony

By definition, the essential feature of irony is the indirect presentation of the contradiction between the action or expression and the context in which it occurs. In the figure of speech, emphasis is placed on the opposition between the literal and intended meaning of a statement; one thing is said and its opposite implied. In addition to the rhetorical figure, ironic literature exploits such devices as character development, situation, and plot to stress the paradoxical nature of reality or the contrast between an ideal and actual condition, set of circumstances, frequently in such a way as to stress the absurdity present in the contradiction between substance and form ("Irony" Dictionary.com 2008). In *Irony's Edge* Hutcheon defines

irony as unidealized "discursive practice or strategy" that is "verbal and structural" (1995: 3). Moreover, the politics of irony is not limited to the intentions of the ironist, but to an active interpreter as well. The interpreter needs to possess the ability to take in information, deconstruct it and reconstruct it in a new, improved, refined format. To give an example from a contemporary Native art, in 1985 Bill Powless (Iroquois) created a series of posters called *Indians' Summer*. They were meant as a subversive parody of the numerous historic portraits of Native war chiefs who posed in their magnificent beaded and feathered finery, for non-Native painters and photographers[16] who sought to fix their subjects' image in public memory before they vanished from the cultural and physical landscape, along with the rest of their ill-fated race (Taylor 2006: 20). The most famous painting shows a "big" Indian in swimsuit seated on a beach in a classic portrait pose, facing left, with his left hand firmly planted on his left tight and his right forearm resting on his right tight (6). On his head is an absurd umbrella headpiece with a small feather attached. In his right hand one can see a double Popsicle. For a non-Native interpreter this grotesque painting is very hard to understand since the prevalent historical stereotypical representation of Indians in paintings is that of noble chiefs in their full regalia, not a 'fat' naked Indian exposing his 'Indian flesh' on the Manitoulin Island beach. On the other hand, after observing the canvas, Native viewers become firmly convinced that the figure firmly holds a beer bottle rather than a Popsicle (21).

Humour and irony in Native literatures work as a great communication tool for Native writers to challenge dominant social paradigms by juxtaposing contradictory elements or perceptions within the literary text. Employing these discursive strategies, both together and separately, enables the oppressed and marginalized groups to de-center and destabilize the

[16] For more on Thomas King's photography projects see Greg Staats *Books in Canada* (1994) and King's "Artist's Statement: The Medicine River Photographic Expedition: Shooting the Lone Ranger." (1998)

conventional patterns of the hegemonic culture. The amalgamation of these two discursive strategies is not easy since not all irony elicits laughter and many humour texts lack an ironic edge. However, when combined they share many similar features and create an analogical response from the readers and audience. By creating multilayered text with linguistic and situational discordances, it forces the readers to get involved with the text and contribute their own interpretations. Irony on its own revolves around the perceived notion of an incongruity between what is said and what is meant; or between an understanding of reality, or an expectation of reality, and as opposed to of what actually happens. As Hutcheon remarks, "irony rests on the principle of inclusion and exclusion, sometimes some people just don't get it and that gives irony its edge" (1995: 10). Trouble arises when an audience is constituted by multiple "discursive communities"[17], capable of attributing irony or not, in the way the ironist intended or not. Rather than being static entities, these communities are flexible and constantly changing formations that reflect the multiple and shifting relationships individuals and groups have with each other. Moreover, humour and irony involve a process of interpretation. But because of the dynamic and plural relations among the text or utterance, its author, its audience, and the larger context of reception, neither discursive process can guarantee a single definitive response (11). Every interpreter has his or her own discursive communities, necessary for the attribution of irony and for its inclusive or exclusive valences. King's fictions, as well as his photography and radio show, apply the strategy of inclusionary and exclusionary humour to create a tension and trigger the creation of the interpreter's individual meaning. The non-Native spectator is then puzzled as to whether laughing at a particular joke or situation is permissible within the discursive community:

[17]Discursive community is "the complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies" (Hutcheon 1995: 91).

> If I laugh at that joke am I laughing at Native people? If I laugh at that stereotype am I admitting that it's true? If I don't laugh am I offending the poor Indian on stage? If he's making fun of himself, can I laugh? (Taylor 2006: 55)

Our text of choice, *Truth and Bright Water,* abounds with examples of both inclusionary and exclusionary humour. The novel resembles an intellectual puzzle, a game presented for the reader not to be left unsolved. However, some of the pieces of this postmodern-like riddle are hard or even impossible to decipher for most readers. They involve complex allusions to Native history, such as the Cherokee removals, Trail of Tears, Canada Day, as well as to various historical figures, e.g. Geronimo, Tecumseh, Rebecca Neugin, John Ross and many others. King's previous novel *Green Grass Running Water* abounded, among others, with the linguistic technique of 'code-switching', in order to purposefully exclude the English-speaking readers from the participation in the novel. The narrative is fragmented and non-linear, written in irregular grammar that includes numerous idioms and puns, with the intention to incorporate the traditional storytelling techniques into the text. Foundations of English language are challenged and rules disrespected. Thus the author achieves the inversion of the hierarchical relationship between Indigenous languages and English as a language of the dominant discourse. In *Truth and Bright Water* it is rather the allegory and its geographical symbolism that defines King's trickster discourse and helps the author to shift power relations and overthrow dominant paradigms (Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 48). The author embodies the Trickster, the painter, who (re)creates and (re)paints the history of Indian people.

3.4 Power of words

King revels in intertextual allusiveness and strategic satire[18] which highlights his unique and varied style of writing. Even though his symbolism and jokes are highly politicized he does so without scaring off the reader. "It has been said that simply being born Native in Canada is a political act," writes Drew Hayden Taylor in *Me Funny:*

> You're a walking shadow of the unfinished business that hangs over the country, and uncomfortable reminder of the reality that gives lie to Canada's cherished self-image as a fair and just country. You're Canada's living, breathing, dirty little secret. (55)

Native authors deal with this "secret" in many different ways. The apparent anger and raw violence of Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* or Armstrong's *Slash* is simply missing in King's work. Instead, King hides his subversive humour behind what may be termed 'guerrilla comedy'[19] and thus achieves even bigger power for his political statements. He does not just let the lions out of the cage to initiate change. He lures the unsuspecting observer or viewer, who does not think a serious political message can be couched within a humorous format into a trap while he keeps him/her laughing. Taylor compares this strategy to people who choose to walk into a comedy club rather than to a lecture on Native history (59).

However, King does not only point his critique and satire of social and political issues to the hegemonic white society. By moving away from the traditional adversarial, binary approach, his protagonists represent the dysfunctional and highly fragmented Native

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[18] It should be remembered that satire is, by definition, a hopeful and optimistic mode of critique, in that it assumes the possibility of change in attitude or behaviour (Ryan 1999: 168).

[19] King's 'guerrilla comedy,' 'guerrilla warfare,' 'humour of decolonization', or what Michel de Certeau refers to as "writing that conquers" is "a counter-discursive resistance to a victory that has never been conceded by all parties involved – a resistant re-writing of the historiography of the supposed victors." (King 2003: 15).

community of present day. His stories pose a mirror for both cultures; members of the dominant culture can look in the mirror of stereotypical caricature, the Native people will see passive objects of self-pity lost in desolated dysfunctional world. One of the *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour* stars is Gracie Heavy Hand, by real name Edna Rain. In the show, she symbolizes the equanimity between the Native and non-Native world: “We have to live in both worlds," she says, "we can't isolate ourselves the way we did years ago. We can't cry about what happened years ago. It's time for the young people to grow up and change things” (Stackhouse 2001: 5).

