

## Mapping and Dreaming Native Resistance in *Green Grass, Running Water*

The dream map was as large as the table top, and had been folded tightly for many years. It was covered with thousands of short, firm, and variously coloured markings. . . . Abe Fellow and Aggan Wolf explained. Up here is heaven; this is the trail that must be followed; here is a wrong direction; this is where it would be worst of all to go; and over there are all the animals. They explained that all of this had been discovered in dreams. Aggan also said that it was wrong to unpack a dream map except for very special reasons. But the Indians' needs had to be recognized. . . . Everyone must look at the map now.

BRODY (267)

The epigraph, as well as the title of this essay, are drawn from Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams*, a text that charts the author's experience with the Beaver people of the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains. In the 1970s, Brody spent eighteen months helping the Beaver people to create maps that would indicate all of the ways in which they had used their lands within living memory. At one point, Brody's Native companions invited him to join them on a hunting trip and, while resting by the fire, they told him that "Indian guys, old-timers, they make maps too" (45). They went on to explain that these maps were revealed in dreams and showed the place where the trails of animals converge, and that some of the "really good men" could also see the "dream-trails to heaven" (46). The men recognized that Brody might find their idea of mapping absurd. "You might say such maps are crazy," they told him. "But maybe the Indians

would say that is what your maps are. . . . Different maps from different people—different *ways*” (45-46).

Brody’s experience testifies to the fact that Native American peoples have repeatedly asserted the legitimacy of their own maps and contested European maps and strategies of mapping, which have played such a central role in conceptualizing, codifying, and regulating the vision of the settler-invader society. As John Vernon argues, the model of reality afforded by the Western map contributed to the rigidly dualistic philosophy that has enabled Western civilization “to confirm its absolute space of reasonableness, cleanliness, freedom and wealth, precisely by creating equally absolute but sealed-off spaces of madness, dirt, slavery and poverty” (17). Chandra Mukerji puts it even more bluntly when she states that “the meaning of land as property to be consumed and used by Europeans was written into the language of maps just as the meaning of the world as sign of God had been in the late Middle Ages” (31).

In *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) Cherokee/Greek/German novelist Thomas King revises inherited maps and replaces them with representations that speak to a Native worldview. Before turning to his interrogation of Western culture’s maps and mapping strategies—the focus of this study—it might be helpful first to outline the fluid relationship that King and other critics, myself included, envision as existing between maps and books. In his *Book of the Fourth World*, George Brotherson stresses the importance of viewing Native maps (forms of Native pictorial discourse) and literary texts as closely related and equally legitimate modes of representation. Brotherson notes the problems that arise when Native visual modes of representation, examples of which he terms “classic texts,” are not recognized as belonging to the categories of “script” and/or “text.” As he observes:

The concept of the Fourth World text and literature in general has been especially fragmented as a result of having had imposed upon it imported notions of literary medium. For a start, jejune Western pronouncements on what does and does not constitute script, and the categorical binary that separates oral from written, have proved especially inept when applied to the wealth of literary media in native America. . . . Whole modes of representation have as a result been simply ignored, along with the configuring of space and time whose reason is assumed in the placement and enumeration of every native detail. (4)

Brotherson goes on to point out that, even within the Western philosophical tradition, the overlap between writing and pictorial and/or oral modes of

representation has been recognized. As he explains, “for Derrida [in *Of Grammatology*] ‘writing’ is in fact present everywhere, in gesture and speech itself, in the traces and paths of landscape . . .” (42).<sup>1</sup>

*Green Grass, Running Water* adopts this broad understanding of “writing” and opens with a consideration of an example of a Native “classic text,” namely, the Fort Marion Ledger Art. King’s novel underscores how this text affirmed Native people’s solidarity in the face of exile and territorial dispossession, and recalls how it revised the status of the “book” in Native culture. In King’s novel, writing and mapping are conceived of as complicitous activities that often serve to secure a Western world view. Owing to the close relationship he perceives between visual and written forms of codification, and the role they have played in securing the settler-invaders’ understanding of “reality,” King’s project also involves subverting a whole range of Western representational strategies, including the map, the linear narrative (in books—particularly the Bible—but in movies, as well), the stereotype, and literacy itself.