3.5 Defining Native humour

> Those things that hurt in life, those things that continue to hurt about being native in North America, I can handle those things through humour. I can't handle those through anger because, if I get angry about something, it just gets away from me. It just consumes me. I've got to keep coming back to humour as my sort of safe position. And I think I can make more of an impact. (Thomas King)

Trying to defining Native humour is a difficult task for a Native literary theorist, more so for a non-Native critic. What exactly is Native humour? Can it be differentiated and defined at all? For trying to explicate these questions I will take advantage of Drew Hayden Taylor’s study on Native humour *Me Funny,* and his early National Film Board documentary, and Taylor’s tour de force, *Redskins, Tricksters and Puppy Stew* (2000) as well as Thomas King’s already mentioned, and in contemporary Canada highly controversial, CBC Radio show *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour.*

Me Funny is a first publication completely devoted to researching Native American humour. Drew Hayden Taylor, a famous Ojibway comedian and one of the most influential contemporary Native playwrights in Canada, edited an anthology, with the objective to map the importance of humour for the Native people. Taylor explores the diverse areas of Native humour such as stand-up comedy presented by Don Kelly, a famous Ojibway stand-up comedian and visual arts, where he uses the works of Bill Powless as an example. Tomson Highway speaks about "Why Cree is the Funniest of All Languages". Thomas King sets on a quest for a definition of humour while integrating sketches from his famous radio show.

Native humour is about survival and community. On its own, however, this statement fails to define Native humour. We may have Latino humour or Black humour with a strong sense of community. In the heart of Native humour is the notion of self-deprecation or self-reflexive satire. King refuses any firm definition of Native humour and, instead, suggests that Native humour is "humour that makes Native people laugh" (qtd. in Taylor 2006: 171). Although King claims that his initial idea was just to create a Native talk show with all-Native cast, *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour* soon became a showcase of Native humour with all its 'bite' and 'edge'. According to Taylor, laughter on the psychological level does not require the intervention of the higher mental functions. "Emotions and sensations can often generate the bodily movement of laughter before thinking takes place," states Taylor. "This separation between thought and emotion creates room for self-reflection and can upset preconceived notions. It is here the 'dangerous' power of humour lies" (107). It is precisely this room of self-reflection which King and his colleagues exploit. They make the listener laugh but once they start to think, the jokes and anecdotes instantly transform into sharp messages describing serious issues.

Is there a real purpose in defining Native humour as an individual and community performance? Taylor with King mention the Heisenberg principle of uncertainty which says that, "the more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant, and vice versa"(2). Thus putting Native humour under microscope changes its effects and impacts. And at the end, the reader might eventually miss the performance itself.

In *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour*, Tom King (Thomas King), Jasper Friendly Bear (Floyd Favell Starr), and Gracie Heavy Hand (Edna Rain) engage in a humorous performance that ranges from a scathing political critique to cheerfully irreverent comedy. The aim is simple: to deliver a 'statement' to the mostly white audience through the use of humour and entertaining show: "I wanted to make it Native," explains King, "I wanted to make it funny, and I wanted to make it political if I could. I also wanted to make it sort of bozoish" (King 1998: 1). *Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour* combines arguably all those things. The cast hands out authentic Indian names to lucky listeners, gives 'Traditional Aboriginal Decorating Tips' (car bodies and dogs for reserves were two popular suggestions), and offers up 'Reserve Recipes'[20] ("people said you can't kill a dog on live radio," says King). The show successfully blends sharp political issues (e.g. Jasper reading aloud Royal Commission Report recommendations, road blockade reports are happily encouraged) with cheerful irreverence, which obviously sparks a hot debate within both communities. "I've only got 15 minutes, and I can't get too profound," says King, "but maybe I can get people thinking, and if I can get them thinking, great" (1998: 1).

[20] Compare to the sequence of tourists visiting "Indian Days" in *Truth and Bright Water,* who attempt to acquire and buy traditional Native meal recipes.

3.6 Laughter as a good medicine

Already in the 16th century, French doctor Laurent Joubert, in his now often-cited *Treatise on Laughter* (1579), analyzed the physiological and psychological functions of laughter. He came to the conclusion that laughter positively affects both the body and the soul. “Since being joyful and ready to laugh indicates a good nature and purity of blood,” says Joubert, it “contributes to the health of the body and of the mind, as experience coupled with reason shows us,” which is why “laughter has been able to save some people from grave illnesses”(10). Joubert quotes Solomon: "The joyous heart is a good remedy, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones"; and also Ficino on why people should live joyously: "the heavens created you out of joy, which they have made clear to be their way of laughing (that is, their dilations, movements, and splendour), as if they were at play" (10). Humour as a medical tool was also used by the Austrian doctor Viktor Frankl, who made his patients laugh at their phobias and problems to ultimately become relieved of them.[21]

Drew Haydon Taylor named humour the WD-40[22] of healing (2006: 70). It has been said before that the regenerative and transgressive function of humour is crucial for the current efforts of Native artist to ‘decolonize’ the circumscribed and otherized Native body. To restore the cultural identity and subjectivity of the American Indian it is necessary to abolish from enfeebling, scapegoating and emasculating the Native cultures by stereotypifying, marginalizing and discriminating its members. Contemporary First Nation artists employ subversive humour in various ways to challenge the dominant paradigms and power systems, as well as to draw attention to serious social and political issues that concern Native

[21] The use of humor as a form of therapy in the treatment of illness by getting the patient to laugh is called *Gelototherapy*. One of the most prominent scholars in the area of gelototherapy, theory of comics and play is the psychologist Vladimír Borecký

[22] WD-40 is the trademark of a widely used penetrating oil and lubricant

communities. Forced assimilation, residential schools, foster parenthood, environmental destruction, land claims, self-government, attempted cultural destruction; all these delicate historical and cultural issues, which are still being under hot discussion, can be more easily approached and renegotiated with the help of humour. Native artists can therefore help the community to move from the historical and personal trauma into a 'new' alternative space where the possibility for mutual respect and understanding is possible.

3.7 Gallows humour

Another type of humour is the so called "gallows humour" described and termed by Antonín J. Obrdlik in his essay "Gallows Humour – A Sociological Phenomenon" (1942). This humour, Obrdlik states, is typical in the nations which are oppressed by their invaders. He describes the social function of gallows humour within the era of Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia. At his time people lived in absolute uncertainty about the future of their lives and their country. The only refugee from the state of disempowerment and disillusion could be found in inventing, repeating, and spreading anecdotes, jokes about the oppressors mainly through the counterpropaganda channels. In this environment of death, the gallows humour achieves its highest potential. The people involved used gallows humour to persuade themselves of the temporality of their suffering. The irony and invectives which symbolize gallows humour served as a "psychological escape" and what Obrdlik calls "psychological compensation" (712). Gallows humour not only bolsters the morale and resistance of the victims, but according to Obrdlik it also undermines the confidence of the oppressors or colonizers thus becoming a socially significant element. This type of humour is not meant as a humour-for-humour but always humour with a definite purpose - "that is, to ridicule with irony, invectives, and sarcasm in order to become a means of an effective social control" (713).

Thus the gallows humour can be differentiated from the circumstantial, unintentional humour which involves ordinary people caught up in humorous situations related in some way to death. The authors who use gallows humour intentionally cope with death or with the threat of death. Sigmund Freud considered *galgenhumor* to be one of the best defensive mechanisms. He saw greatness of soul in a humour that smiles through its tears:

> When somebody succeeds in paying no heed to a painful affect because he holds before himself the greatness of the world's interest as a contrast to his own smallness, we see in this the function of philosophic thinking. (Freud 1916: 379)

Those who engage in generating humour are often willing to walk a bit closer to the edge of the current social norms. Native humour particularly very often crosses the boundary between politically correct and politically incorrect. When one introduces sex into death humour, which is by no surprise, since creation is death's logic opposite, the limits of social acceptability become challenged. "Cree, is neither a language of the mind nor a language of the senses. It is a language of the flesh," writes Thomson Highway,

> [it is] a physical language. It lives in the human body not above the neck, as English does, not between the neck and the waist, as French does, but one step lower: between the waist and the tights. Cree lives in the groin, in the sex organs. (qtd. in Taylor 2006: 160)

Taylor calls the politically correct comic boring (70), but where is the true border of political correctness anyways? Is it politically correct for me as a non-Native person to tell a joke about a delicate subject such as alcohol, drugs and Natives? I believe no, since it would be considered racist. "She died young, of drugs. Sounds like an Indian to me," writes King in Truth and Bright Water (1999: 211). However, racism works only from the top down. "Racism," claims Taylor, "is filled with lead, not helium" (2006: 73). Therefore, it can be considered perfectly acceptable

for a Native person, such a Thomas King, to make jokes about Native people as well as white people without being accused of racism. “It all boils down to power,” concludes Taylor (Ibid). This argument can be further extended to the problematic issue of cultural appropriation and ‘stealing the Native voice’.[23]

Speaking about politically correct humour, Taylor asserts that to remain within the realm of political correctness, one has to stay within the limits of his/her sphere of knowledge. An interesting fact is that this sphere of knowledge may grow and penetrate into a different sphere. Therefore, it is possible for a person, who had spent a significant amount of time with Native community, to partly become the insider and thus receive the permission to cross the otherwise stable boundary of political correctness (Ibid).

3.8 Teasing and self-deprecating function of humour

Even though the survival and political humour has been present in Native culture for already five centuries, it is important to note that humour was a part of the culture long before the contact. In fact, the social function of humour as a complex teaching tool in the Native communities has been here since the very beginning. Humour serves as a bonding tool that creates social harmony and stresses the importance of group cohesion. It also plays an important part in the education process, however, as Kristina Fagan suggests in her essay “Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching”, when joke or humorous story is offered as educational, it is rarely interpreted. The moral and instruction is simply never told in Native educational

[23] See Lenore Keeshig-Tobias’ “Stop Stealing Native Stories” (1990), Jeanette C. Armstrong’s “Cultural Robbery: Imperialism, Voice of Native Women” (1989), Barbara Godart’s “The Politics of Representation” (1990), Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao. *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (1997)

practices to allow for an uninterrupted observation, interpretation and personal negotiation. Native humour can also be used to force members of a group into the cohesion. Joseph Bruchac, the Abenaki storyteller, writes:

> Humour can be used to remind people – who because of their achievements might be feeling a little too proud or important – that they are no more valuable than anyone else in the circle of life. Teasing someone who gets a little too 'tall' may help shrink them back to the right height. (qtd. in Taylor 2006: 36)

Obrdlik gives in his essay an interesting example of the self-deprecating function of humour when he comments on the social sanctions among the Eskimos. These "primitive" cultures use ridicule against thievery. Instead of punishing the thief, they laugh whenever the thief's name is mentioned, which, judging from the fact that stealing is almost unknown among the Eskimos, is probably a more effective means of social control than fining or imprisoning offenders (Obrdlik 1942: 712). Vine Deloria suggests a very similar concept in the culture of Plains Indians:

> Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within tribe … were held to a minimum. (qtd. in Taylor 2006: 36)

Another example of self-deprecating function of humour comes from the actor of King's radio show Floyd Favel Starr. He sees laughter as the "great leveller" in Native society:

> They also say it keeps you grounded. It keeps you focused, who your friends are. It makes your spirit happy. Happiness is what we strive for, to make people happy. (qtd. in Stackhouse 2001: A23)

But the true self-deprecating humour is a form of humour in which people or comedians make jokes about themselves, their shortcomings, or their culture, without paying much attention to any underlying self-esteem issues. According to Taylor, Native people in general love to make fun of themselves as individuals or a group. He employs a term 'permitted disrespect' which further explores Taylor's model 'Ladder of Status' and his concept of political correctness: "We can laugh at you; but as a white person, you can't laugh at us," states Taylor. Nevertheless, if a white person is teased by a Native person it can eventually signify his/her acceptance by the community (2005: 75).

One of the most famous Canadian comedians of all time is arguably Don Burnstick, a Cree from the Alexander First Nation. He spent his teenage years as an alcoholic and drug addict on the streets of Edmonton. Nowadays, he is an established comedian and performer who employs the self-deprecation and healing function of humour to revive the proud heritage of Native people. His comedy show "You Might be a Redskin - Healing Through Native Humour" humorously portrays First Nations people, their habits, likes and dislikes. For instance, Burnstick culturally appropriates and indigenizes Jeff Foxworthy's (American 'redneck' comedian) comedic routine "If you [...], you just might be a redneck":

> If you know how to fillet beloney, you just might be a Redskin.
>
> If you list your probation officer as a reference, you just might be a Redskin.
>
> If the only dates you have marked on your calendar are bingo and poker events, you just might be a Redskin.
>
> If you pawn your DVDs at one pawn shop to get your DVD player out from another pawn shop, you just might be a Redskin.

> If you use duct-tape to hem up your pants and cover up any holes in your jeans, you just might be a Redskin. (Burnstick 2008)

Naturally, all of these jokes can be told only by someone within the confines of Native sphere of knowledge. Using them outside of this sphere automatically suggest crossing the thin boundary of political correctness. When told in the presence of non-Native audience these jokes trigger a burst of emotions and doubts about the observer's ability and permissibility to laugh. Thus comedy may function as a means to (re)claim recognition. It is a method for opening up discussion, a way to seduce bigots into dialogue, although it has its limits. It cannot by itself overcome structural power relationships. It has been said before that humour can be named the WD-40 of healing; however, sometimes it merely greases the wheels of oppression.

4. Power, hybridity, binary oppositions, and the 'third space'

The fourth and last part of my dissertation depicts the relation between humour and power in regards to Native society. I will propose a theory that through the use of humour and irony Native artist can explore the alternative space where through the process of hybridization new possibilities and meanings can be carried out. As Homi Bhabha, a well known figure in post-colonial cultural criticism, suggests in his book *The Location of Culture*, the process of cultural translation and transposition occurs within a 'liminal' area characterized as a 'third space'. This interstitial place, situated 'in-between' the cultures, allows the creation of meaning that is "neither one nor the other" (52-56).

I will attempt to define and explain Bhabha's notions of 'hybridity' and 'third space' in relation to the work of Thomas King. I will engage with King's criticism of post-modern pluralistic visions and post-colonial theories in relation to Native society. I will try to portray some of King's textual strategies which on one hand attempt to eradicate and transgress borders but on the other meticulously maintain others, thus creating a performance of substantial political and cultural resistance. Moreover, King's use of the omnipresent and omnipotent figure of Trickster will help us explore from a Native perspective the interstitial and liminal spaces as postulated by Bhabha.

The positioning of Thomas King in-between the two cultures permits the author to understand what is being delineated and what remains stable. King's placement of his subject "without the two societies but within the hybrid expression" (Scott 2005: 14) is one of the multiple forms used to create the unique Native experience as well as gives the author the political capability to become a mediator between the respective cultures.

The objective of this chapter is to show the possible benefits of both hereby presented theoretical approaches vis-à-vis the ongoing struggles of Native people for re-defining their

status within the contemporary Canadian pluralistic society. My aim is to propose theoretical alternatives to the perpetuation of antagonistic binary oppositions, exclusionary identity politics, and dualistic patterns of cultural exchange; notions that are still strongly present in the perception of Native cultures by the non-Native society. I will attempt to validate Bhabha's theoretical concepts in regards to Native people by explaining them in the context of *Truth and Bright Water*. A short section of this chapter will be devoted to one contemporary example of successful practical implementation of the above mentioned theories.

4.1 Cultural politics

Before I commence delineating the theoretical concepts, a brief comment on the current problematic issues with identifying the cultural difference of Native people in Canada is necessary. In no means I will engage myself in the debate over '*Who is native*'? Rather, this paper will focus and explain the position and status of Native people within the Canadian cultural mosaic. Applying the post-colonial theory on Native issues, which in its basic generality attempts to develop "theoretical and critical strategies […] to examine the culture […] of former colonies of European empires, and their relation to the rest of the world" (Hart and Goldie 1993: 155) can become difficult and confusing, since Canada, and other 'post-colonial' countries, including New Zealand and Australia, have been considered colonial powers themselves vis-à-vis the Indigenous population residing within (and across) their boundaries.[24] Thus, ambiguously, the Canadian nation while positioning itself as a *post-colonial* country can be situated in the position of a *colonizer*. This form of *internal colonialism* vastly differs from the classic colonialism (sometimes referred to as 'blue water colonialism') which stands for an

[24] See Jace Weaver's essay "Indigenousness and Indigeneity" in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2005) for more information on applying post-colonial theory on Indigenous peoples

occupation of a land by a small group of colonizers far from their metropolis. These colonizers exercise a control over a large body of Indigenous population while remaining a minority. On contrary, *internal colonialism* exemplifies the absorption of the Indigene by a large mass of colonial settlers who at the end do not have a metropolis to return to. Gerald Vizenor calls these settler colonies "paracolonialism" (qtd. in Weaver 2000: 223).