As critics such as Graham Huggan observe, works by other Canadian writers frequently strive toward a “cartography of difference, which endorses a dynamic view of cross-cultural exchange,” but their efforts remain primarily directed “toward a de/reterritorialization of Western culture” (24). This is precisely what sets King’s novel apart from other fictions; *Green Grass, Running Water* succeeds in articulating a Native cosmography, and, as we will see, serves as a map in the traditional, Native sense of the word. More specifically, through its allusions to, and depictions of, the Sun Dance, the novel inscribes an aboriginal conception of the world in which the individuals can locate themselves at the centre of a land-based, communal, and non-hierarchical spiritual practice that involves both body and soul.

### 1. The Fort Marion Ledger Art and the Cartography of Exile

I saw seventy-two big Indians yesterday: proper men, and tall, as one would wish to behold. They were weary, and greatly worn; but as they stepped out of the cars [of the train], and folded their ample blankets about them, there was a large dignity and majestic sweep about their movements that made me much desire to salute their grave excellencies. Each had his ankles chained together; but managed to walk like a man, withal. They are confined,—by some ass who is in authority—in the lovely old Fort, as unfit for them as they for it. It is in my heart to hope sincerely that they may all get out.

King repeatedly alludes to the historical events described by Sidney Lanier, the Southern musician and poet, in the epigraph above. In this trickster-infused fiction, the incarceration of the seventy-two Indians at Fort Marion in the late 1800s serves as a formal and thematic touchstone that highlights the challenge of the novel to the imposition of non-Native boundaries and enclosures and, more generally, to European modes of mapping. Readers first become aware of the event's significance in the opening section, when Dr. Alberta Frank, a professor of Native history at the University of Calgary, delivers a lecture on the subject to her students. The text continues to emphasize the event's centrality by concluding each of its four sections with a portrayal of a variety of mythical protagonists being dragged off to the Fort.

The repeated allusions to Fort Marion raise a number of questions, including what led to the Native people's incarceration and what happened at the Fort? But readers must also consider why King focuses on this particular historical incident and how it informs his novel. Before answers to the latter questions are offered, a brief review of the historical events might be helpful.

In the summer of 1874, U.S. government officials launched a brutal campaign to force the remaining Plains Indian tribes onto reservations. That same year, various tribes, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Plains Apache, and Comanche had broken out of their reservations to prevent the extermination of the buffalo. To protect the remnant of the southern herd on the High Plains, these tribes fought engagements at Adobe Walls, Anadarko, and Palo Duro Canyon (see Meredith 92-93). Determined to maintain a traditional life, members of these tribes protested against the slaughter of the buffalo and the limited and artificial boundaries imposed on their people.<sup>2</sup>

To forestall their efforts, the military hounded the tribes and burned their camps, one after another. Although the Native people attempted to outrun the army, they had no time to hunt and replenish their supplies. First their horses died of exhaustion and hunger; then, after one of the most severe winters of the decade set in, the Indians themselves began to perish. In the end, starving and freezing, the remaining members of the tribes made their way on foot to the agency and surrendered (see Peterson ch. 1).

To ensure the complete subjugation of the Plains Indians, the government subsequently rounded up the so-called "notorious hostiles," a total of

seventy-two individuals accused of crimes against white settlers and soldiers. After the Indians surrendered to the agency, those considered guilty were locked up and “the most hostile were placed in double irons” (Peterson 15). While the rest of their peoples were sent to reservations, these so-called “hostiles” were chained to wagons and initially transported to Fort Sill, in what is now known as Oklahoma. Shortly after, in April of 1875, “without a trial or a hearing,” the prisoners were chained into wagons and carried away under guard “to what they believed would be their execution” (Peterson 15). Their journey ended at Saint Augustine, Florida. Sidney Lanier, whose remarks are cited in the epigraph, encountered them on May 21, the day they arrived and were interned in the dank, seventeenth-century Spanish stone fort, then called Fort Marion.

King’s text repeatedly depicts this journey. But the novel also alludes to what happened at Fort Marion and highlights the unusual fact that the prisoners became warrior-artists. Although the government’s behaviour was brutal, it is unlikely that the fate of the seventy-two prisoners, or the “Florida Boys” as they were called, would have garnered public attention if their jailer, Lieutenant Richard H. Pratt, had not decided to launch an experiment in penal reform.<sup>3</sup> Pratt insisted that his charges be taught reading and writing, be given religious instruction, and be assigned to manual labour. More importantly, Pratt allowed them to earn money and privileges by making items to sell to tourists. The prisoners produced trinkets, such as polished sea beans, bows and arrows, as well as beautifully rendered drawing books filled with autobiographical pictures. Nowadays, these books, which sold in the 1800s for two dollars apiece, have garnered considerable fame. They contain striking images of the Native peoples’ life on the Plains, their journey to Fort Marion, and their experience as prisoners, and are known collectively as the Plains Indian Ledger Art.

Dr. Alberta Frank’s lectures on the Fort Marion episode and the creation of Plains Indian Ledger Art contain the whole gruesome story of the prisoners, including what happened to the Cheyenne Indian, Grey Beard who, after jumping from a window of the train with chains on his hands and legs, was hunted down and shot (against orders) by his captors. She goes on to explain that, when they arrived at Fort Marion, Pratt provided the men with drawing materials, ledger books, and coloured pencils, as “a way to help reduce the boredom of confinement” (15). She then shows her students slides of the inmates’ art, but they pay no attention. Though Alberta warns

them that the drawings will be on the test, her students remain uninterested. The episode draws to a close after the only attentive pupil, Helen Mooney, asks a simple yet pertinent question:

"Professor Frank," Helen said, "the seventy-one Indians. The ones at Fort Marion. I was wondering."

"About what?"

"Well, for one thing, what happened to them?" (17)

Her question remains unanswered; yet, owing to the emphasis placed on this event, readers sense that the students overlook the importance of this history lesson at their peril.

As noted earlier, the text emphasizes the centrality of this incident by circling back to the fate of the inmates at Fort Marion at the end of each of its four sections. In section one, the narrator tells Coyote a story that concludes with soldiers putting the mythical First Woman and Ahdamn on a train to Florida. We are told that "there are a bunch of Indians on that train with chains on their legs. First Woman and Ahdamn have chains on their legs, too" (82). When they arrive in Florida, they all "sit around and draw pictures" (82). Although Ahdamn loves having people from "New York and Toronto and Chicago and Edmonton come down to Florida" to watch him draw, First Woman refuses to remain imprisoned (82). Disguising herself as the Lone Ranger, she strolls out of the front gate, leaving Ahdamn behind (83).

In the next section, the narrator tells Coyote a story featuring Changing Woman; this tale ends similarly with the protagonist being dragged by soldiers down a dirt road. When Changing Woman looks around, she sees that there "are soldiers with rifles everywhere. And there are Indians, too. There are Indians sitting on the ground drawing pictures" (188). In the third section, the narrator's tale featuring Thought Woman likewise concludes in what is, by now, a familiar fashion, although to reflect the changing times (presumably the 1960s), the soldiers who arrest Thought Woman have flowers in their hair. In the final section, the narrator's story about Old Woman concludes in the same way, with the military putting the protagonist on a train to Florida. When Thought Woman arrives, she meets the same fate as the other mythical characters: the soldiers "throw her in Fort Marion" (349).

On one level, the repeated emphasis on the historical event conveys the overwhelming impression that North American Native people are caught up in a socio-political situation akin to a rigged game of Monopoly. No matter what card the Native characters draw from the Chance pile, it always

says the same thing: "Go to Jail." That being said, King could have chosen any number of historical encounters between non-Native and Native people to illustrate this point. Is there, then, something unique about the Fort Marion incident that led King to select it?<sup>4</sup>