For decades, the governmental agenda towards the Native super-minority was revolving around two simple, yet in their implementation complex, options: *complete assimilation* (generally encompassing cultural strategies of integration, and acculturation) or *preservative segregation*. In the beginnings of the Canadian state, the government enacted the Indian Act (1876), which identified Native people as poor savages inferior to white citizens. Consequently, this self-serving identification was complemented with the inability to possess land; therefore, the Act provided legal ground for acquiring territories of enormous size for the newly come settlers. Later, the 'Indian' was (re)moved into residential schools to be stripped of his/her savage soul, pagan language and any other affiliation to the traditional society. In the previous decades much had been done in terms of improving the relationship between First Nations and the Canadian government. However, especially during the Trudeau's multicultural hype the governmental agenda towards First Nations remained in the sphere of 'sedative politics' that allowed the nation much self-congratulation without bringing any real material change. Therefore, even now in the beginning of 21th century, the issues of First Nation peoples in Canada are being discussed within the scope of polarities – the voice of majority vehemently calls for assimilation and integration, if not obliged, the 'Indian' will have to face life depressed 'in the middle' (Scott 2005: 4).

Post-colonial studies, however, offer alternative approaches for understanding the cultural relationships resultant from the process of colonization. Particularly interesting, and

for the purpose of this topic most compelling, are Bhabha's theories which denounce the binary conceptualization and diverse realities of the 'colonizer' – 'colonized' relationship and rather attempt to recognize the 'hybridisation' and 'performativity' of cultures. Acknowledging this alternative positioning is essential in order to better reflect the relationship between First Nations and the Canadian nation-state.

4.2 Performativity of Native America

Performativity studies posit an argument that through cultural performances, such as festivities, plays or state ceremonies, cultures can be studied 'in action' as they develop, create and unfold 'meaning'. Performativity describes "the theatricalised (re-)actualisation of socio-symbolic systems which render cultures visible to themselves and to others" (Böttcher 2007: 1). King's narrative in *Truth and Bright Water* revolves around the annual festivities called 'Indian Days'. This central sequence in the novel shows American, German, Japanese, and Canadian tourists as they gather at the reserve for what is to be an 'authentic' Indian week of celebrations.

The significance and meaning of *authenticity* in regards to Native cultures is very complex and therefore requires a closer explanation. King suggests that "in the past, authenticity was simply in the eye of the beholder," (2005: 25) or as Jonathan Friedman views it "in the practice of the beholder" (1999: 249). In simple terms, Indians who looked Indians were authentic. "Authenticity became problem for Native people in the 20th century," explains King (2005: 25). In regards with literary criticism, any current attempt to recover the 'authentic' Native form of discourse is not possible, since Native American narratives are by nature deeply hybridized and heteroglossic, which is especially true in the work of Thomas King. Furthermore, the cultural critics describe another process, relevant to the issue of

authenticity, and that is "indigenization"[25], which roughly means 'becoming Native'. Deloria describes this quest for indigenity by members of white society as:

> [...] the white man knows that he is alien and he knows that North America is Indian – and he will never let go of the Indian image because he thinks by some clever manipulation he can achieve an authenticity which can never be his. (qtd. in Weaver 2000: 27)

In literature the works of Crévecoeur, Nieburg, Cooper or contemporary writers like W.P. Kinsella and many others prove this theory as a valid one. The contemporary efforts to include Native literatures into the national literary canons may serve as another example of the ongoing cultural appropriation of the Native voice.

In *Truth and Bright Water* King expands on his role-switching, trick playing, stereotypes subverting patterns employed in his previous novel *Green Grass Running Water*. The tourists arrive at the Indian days festivities with the expectations of visiting an exotic site and experiencing an uncommon spectacle. By using "open-ended incremental devices of polysyndeton, repetition, and parallelism" (Dvorak 2002: 219) King slowly transforms the performance into a neo-colonial form of an invasion. Not only are the tourists dressed as Indians "with buckskin beaded shirts, fringed leather pants, medallions, and painted faces," (King 1999: 223) but they also indiscriminately buy up furs, dream catchers and unashamedly offer money for traditional cook recipes in order to collect as many artefacts of nostalgic colonial history as possible to bring back to their Indian clubs in Europe.[26] In order to

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[25] The adjective "indigenous" is derived from the Latin compound in + de + gena (within + from + to beget) and means produced, growing, or living naturally in a particular region or environment.

[26] Another interesting example of similar practice is described in Philip Deloria's critical study *Playing the Indian*, where the author comments on the white settlers act of disguising as Indians during the Boston

demonstrate that the process of *othering* exists within the white society as well, King plays a little trick on the Whiteman.[27] He employs the Trickster figure of Monroe Schwimmer; a "big Indian artist" and a Trickster, who reverses the history of Indian removals and transforms Native people from the subject of removals into agents of their own re-creation. Schwimmer, who evokes the contemporary Canadian "Trickster" artists (whom we already mentioned in the introduction) Gerald McMaster, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun or Edward Poitras[28] reverses the cultural appropriation of white tourists, recontextualizes the common stereotypes of Native people and most importantly creates a space for Indian content, for the *possibility* of Indian content:

> He borrowed a tube from the Mormon church over in Cardston and got his auntie to make him a pair of short pants out of elk hide with elk hide suspenders. And when Indian Days came around and the crowds of tourists were everywhere, he marched through the boots and the tipis, puffing on the tuba, pretending to be the Bright Water German Club. (26)

Tea Party in 1773: “Indianness helped the Mast Tree rioters (and the Boston Tea Party participants as well) define custom and imagine themselves a legitimate part of the continent’s ancient history” (King, Truth about Stories 81). “Indians and the land,” Deloria suggests, “offered the only North American past capable of justifying a claim of traditional custom and a refiguring of the rhetoric of moral economy. Native people had been on the land for centuries, and they embodied a full complement of the necessary traditions. By becoming Indian, New Hampshirites sought to appropriate those laws of custom. White Indians laid claim, not to real Indian practices, of course, but to the idea of native customs ... the specifics to be defined not by Indians, but by colonists” (Deloria 1998: 25).

[27] This phrase was first used by Philbert Bono (Gerry Farmer) in the film Powwow Highway (1989).

[28] Edward Poitras, resident of Gordon First Nation, is a famous Native artist who’s 1989 Vancouver installation *Et in America Ego* may be compared to Schwimmer’s method of (re)appropriation. Poitras combines Hopi and Greek mythology to alter the photocopy of the famous canvas *Et In Arcadia Ego* by French artist Nicolas Poussin. By “whiting out” the human beings he “was trying to alter it in such a way as to take out the “European” and somehow maybe put in some kind of “Indian” content. (Poitras qtd. in Ryan)

King develops his grand satirical scheme even further by reversing the process of commodification and mocking the tourists' demand for exoticism. Indian days together with the adjacent "Happy Trails" trailer park (Named after a song in a stereotypes-abounding western series. The name also satirically relates to the infamous Cherokee removals of 1838 and the so called 'Trail of Tears') is in fact an intended tourist trap, where tourists hungry for 'authenticity' are being sold furs bought from "a white guy in Los Angeles" (245), metamorphosed turtle and coyote carvings, and are taken for an 'authentic' buffalo hunt in sidecars and motorcycles equipped with paint slat guns.

The author's strategy of resistance against the acculturation, cultural contamination, commodification and stereotypization was described by Peter Kulchynski as a "semiotic reversal":

> [...] taking structures, signs, technologies and so on that have been deployed by the established order and reversing them, deploying them in a manner that works against their intended efforts. (Kulchynski 1997: 64)

As a result, King's characters exploit the stereotypes of the Other that have been projected onto them by 'white' culture and through the liberating reversal of exoticism, which is also a process of hybridization, the objects of the cultural *othering* are able to domesticate the process and become the agents themselves (Dvorak 2002: 222).

Schwimmer, the central character in the novel, enacts many different racial and sexual identities to disrupt the subject positions attached to the Indigene and subvert established conventions. His trans-gender, trans-racial and trans-national performance opens a new space for negotiating the hybridized Native identity and, of course, functions as the traditional trickster discourse in the novel. Tricksters are known as jokers, jesters, fools and shape-

shifters, who do not take seriously what all societies around them regard as sacred and firm rules. They embody the post-modernity's great desire to slip freely between identities, genders and races. During Monroe's artistic performance the Indigenous space is (re)colonized and (re)appropriated by the artist himself. Monroe Schwimmer[29] also functions as a community healer who possesses powers to heal and regenerate the national identity[30] as well as to remove the colonial past and its impacts on people and landscape without turning in to violence and destruction (Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 188). He evokes the Paiute prophet, Wovoka, who foretold the dissipation of white people, return of the ancestors and repopulation of the prairies by buffalos (Ridington 2000: 8). Schwimmer offers an artistic vision that undermines the agency of the border. His buffalo statues serve as a living remainder that the artificially constructed demarcation between Canada and the U.S. does not only attend to the agendas of the neighbouring nation-states. King uses the border "as a site of alternative signification" (Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 147) and "space of negotiation, reflection, and potential play" (606) but never explicitly offers an ultimate or utopian alternative for resolving the complex relationship between the bi-polarities *tribal-national* and tri-polarities *US-Native-Canadian*. Furthermore, it is important to stress that King does not in any way advocate the idea that erasing the impacts of colonization and re-creating of what is forever lost is a useful strategy for achieving resistance through art. Decolonization will, of course,

[29] In fact, Swimmer was a Cherokee healer who in 1887 showed anthropologist James Mooney a book of sacred formulas written in the syllabary devised by Sequoyah in 1821. The first name Monroe belongs to James Monroe who was a key figure in the shared American/Indian history of Cherokee removals (Ridington 6).

[30] Although, what or who gives Schwimmer the agency to speak for the pan-Indian nation? His actions specifically refer only to the prairies tribes and their mythologies, ignoring the heterogeneity of First Nation peoples in Canada. On the other hand, Thomas King does employ the "pan-Indian" stance and has the agency to speak for Native peoples. Does King write himself into the character of Monroe Schwimmer? The answer is solely up to the reader.

never return Native society to a pre-colonization state. To use the words of Stuart Halls, one of the leading critics in cultural studies:

> [...] colonisation so refigured the terrain that, ever since, the very idea of a world of separate identities, of isolated or separable and self-sufficient cultures and economies, has been obliged to yield to a variety of paradigms designed to capture these different but related forms of relationship, interconnection and discontinuity. (Hall 1996: 252-3)

Additionally, throughout his work King keeps affirming the necessity of maintaining some borders to ensure that Native rights and title to land are respected. Uncritically following the postmodernism's pluralistic visions and transnational or even post-national perspectives, without respecting those borders and boundaries that in fact protect and sustain marginalized populations, is for King unacceptable.

4.3 Center vs. margin, 'us' vs. 'them' and the (dis)location of cultures

> *Before I built a wall I'd ask to know*
>
> *What I was walling in or walling out,*
>
> *And to whom I was like to give offence. (Robert Frost)*

Thomas King's work can be placed in the forefront of the ethnic literature's tendencies to reconfigure "cultural geographies in terms of the creation of alternative loci of enunciation" (Sanchez and Calvo 2005: 34). Even though he refuses to be pigeon-holed under the post-colonial rubric and warns about the limitations of this theory to Native literatures[31], which he

[31] For King's own approach to Native literature criticism see "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" (King: 1990).

believes should not be described within the colonial paradigm, his works are still predominantly concerned with the post-colonial topics of 'centres', 'difference', 'totalizing', 'hegemony', and 'margins' (Scott 2005: 14). Most of his novels are situated directly upon the Canadian-American border and his characters, by challenging the institution of the 49th parallel which serves as a constant reminder of colonial history, engage in deconstruction and reconceptualization of these artificial and subjective barriers that delimit the identity and belonging of Native peoples.

Borders are, by simple definition, those institutionalized signs that divide one entity from another; they separate 'us' from 'them', 'insiders' from 'outsiders'. They are historical, cultural and social constructions usually thought to be immutable but in fact being precisely the opposite. In the globalized post-modern world, or, as Bhabha calls it, 'translational times,' many boundaries eroded as well as many emerged in their place (Bhabha 2001: 3). Boundaries between nation-states became permeatable for some but closed for others. Ethnic, religious or boundaries of consumption patterns shape the postmodern world. Beyond the 'real' world, boundaries emerge in the virtual world of cyberspace. All these changes signify the inherent instability and elasticity of the borders. European Union may serve as a good example of the elasticity of borders; although the 'European border' is becoming more secure, the internal demarcations are becoming more fluid (2).

Martin Heidegger was quoted as saying: "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing" (1971: 332). In *Truth and Bright Water* the characters routinely cross the national border (between the American town Truth and Canadian reserve Bright Water), which is also a natural political divide symbolized by a river called "the Shield", several times a day on: "an old iron bucket suspended on a cable [...] Lum and Jason Scout call it the Toilet" (King 1999: 42).

Even though there is an unfinished, derelict bridge that “looks whole and complete [...] it appears as a thin line, delicate and precise, bending over the Shield and slipping back into the land like a knife" (1) the characters do not think about it as a symbol of traditional imperialist demarcation. They live on a land that, in a sense, lies ‘in-between’ the borders of the nation-state. Every day they are forced to operate between and across multiple nations – nation-states, reserve lands, and communities. Even though Native people are strongly affected by these borders (e.g. Blackfoot/Blackfeet separation), they also represent independent liminal places in their minds. In “Poetry, Language, Thought,” Heidegger uses the structure of a bridge as a model of the process in which ‘building’ transforms ‘space’ into ‘location’ and thus performs a function that is essential to human ‘dwelling’ and emplacement. Heidegger sees a bridge as a structure that “does not just connect banks that are already there, it designedly causes them to lie across from each other [by setting] one side against the other” and, in so doing, “bring[ing] to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind” its banks (1971: 152). King’s vision of the bridge between the towns of Truth and Bright Water bears an interesting resemblance. On the first mention it resembles the 19th century descriptions of Niagara Suspension Bridge, in reality it is a decrepit residue of a violent and incomplete attempt to reconnect the two banks of the river and thus to re-connect adjacent parts of the landscape that were, in Heidegger’s words, “set off against each other” by the border (Ibid).

> At a distance, the bridge between Truth and Bright Water looks whole and complete, a pale thin line, delicate and precise, bending over the Shield and slipping back into the land like a knife. But if you walk down into the coulees and stand in the shadows of the deserted columns and the concrete arches, you can look up through the open planking and the rusting webs of iron mesh, and see the sky. (King 1999: 1)

The bridge itself can be therefore metaphorically compared to the Picture of Dorian Gray, an artificial structure that symbolically indicates the deterioration of relationship between the opposing cultures, people in general, races and countries. The bridge can be read as a macabre figure for the danger and destruction that face all members of the Native community:

> The decking only goes so far before construction stops and the planks and the plywood come to an abrupt halt. From here, as far as you can see, the bridge is nothing more than a skeleton, the carcass of an enormous animal picked to bone.
>
> "You smell it?" says Lum. "The whole thing's rotting." (270)

The bridge thus serves as a material testament to abandoned schemes and lost hopes. Thomas King suggests in an interview with Jennifer Andrews, "It [the bridge] will not hold the weight of people trying to cross back and forth" (Andrews 1999: 5) or in Heidegger's words again, it will not allow "mortals ... [to] come and go from shore to shore" (1971: 330). It is precisely at this place, where, at the end of the novel, the young boy from a desolated Native community achieves release in self-destruction.

In "Borders", which is one of Thomas King's short stories published in the collection *One Good Story, That One*, King's Blackfoot[32] character becomes stranded between the Canadian-American borders unwilling to 'locate' herself within the institutionalized discourse of the 'nation':

> "Now, I know that we got Blackfoot on the American side and the Canadian got Blackfeet on their side. Just so we keep our records strait, what side do you come from?"