Given the emphasis on the prisoner's artwork, King may have chosen this incident because it draws specific attention to Native acts of self-representation and to the status of the book, in particular. Unlike many other historical events, the Fort Marion episode reflexively addresses what it means for Native people to disseminate artistic representations of tribal life in the overarching context of widespread domination by the settler-invader society. By adopting the fate of the "Florida Boys" as a primary intertext, King self-consciously positions himself as a contemporary warrior-artist, whose work, like that of the Fort Marion prisoners, speaks both of the need for resistance and for the preservation of Native rituals and tradition. For the inmates of Fort Marion and for King, the book serves as repository of Native ritual and tradition. To borrow a central metaphor from the novel—a metaphor that this essay will go on to explore—both the ledger books and *Green Grass, Running Water* serve as maps that challenge European modes of map-making, which Native and non-Native people can use to orient themselves in the world.

The role played by the map in Native culture should not be underestimated. Long before contact, Indian peoples of the Great Plains were accomplished map-makers.<sup>5</sup> They also possessed a strong sense of history and were accustomed to plotting their history pictorially. As Janet Berlo points out:

Images inscribed on rock walls served for hundreds of years as a large-scale, public way of marking historical events and visionary experiences. Narrative scenes on buffalo hide robes and tipis provided records of a man's experiences and visions. His exploits in war or success in the hunt would be painted on his garments and his shelter to validate and memorialize those heroic deeds. This was personal history made public, for all to see. (12)

Modes of representation changed, however, when non-Native explorers and traders began travelling across the Great Plains and introduced different methods and materials for inscribing history.

Owing to their encounters with non-Natives, Plains Indians began drawing their maps and inscribing historical information into books. As Berlo explains, some of the Indians' new-found regard for books was the result of the influence of white culture, but some "was also grounded in an indige-

nous Aboriginal belief in the power of history and of images, now combined with a new belief in the power of the written word" (16).

Through its allusions to the Fort Marion episode and Plains Ledger Art, King's novel emphasizes that, for Native writers, the tradition of drawing on paper and in books is fundamentally "an art of intercultural communication" (Berlo 13). The self-conscious allusions to the Fort Marion ledger art also remind readers that books by Native authors (and *Green Grass, Running Water* is no exception) constitute a complex polyphonic discourse located at the interface between two radically distinct cultures.

The Fort Marion ledger books garnered a profit for the company of upwards of five thousand dollars, painfully demonstrating that the "interface" between cultures was not based on equality (Peterson 66). The patronage of whites, who placed orders for painted fans and requested duplicates of ledger books they fancied, exposed what some critics refer to as "the unspoken truth of the Anglo-Indian relationship," namely, that Indians "existed for the convenience and entertainment of white society" (Wade and Rand 48).

The references to the Fort Marion Ledger Art not only throw light on the exploitative and performative expectations that characterized Native-white relations, they also underscore the powerful role played by books in the preservation of Native culture. As Berlo points out, the creation of "small but eloquent" autobiographical images helped to keep a tribal spirit alive inside men "whose hair had been cut and who were forced to wear military-issue garments" (14). When a warrior, who has been transformed into a schoolboy and forced to wear a blue serge uniform, draws pictures of the old way of life, he is, as Berlo insists, "keeping that way of life alive" because "to draw the past is to remember it and to convey it to others" (14). Thus, at a pivotal moment in Native history, when Plains cultures were under siege, when people were being hounded onto reservations, and when the foundation of tribal existence was being challenged, books served as repositories for Native wisdom and tradition.

However, ledger books and the Fort Marion books, in particular, did not simply record personal and public history; they were also inextricably connected to Native resistance. The simple act of writing in a ledger book must be considered, in and of itself, a gesture of defiance and self-assertion:

During the most brutal and extensive period of U.S. government violence against Native Americans, between roughly 1860 and 1900, certain warriors of the Great Plains would take ledger books, turn them horizontally, and begin to draw. These

narrow, lined vertical bound books, meant for recording details of commerce or tallying prisoners, were unmistakable artifacts of white settlers and the United States military. . . . [The Indians drew] over this space of foreign calculations, thereby transforming the nature of their own drawing and the ledger book itself, creating a middle place, an in-between place, in a place of writing. (Blume 40)

Blume goes on to liken the ledger book to a silent rifle, that, once possessed, “even without the necessary ammunition, could potentially give the warrior some of the power of his opponents, which had proven to be so devastating” (42).