[32] Blackfoot is a First Nation tribe in Alberta, Canada known for its members residing on both sides of the 49th parallel.

"Blackfoot side."

"I know ... and I'd be proud of being Blackfoot if I were Blackfoot. But you have to be either American or Canadian." (King, "Borders" 1993: 141)

She constructs her own border: an alternative or even 'prenational' vision of a nation, which reflects a world-view shared by the indigenous communities. By doing so, she destabilizes the firm imperialist belief in the centrality of the nation and contests the influence of this 'imaginary line' on Native population. For the author himself, the 49th parallel is an artificial borderline that "suggests things to us that we should become, things I am not much interested in becoming" (Davidson, Andrews and Walton 2003: 172). The universal assumption of Indian nations as homogenous entities and an ethnic minority without special rights, together with the lack of political will to acknowledge the legitimacy of its hemispherical tribal status (e.g. 'nations within a nation' in the U.S.), still persist in the contemporary Canadian society:

"Every one of those stars has a story. You see that bunch of stars over there that look like a fish? [...] Coyote went fishing, one day. That's how it all started." (King 1993: 144)

However, King does not only pay attention to undermining nation-state structures and emphasizing the elasticity and instability of physical borders, thus attempting to (re)create what Bhabha calls the alternative sites of meaning (Bhabha 1990: 4). His application of textual strategies such as the technique of subverting the language of representation by mixing the oral and written, using powerful subversive 'gallows'[33] humour and employing the Trickster

[33] See Chapter 3 for more on gallows humour. Vine Deloria, in his essay "Custer Died of Your Sins", states: "When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anyone drive them to extremes, then it would seem to me that the people can survive."(169) In *Me Funny*, D.H. Taylor supports this idea: "Native humour comes from 500 years of colonization, of opression, of being kept prisoners in our own country. With legalized attackson our culture, our languages, our identity and even our religion, often the only way left for Native people to

figure(s) challenges the dominant metanarrative and, as David Carroll suggests, indicates the "possibility of another kind of society, or social relation" (qtd. in Ryan 2001: 92). These "(alter)na(rra)tives" express a different perception of the world and help to create a new space, a *third space*, for Native literatures to operate 'in-between' the borders, where a renewal and appropriation of the long lost voice of those culturally and physically displaced may finally take place.

4.4 First Nations in the postmodern world

In the early 20th century writer Randolph Bourne coined the term *transnationalism* to describe a new way of thinking about relationships between cultures. This social movement has developed from the new (re)configuration of places that exchanges a "geohistorical politics of location in place of national- or territorial-identity politics" (Mignolo 2000: 182). For decades the common supposition towards humanities scholarship expressed firm belief in the centrality and primacy of the 'self', equally tied to the notions of 'national'. Nowadays, in the light of globalization and transnationalism, the impermeability and inelasticity of the national borders is being seriously undermined. The belief in a stable identity, which was characteristic for the 19th century society, is now being transformed into the never-ending process of identification. Identity as a passive and descriptive notion converts into identification as an active process and form of negotiation.

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respond to the cruel realities of 4th world existence was in humour. Humour kept us sane. It gave us power. It gave us privacy. (69)

However, for Native people the postmodern turn to undermining the meaning of *subjectivity* invalidates their contemporary struggles to finally recover their 'voice' and assert their own agency and subjectivity within the Canadian society. Stuart Hall writes:

> [...] questions of hybridity, syncretism, of cultural undecidability and the complexities of diasporic identification ... interrupt and "return" to ethnically closed and "centred" original histories. Understood in its global and transcultural context, colonisation has made ethnic absolutism an increasingly untenable cultural strategy. It made "colonies" themselves, and even more, large tracts of the "postcolonial" world, always-ready "diasporic" in relation to what might be thought of as their cultures of origin. (Hall 1996: 250)

In a postmodern world the stable 'self' is suddenly dislocated and disrupted. In order to retain its centrality within the new notion of nation it must reconsider and legitimize its speaking position (Sanchez and Calvo 2005: 28).

What constitutes, influences and determines gender, national, racial and ethnic or even the contemporary phenomenon of online identity? Exploring the possibilities of these notions from a postmodern view unavoidably brings us to the liminal space:

> The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. (Bhabha 2004: 1)

In Native mythology, the liminal space is occupied by a creature of many disguises, forms and interpretations. Trickster, the creator, mediator, transformer and destroyer epitomizes many antithetical roles, prolific bodily transformations and spatial and temporal positions. In

Structural Anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss formulates his function as to "mediate a fundamental contradiction in the society [...] since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms, he must retain something of that duality – namely an ambiguous and equivocal character" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 226). Inhabiting the place of cultural clash, the liminal space, or what Klára Kolínská terms the "border of possibility", provides for elaborating new strategies of self-hood, initiating new signs of identity, innovative sites of collaboration and contestation "in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 2004: 1). Through the figure(s) of Trickster, King incessantly deconstructs the hierarchical constructions of nation, gender and race in order to force the non-Native reader to detach him/herself from the conventional 'western' models and systems of representation and thus become able to imagine alternative ways of perceiving and of living in the world.

However, King does not pontificate the non-Native reader to a greater understanding or even sympathy with Native society. In fact, by using a complex network of associations to Native history, mythology, ideology, politics, art, and his own work, King clearly demonstrates his primary focus on Native audience: "I really don't care about the white audiences. They don't have an understanding of the intricacies of Native life, and I don't think they're much interested in it, quite frankly" (qtd. in Vizenor 1994: 174)[34]. What he is trying to accomplish is rather to create a sense of social justice that seeks to "negotiate the difficult politics of identification [...] of imagining kinship across the frontiers of race, gender, and class" (Cheyfitz qtd. in Tidwell 1997: xiv).

In a structuralist sense the Trickster is a semiotic sign, a synthesis of binary oppositions, a creation of tensions where they are least expected:

[34] Of course, the fact that the majority of King's readers are non-Native is well-known to the author himself. His statement serves as another example of King's playful trickery.

> An ambiguous personage like the culture hero/demiurge/trickster blends in a single person the pathos of the cosmic and social order on the one hand and, on the other, the manifestation of a harmony that is not yet fully constituted; an expression of disorganization, in other words. This contradiction is possible because mythological cycles link events to the mythical past, to the time before rigid, universal orderliness was established. Yet it must be remembered that the actions of the culture hero's negative Doppelganger ... are themselves paradigmatic since they determine and justify the evil in the world. (Meletinsky, Lanoue and Sadetsky 1998: 172)

In Bhabha's words, Trickster opens up a space of translation in alternate dimension, a place of hybridity where new elements of cultural negotiation that are "neither the One, nor the Other" can be enunciated.

> The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the 'I' and the 'You' designed in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implications of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. [...] The meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither one nor the other. This ambivalence is emphasized when we realize that there is no way that the content of the proposition will reveal the structure of its positionality; no way that context can be mimetically read from content. (Bhabha 2004: 36)

This in-between space thus works as a place where new possibilities can emerge and new understandings can originate. This alternative mode of articulation blurs the limits of current boundaries and questions established categorizations of identity and culture. Bhabha's

concept of third space provides an inclusionary spatial politics that "initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation." (1)

Moreover, this concept suggests, similarly to King's works, that the borders of cultural contiguity are not permeable. One must not think of cultures as closed ideological systems that can be either destroyed or absorbed. Bhabha furthermore claims that the possibility for change lies in the "negotiary" space where no enunciations are privileged (263). Another aspect posited by Bhabha is the above mentioned performativity of cultures, which evades the obsession with a pure, originary culture and promotes the "continual production" of culture. Especially when speaking of Native cultures, it is crucial to free from the fixation on cultural origins and authenticity and approach and register cultures as living organisms of "contemporary performance" (Scott 2005: 9).