Not surprisingly, given the circumstances of their production, the drawings of the Fort Marion prisoners register profound transformations in Native practices of self-representation. Whereas in the past, Native peoples typically recorded individual heroic deeds, the warriors imprisoned in Fort Marion articulated an emerging sense of community and an appreciation of domestic life, both of which signalled a significant departure from earlier forms of representation:

The art of Fort Marion prisoners affirmed more general ideals of social solidarity through the exploration of tribal histories, elevation of the commonplace as a central artistic theme, and assertion of Native American dignity in the face of cultural purification experiments. The drawings made at Fort Marion from 1875 to 1878 are nothing less than an incipient national literature. (Wade and Rand 45)

Furnished with only this cursory understanding of the Fort Marion incident, readers can appreciate why King’s text acknowledges its debt to this “incipient national literature.”

Turning to *Green Grass, Running Water*, one can identify virtually all of the characteristics associated with the creation of Fort Marion ledger art. First, as many critics have argued, King’s narrative self-consciously locates itself at the intersection between Native and non-Native culture.<sup>6</sup> In keeping with the warrior-artists who first appropriated ledger books, King has likewise created a palimpsest—a work that both recognizes and draws “over the space of foreign calculations.” Second, the novel emphasizes the thematic elements associated with the radical changes introduced by the Fort Marion drawings, including the affirmation of solidarity, the elevation of the commonplace, and the assertion of Native dignity. Third, by populating the novel with characters who work in the service and/or entertainment industry, the narrative interrogates the “unspoken truth” that Native people exist

“for the convenience and entertainment of white society.” Finally, and most important, in accordance with the traditional role played by the book in Native culture, *Green Grass, Running Water* serves as a tool for the preservation and transmission of tribal traditions and wisdom.

In his autobiographical narrative *The Names*, Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday offers insight into the precise nature of this tool when he describes his ancestor, Phod-lohk, taking out his treasured book: “Now that he was old, Pohd-lohk liked to look backwards in time, and although he could neither read nor write, the book was his means. It was an instrument with which he could reckon his place in the world” (48). In keeping with Momaday’s association between the book and an instrument used to reckon one’s place, this study argues that King’s novel serves as a map; with the aid of this map, both characters and readers can “reckon . . . [their] place in the world.”

The relation between Native fiction and mapping is a long-standing one. As James Gray observes, “the figuration or mapping of space in time, the undoing of imposed boundaries and enclosures and the negotiation of rightful passage and claim” (56) remain foregrounded concerns in works by American Indian writers, including King’s. Bonnie Berthold argues further that “recent Native American fiction can be read specifically in reaction to the modern European mode of mapping” (qtd. in Gray 56-57). She contrasts with Western mapping a “specifically Native American mode of temporal mapping, which she calls ‘story-mapping’” (57).

From the start, King’s book signals its interrelated preoccupation with mapping and the Fort Marion episode. Images of trains, cars, roads, traffic lights, as well as the act of driving abound. Taken together, they highlight the novel’s on-going interrogation of what Bakhtin cites as one of literature’s most common “chronotopes,” the spatial and temporal setting established by “the road” (120). This image evokes the age-old concern with mapping one’s journey through life, although it assumes a straightforward, linear unfolding of plot. It is no coincidence that all three of the younger characters, namely, Lionel Red Dog, Alberta Frank, and Charlie Looking Bear lack direction in their lives and are in dire need of guidance and/or maps. At one point or another, all three embark on road trips that go awry. Yet the novel intimates that their journeys will never assume a meaningful direction, so long as they stick to the man-made road and continue to rely on non-Native discursive maps.