At the end of the novel *Truth and Bright Water*, the protagonist's cousin Lum commits suicide by jumping off a top of the bridge that symbolizes the neutral space between the two nations, between the reserve and the world of the colonizer. A non-colonial space of possibility and potential for the two societies to meet in a compromise. A space in a creation. Klára Kolínská explains his leap into the unknown as:

> [an act that] connects the multiple levels of the narrative horizon, and creates the missing arch of the bridge's construction, which so far pointed towards the unexplored distance. The image of bridge is modified from the symbol of connecting various borders into a symbol of the narrative structure of the novel. (2004: 134)

One of the foundations may be the establishment of a mediated space for resolving the extremely complex issues of land claims in Canada. For example, The B.C. Treaty Commission functions as an independent hybrid institutional space, authorized by federal, provincial and

First Nation governments to negotiate the terms for land settlements. Its key goal is to "establish a new relationship based on mutual trust, respect and understanding – through political negotiations" (BC Treaty 2) between First Nations, Provincial and Federal governments. Even though the results are questionable it is a clear example of a rising political, cultural and legal voice of First Nations and the necessity for dismissing the unilateral thinking and acquiring far more critical perspective of bicultural politics in Canada towards the Native population.

5. Conclusion

In the last chapter of this dissertation I tried to theoretically support the growing needs for the acquisition of the counter-hegemonic cultural politics in Canada. Thomas King is one of the authors who through their literary work strive for re-defining the relationship between Native peoples and the majority society in the 'post'-colonial Canadian nation-state. Even though King's fiction is interwoven with comedy and humour, his texts serve as a powerful political tool. "Tragedy is my topic. Comedy is my strategy," explains King pointedly ("Definitely" 1993: 60). One of his most important contentions is the necessity to acknowledge the "fundamental asymmetry" of the government's perception of the social and political difference between non-Indigenous and Indigenous population. What King suggests and supports is the acknowledgement of First Nations as distinct members with special rights (which include title to land and self-determination), not just an ethnic minority within a nation-state that is able to recognize only a single category of citizenship.[35] Bhabha partially agrees, claiming that the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 2004: 2). His concepts of third space and hybridity theoretically sustain First Nation's initiatives by suggesting the avoidance of antagonistic binarisms and proposing inclusionary and multifaceted patterns of cultural exchange (Meredith 1998: 5).

One of the crucial objectives of my dissertation was to propose the conjecture that humour *can* function as a mediating and bonding device between the Native and non-Native societies. Most of the current animosity that some non-Natives feel towards Native people

[35] This idea can be termed "pluralist separatism" and closely relates to the concept of *Citizen Plus*, published by Alan Cairns as a part of the Hawthorne report in 1966. An interesting discussion on the benefits and shortcomings of this theory can be found in "Flanagan and Cairns on Aboriginal Policy" (Inroads magazine No. 10/2001).

stems from a lack of cultural understanding and group cohesion. 'Trickster discourse', as exercised by Native writers and artists, is a useful tool for creating a dialogue between the two cultures. It plays a vital role in social regulation, constructing and enforcing norms of behaviour. As Fine and de Soucey write, "Informal groups without a publicly acknowledged power system or explicit set of rules need mechanisms to regulate the behaviour of their members" (2005: 7). One may, however, argue that these "informal groups" can also be considered as communities of practice; they can suggest anything from social organizations to academia to the nation as a whole. In these communities, social codes are not overtly recorded, but comic discourse provides the alternative space or forum where new possibilities can be negotiated and a cultural dialogue can be accomplished on the basis of given rules.

The mixture of humour and irony, anger and hope is central to all Native artists that are discussed in this dissertation. Most of them use humour as a complex strategic device that helps them deal with and approach often tragic subjects of Native identity, cultural appropriation and commodification, tokenism and the reinforcement of ethnic stereotypes, marginalization, museumization, consumerization, romanticizing, etc. They believe that now is the time to renegotiate the relationship with the dominant non-Native society and together create a better place for Native peoples and their communities. As one can observe, for example, in Thomas King's novel *Truth and Bright Water*, renegotiating the relationship with Canadian society requires first the obliteration of binary categories and boundaries that have for a long time negatively influenced the identity formation and cultural position of Native people.

King, whose fiction served as primary reference for analysis, invites readers to enter his vision of Native universe, provided they are brave enough to venture into his 'comic' world of postmodern writing, complex historical, cultural and political allusions and intertextualities,

as well as King's (alter)native notions of gender, race and nation. The author's narratives, which often break borders between reality and fantasy, invite readers to participate in the episteme of their own culture and in the process of redrawing the map of their systems of belief (Turcotte 2003: 17). By setting numerous textual traps and luring the reader to fall into them and thus acknowledge his/her ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and naivety, King's trickster discourse becomes a powerful instrument of cognition. The reader is presented with a Native subject that rejects the perpetual constructions of Native people "as abjects, as invisible, as that which must be eradicated or controlled, frequently 'for their own good'" (Ibid).

When the Native authors place these artistic strategies within the act of decolonization, they engage in a procedure that is dynamic and in a constant state of flux, as explained by Helen Tiffin: "Decolonization is process, not arrival; it invokes an on-going dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them" (95). It is important to stress that humour, as conceptualized by these artists, does not seek to reverse the power relations in advantage of Native people. Rather than replacing one form of dominance over the other they attempt, through their work, to establish a dialogue between the inhabitants of the so-called center and periphery, thereby creating a cultural hybrid subject that stands in contrast to the binary oppositions that construct the colonial order. As contemporary Native playwrights demonstrate, humour can bridge two worlds on one stage.

Humour thus serves as an instrument to protect and develop the self, as political weapon to defend against or strike at an enemy, as a social regulator to highlight and control norms, as cement for social relations and as a mediator between different cultural perceptions of world (Martineau 1972). Humour fortifies the self and manages problems at various levels.

At the individual level, humour aids in the identity formation and development of the self. It helps in preserving dignity, esteem as well as it transcends the hardship and sufferings.

Mark Twain was once quoted as saying: “Truth is the funniest joke in the world”. Most of the irony and satire coming from the contemporary Native artists springs from this simple, yet very accurate notion. Even though the current social problems and difficulties in the Canadian highly fragmentized ethnic mosaic will “not [be] easy to get rid of” (King 1999: 246), one of King’s, rather humorous, recommendations is, that if the white people begin to have a better sense of humour, the world will ultimately become a much better place:

> “You know what’s wrong with the world?” My father reaches under the seat and comes up with a bottle. The label says “Wiser’s.”
>
> “Is that whisky?” I say.
>
> “Whites,” he says. “It’s as simple as that.” [...]
>
> “That’s because they took our land, right?”
>
> “Nope.”
>
> “Because they broke the treaties?”
>
> “Double nope.”
>
> “Because they’re prejudiced ... ?” [...]
>
> “Listen up. It’s because they got no sense of humour.” (91)

Until then, however, it is up to the Native artists to remain ‘funny’ and continue to keep the non-Native audience laughing and, if possible, listening. Only thereafter there is a possibility to

change the rooted perceptions and opinions of the white majority on the Native subject and renegotiate the border zones between the two cultures.

6. Résumé

Moje diplomová práce na téma „Humor a moc: dekolonizace Kanady v dílech Thomase Kinga“ se zabývá komickými a ironickými metodami, které využívají současní indiánští autoři za účelem zpochybnění a vyvrácení zastaralých stereotypů a systémů kulturního a estetického zpodobnění postavy severoamerického indiána. Tito umělci ve svých dílech využívají kombinace komedie a ironie jako hlavních vyjadřovacích prostředků za účelem napadání, rozvrácení a kritického zpochybnění represivních hegemonických ideologií a mocenských struktur, které se stále těší velkému vlivu jak v Kanadě, tak ve Spojených státech amerických. V jejich románech, poezii, esejích, filmech, dokumentárních pořadech, malbách, divadelních představeních a ostatních moderních podobách umění se umělci snaží zachytit a zviditelnit odsunutí původních obyvatel Severní Ameriky na samý okraj společnosti a potlačování jejich lidských práv, které bylo dáno především několika sty let kolonizace, socializace a násilného kulturního přivlastňování.

V posledních několika letech se objevují výrazné snahy ze strany odborné veřejnosti, komunit původních obyvatel a kanadského státního aparátu o změnu bikulturní politiky mezi kanadskými původními národy a dominantní společností. Mnoho kanadských kulturologů a teoretiků (jako např. Diana Brydon, Smaro Kamboureli a Lily Cho) již ve svých pojednáních reflektovalo na tento problém a navrhlo alternativní teoretické sociální modely inklusivní a heterogenní politiky identity. Než bude však možné takové návrhy aplikovat, je třeba v první řadě vytvořit alternativní prostor, který smaže etnické, rasové, sociální a ekonomické rozdílnosti a omezení a ve kterém bude reálné opětovné projednání otázek historických křivd a nevyřešených právních sporů. Takový alternativní prostor položí základy nového dialogu a tím pádem i zvýšení pravděpodobnosti lepšího společenského vztahu v budoucnosti.

V mé diplomové práci se věnuji teoretickým možnostem vzniku takového alternativního prostoru pro indiánské spisovatele a umělce. Předkládám teorii, která popisuje funkci humoru a ironie jako zprostředkovatele mezikulturního dialogu mezi obyvateli tzv. periferie a středu ve vysoce etnicky fragmentované kanadské společnosti. Pokouším se popsat pojem nestabilního hybridního subjektu, který vzniká procesem kulturní transpozice právě v intersticiálních prostorech a vzdoruje binárním opozicím definujícím koloniální systém, tak jak ho ve svých dílech prezentují indiánští autoři. Jedním z cílů mé diplomové práce je definování a vysvětlení ironie a humoru jako velmi silných faktorů pro destabilizaci a transformaci mocenských struktur kolonizační velmoci, které zároveň znázorňují bolestivé a absurdní skutečnosti současné společnosti. V monografii na indiánský humor Jennifer Andrews deklaruje:

> Humor dokáže odplavit hněv, oslavit přežití a dokonce i spojit indiánské a bílé čtenáře tím, že dovoluje různorodým skupinám lidí jednotný prožitek smíchu. Ironie, na rozdíl zmírňuje rozpustilé prvky humoru neustálým připomínáním historie a utiskování, které po staletí formovalo životy původních obyvatel v Severní Americe. (Andrews 200:1)

V současné době se na literární a umělecké scéně pohybuje velké množství indiánských autorů, jejichž umělecké postupy obvykle zahrnují jak humor, tak i ironii. Z tohoto důvodu jsem se rozhodl soustředit pouze na dílo Thomase Kinga, jakožto v současnosti nejznámějšího indiánského autora v Kanadě. Kingova popularita pramení především z jeho částečně přístupného stylu psaní a hojného používání humoru, jako vyjadřovacího prostředku. V jeho dílech se projevuje autorova neobyčejná schopnost překonávat etnické, národní, rasové a genderové hranice, stejně tak i hranice mezi lidovou slovesností a psanou literaturou. Tato schopnost ho nepřímo předurčuje do role advokáta pan-indiánských kulturních hodnot. King

používá ve svých dílech humor a ironii především jako nástroj politického vzdoru za účelem narušení diskursu dominantní společnosti.

V úvodní části diplomové práce se zabývám problémovým a historicky velmi složitým sociálním vztahem mezi minoritou původních obyvatel a kanadskou společností. Důsledky koloniální doby na různé aspekty indiánské kultury jsou dále detailně probrány ve čtvrté kapitole, kterou jsem nazval v postmoderním duchu „Moc, hybridita, binární opozice a ´třetí prostor´“. Ve druhé kapitole „Indiánský humor“ se soustřeďuji na koncept humoru, komedie a ironie, které jsou brány za stavební kameny a definující prostředky kultury a mytologie původních obyvatel. Abych byl schopen vytvořit teoretický rámec pro svoji práci, odkazuji se na studii českého sociologa Antonína Obrdlíka, který se v polovině 20. století zabýval teorií šibeničního humoru v nacisty okupovaném Československu. Dále využívám přelomové sbírky současného indiánského umění *Trickster Shift* od kanadského archeologa Allana J. Ryana. V této detailní studii se autor zabývá formováním indiánské identity, kulturního ztvárnění a současnou pozicí původních obyvatel v kanadské společnosti. Kniha popisuje indiánský humor jako zřetelně odlišný „společenský postoj“. Mezi nejvýraznější a nejvíce angažované autory, kteří prezentují svá díla a názory v této knize, patři Lawrence Paul Yuxwelpuptun (Ališ), Jane Ash Poitras (Krí), Gerald McMaster (Krí), Edward Poitras (kmen Gordon) a mnoho dalších. Jejich výstavy, představení, sochy, malby a ostatní díla zaujímají důležitou pozici v procesu podrývání systémů reprezentace indiánů v kanadské společnosti a v úsilí za nalezení a navrácení indiánského ´slova´, identity a místa ve společnosti. Jejich unikátní umělecké ztvárnění a ´moderní´ styl jim umožňují zpochybňovat pozici a význam institucí, ideologií a převládajícího diskursu takovým způsobem, který je ve své podstatě současně komický a silně politický. Indiánští umělci se skrz podkopávání romantických idealizací a klišé snaží očistit a napravit současné vnímání indiánských obyvatel kanadskou společností a tím pádem obnovit dávno ztracenou hrdost a sebeúctu. Jejich umělecká díla mají moc manipulovat tyto stereotypy a

vytvořit autentičtější a skutečnější obrazy. Autoři jsou tak schopni reagovat na současné problémy indiánské identity, politické otázky a realitu života na rezervacích. Ve své diplomové práci dále hojně využívám informací, které poskytuje antologie indiánského humoru *Me Funny,* uspořádaná komikem, dramatikem a teoretikem Drew Hayden Taylorem z kmene Ojibway. Taylor ve své knize představuje názory předních současných kanadských indiánských spisovatelů (King, Highway), literárních teoretiků (Fagan), komiků a performerů (Kelly) za účelem pokusu o definici indiánského humoru.

V poslední kapitole se pokouším na základě teoretických konceptů postmoderního autora Homi Bhabhy vysvětlit smysl alternativního prostoru pro artikulaci mezikulturních problémů a možnost dialogu. Jako literární reference je použit Kingův poslední román v jeho trilogii *Truth and Bright Water*, ve kterém autor znovu vytváří a obnovuje svět (mytologický prostor pro původní obyvatele), který není závislý na opozicích, ale na kooperaci. Kingův svět maže některé hranice, zatímco jiné posiluje, tak aby mohlo dojít k vyrovnání a usmíření znepřátelených kultur. King je spisovatelem politickým, který klade velký důraz na současné problémy indiánské komunity. Jeho politická angažovanost je však pečlivě skrytá pod závojem humoru a ironie, kterou King hojně využívá jako nástroje léčení indiánské kultury a vzdělávání kultury západní. Jeho román *Truth and Bright Water* je velmi pestrým příběhem obsahujícím motivy překonávání hranic, redefinice identity, dekonstrukce historie a současných politických poměrů v Severní Americe. Kombinuje prvky magického realismu, komedie a tragédie. Použitím velmi složitého symbolismu se autor snaží vykreslit a zachytit sociální a ekonomické problémy indiánských komunit, dědičné nároky na půdu a další globální a hemisférické otázky.

Jaká je pozice původních obyvatel v kanadské společnosti na začátku 21. století? Jak může indiánský autor do své práce zahrnout otázky předsudků, asimilace, akulturace a ghettoizace tak, aby si nadále udržel pozornost neindiánského publika? Jak se může kanadská

společnost zbavit binárních opozic jako např. chápání identity jako černobílého systému „buď/nebo“ (např. buď je člověk výhradně ´bílý´ nebo je výhradně indián). Je pro autora možné vymazat z národního diskursu statickou a stereotypní představu indiána v neustále probíhajícím procesu homogenizace? Moje diplomová práce se zabývá rozdílnými metodami přístupu k těmto otázkám u indiánských spisovatelů a umělců. Ti se nesnaží pouze o uchopení určité fixní názorové pozice, ale přikládají velkou váhu na individuální utváření názorů u čtenářů a pozorovatelů. Je zcela a pouze na nich, aby absorbovali informace a zpracovali je podle svého nejlepšího uvážení. Gerald McMaster, indiánský malíř z kmene Red Pheasant Krí, tuto strategii podporuje tvrzením, že „pozorování je povinné, odpovědi dobrovolné“ (McMaster 1992: 1).

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