## 2. Fixing a Direction

"Pretty soon we'll fix it up. We've made maps and everyone will see where we have our land." (Joseph Patsah in Brody 270)

Through its portrayals of Lionel, Alberta, and Charlie, the narrative demonstrates that the younger generation lacks direction. Furthermore, owing to the account of the experiences of Amos Frank (Alberta's father) and Portland Looking Bear (Charlie's father), readers appreciate that the younger generation's inability to reckon their place in the world stems, in part, from the fact that generation after generation of Native peoples have been forced to take direction from non-Natives, who expect them to play stereotyped, over-determined roles.<sup>7</sup>

In a wonderfully comic scene, the novel brings together both the cartographic and performative connotations associated with the word "direction." On the morning of Lionel's birthday, Lionel's boss, Bill Bursum, owner of the Home Entertainment Barn, screens one of Portland Looking Bear's early Hollywood films, *The Mysterious Warrior*, on a wall entirely covered with tv sets. Bursum has arranged the tvs to form a map of Canada and the United States. When Eli, Charlie, and the four mythical Indians show up at the store to wish Lionel a happy birthday, Bursum seizes the opportunity to explain that the Map was "more than advertising. . . . It was a concept, a concept that lay at the heart of business and Western civilization" (249). For Bursum, "the Map" serves as a means to gain power: "It was like having the universe there on the wall, being able to see everything, being in control" (109). Like most maps, it offers a vision of wholeness, permanence, and stability; everything is known, named, and claimed.

Rather than allow the Map to maintain its power and broadcast the film and reinstall the cowboys' age-old slaughter of the Indians, the four magical escapees from Fort Marion decide to "fix" the ending of "the best Western of them all" (157). To revise the script, they begin to chant, and their ceremonial performance produces startling effects; the film changes from black and white to colour (perhaps because the relationship between whites and Indians is, after all, not-black-and-white issue) and the Indians begin to massacre the cowboys. Bursum, Lionel, Charlie, and Eli watch the Map in amazement, as bullets rip through John Wayne's chest (267). Overcome with pride for his father, who, for the first time, is clearly not taking direction from Hollywood, Charlie hollers, "Get 'em, Dad" (267). This episode is

instructive because the escapees successfully alter the Map—a graphic mode of representation “whose systematic inscriptions upon an ‘empty’ landscape [figured here as blank tv screens] support the territorial imperative of ‘literate’ cultures”; to effect this change, they introduce an oral chant, and through this story/songline they construct “a polyphonic acoustic space, a network of interconnected voices” (Huggan 144).

The Indians’ simultaneous subversion of the Map and of the Hollywood script again recalls the impact of the Fort Marion Ledger Art. By “fixing” the film, King’s escapees from the Fort continue to adopt and adapt the technology of non-Native society to represent more accurately Native perspectives. Like the warrior-artists of the 1800s, who appropriated the ledger books of their captors, King’s mythical escapees also create “a middle place, an in-between place, in a place of writing” (Blume 40). At bottom, this episode intimates that Native people must come to grips with The Map inscribed by the settler-invaders—a map that is reinscribed on a daily basis through the media.

While tampering with the Map and reversing the linear Hollywood script offer instantaneous comic relief, the novel treats Western modes of figuration far more subversively than this. The text implicitly suggests that readers must not simply revise the content of racist scripts, but challenge their fundamental conventions, specifically, the linear, monologic, narrative structure itself. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, oral storytelling, chanting, dancing, and the circle of performance epitomized by the Sun Dance, interrupt and contest the linear trajectory of the printed word.

By now, it has become rather commonplace to distinguish between white “linear” time from Indian “circular” time. Nevertheless, the significance of the circle in Native culture cannot be underestimated. Native spiritual leaders repeatedly refer to the circle as the basis of the Indian Way of Life.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the circle continues to play a central role in Native writing. Native authors have made “their greatest inroads into mainstream literature, without giving up the belief in the circle” (Lutz, “Circle” 88) Tomson Highway once drew a circle on a piece of paper to clarify the difference between Native and non-Native narrative models. As Highway explains:

Whereas the Indian system . . . is a circle, a never-ending circle . . . the European system, is a straight line, what I call the Genesis to Revelations line: progress, progress, progress from point A to point B, until the apocalypse comes. As a result, the circle was shattered and got stretched open to a straight line, and the impact psychologically and spiritually was devastating. (8)

Similarly, when asked about the parallels between the structure of contemporary Native novels and the image of the circle, Jeannette Armstrong also insisted on the importance of the circle. Speaking of her own fiction, she stated:

Native people have asked me, "Is this accidental that there are four parts [in your novel] and it's like the four Directions, and there are the prologue and the epilogue being the direction above us and below us?" And I said, "No, it wasn't, actually." (qtd. in Lutz, "Contemporary" 20)

As we will see, King's fiction examines the reliance of western culture on a teleological narrative structure—epitomized and conveyed primarily by the Bible—and engages in modes of figuration other than those the linear narrative sequences seem to be driving toward.

Through its playful subversion of linear trajectories, ranging from road trips to traditional Western modes of storytelling, King's novel revises the narrative Map and questions a few highly cherished assumptions of Western culture, specifically, the belief that there are no alternatives to Western culture's end-driven stories with their "Genesis to Revelations line." To interrogate the linear narrative—one of the West's essentially tragic 'terminal creeds' (Gray 18)—and install the essentially comic world view of Indian tribes, the novel tackles the problem at its root. From the start, the novel invokes the Biblical story of Genesis, "point A" of Christianity's narrative of progress.

On page one, echoing *Genesis* 1:1-2, the text proclaims that in the beginning was nothing—nothing, that is, but water and Coyote. Next, we are told that Coyote has a "silly" Dream, which he names a Dog Dream. This Dream, which is contrary by nature, gets "everything backward" and insists on being called GOD (2). Following the narrative's playful logic, readers are made aware that the Judeo-Christian God is merely a troublesome figment of the Native trickster's imagination.

The text continues to undermine canonical beginnings when the four escapees from Fort Marion, who are given power to narrate the story, explore different ways of introducing their tales. Initially, First Woman, who goes by the name of the Lone Ranger, tests a variety of opening phrases, including "Once upon a time. . ." (7), "A long time ago in a faraway land. . ." (8), and a parody of Native story-telling, "Many moons comechucka . . ." (9). But her companions reject each narrative foray, insisting that she begin again until she gets it right. At one point, in an attempt

to appease her friends, she cites the opening of *Genesis*, only to be informed that it, too, is “the wrong story” (10). As it turns out, the only beginning deemed acceptable consists of phrases drawn from the opening a Native divining ceremony. The words, written in Cherokee syllabics, invite the people to “listen up” (Hoy). As Jennifer Andrews explains, this ceremony, in which the movement of pine needles floating on water is used to read the future, “playfully subverts the fixity of history in its official (meaning written) form by focusing on the possibilities yet to come” (18).<sup>9</sup> Just as the escapees from Fort Marion “fix” the ending of the Hollywood movie, in this instance, they likewise draw over the space of foreign calculation and revise the non-Native beginning of the book. Rather than install a linear, print-based trajectory, the four Indians offer a beginning rooted in oral performance, just as, later, they rely on chanting to subvert the filmic narrative.

For the most part, the text relies on parody in conjunction with an emphasis on alternative oral traditions to undermine the legitimacy of the fixed Map, which stands for the sum total of Western culture’s hegemonic linear narratives. To further derail the Map’s linear trajectory, secured by the story of *Genesis*, the first section goes on to offer both a retelling and a realistic displacement of the story of the Garden of Eden. In the text’s version, readers encounter Dr. J. Hovaugh (Jehovah),<sup>10</sup> whose garden serves as a pleasant distraction from the mental institution which he oversees. In a brilliant comic gesture, the text conflates the Garden of Eden with Fort Marion; it is within this asylum that King’s four magical Indians are finally incarcerated. The text appropriately designates Dr. J. Hovaugh’s place of work as an “insane asylum” presumably because it is insane to believe that constructs such as the Garden of Eden and, by extension, Judeo-Christianity (not to mention reservations and places like Fort Marion) afford any kind of asylum to Native peoples. King’s narrative also exposes the deathly aspects of Western culture’s asylum; in Hovaugh’s garden, the trees are all moribund (see 60, 79). Moreover, it appears that the Tree of Knowledge has been axed. Dr. Hovaugh proudly sits behind a dead tree, a massive wooden desk, which, as he points out, represents a “rare example of colonial woodcraft” (12). The tree has been “stripped, repaired, stained blond, and moved into his office as a surprise;” nevertheless, it continues to remind him of “a tree cut down to the stump” (12). Owing to its references to the garden and the dead tree, the text subtly aligns the death of knowledge with colonization,

a practice that petrifies living entities and stains them white or “blond.”

By portraying Hovaugh as a man who views events in the world from the warped perspective of his own “terminal creed”—the Bible’s apocalyptic narrative—the novel continues to highlight the limitations of linear narratives that underwrite the colonial tales of progress. Wedded to dreams of catastrophe and death, Hovaugh misguidedly associates the four old Indians’ repeated escapes from his asylum with global disasters, and he can find only one solution to the paranoid scenario he has invented; he demands that his friend, John Eliot, sign the escapees’ death certificates, though they are alive and well. A sensible man, Eliot tries to convince Hovaugh that the paranoid plot he has concocted bears no resemblance to reality. After Hovaugh rattles off a series of dates on which the Indians escaped and insists that they establish a pattern, Eliot counters his argument, saying, “Maybe there wasn’t [a pattern]. . . . Maybe nothing happened on those dates. Or maybe something good happened on those dates. You ever think of that?” (39). Eliot invites Hovaugh to consider more important issues, such as where the Indians go when they escape (40). Captive to his morbid train of thought, Hovaugh does not even hear his friend’s remarks; instead, he sets off on a road trip to round up the Indians.

As noted earlier, in King’s novel, road trips have a tendency to go awry. In a series of magic realist episodes that confirm the validity of Charlie’s initial association between cars and flowing rivers, several of the characters’ cars are submerged in pools of water that mysteriously appear and sweep away the vehicles. At one point or another, the cars driven by Charlie, Alberta, and Hovaugh all disappear. At the end of the novel, they reappear, floating in Parliament Lake, where they act as battering rams to destroy the dam.<sup>11</sup>

On one level, the repeated depiction of cars being submerged in water reminds readers that Native tales of origin begin, not with a void to be mapped and driven across, but with water (Matchie and Larson 158). But the image of a car being washed away also offers a tangible image of the more abstract tensions between non-Native and Native narrative structures. As Gray argues, “in the Native American novel, the broad aim of style and strategy would be to uncover potential beneath surface ‘givens’ to release fluidities latent within apparent rigidities” (62). In King’s text, the performance quality, which is enacted through oral storytelling, “is figured in the water that constitutes the book’s dominant metaphor” (121).

### 3: Mapping the Sun Dance

Located as it is, at the interface between two radically distinct cultures, the novel deploys both linear trajectories—the point A to B route from Genesis to Revelation, represented by cars, roads, and driving—and non-linear narrative trajectories—identified with the circular world view of the Native peoples, and conveyed by the organic flow of water, the cloud cycle, and, most strikingly, by the Sun Dance. As the novel unfolds, however, it becomes apparent that, to orient themselves in a meaningful direction, the younger characters must relinquish the linear trajectory of Western culture, put themselves in the hands of those who can guide them, and embark on the organic path of the circle and performance favoured by Coyote.

Prompted by his aunt Norma's repeated suggestion, Lionel's uncle, Eli, takes Lionel under his wing and drives him to the Sun Dance. As they drive, Eli talks to Lionel about the direction his own life has taken. Although he never states it explicitly, the reader senses that Eli knows that he should never have lived the greater part of his life as a white man, removed from people and traditions; he perceives his error now that he has returned home and is fighting on behalf of his people and their land. Lionel, who has no idea where they are going, listens to his uncle without comprehending Eli's message. Ultimately, the latter's awareness of the importance of the land and community is tangibly conveyed when Eli leaves the paved road and turns onto the lease road. Together they share the experience of exchanging the familiar linear route for the road less travelled. As the narrator explains:

It had been a long time since Lionel had travelled the lease road. Normally, he came in through Medicine River on the road that ran to Cardston. That road was all asphalt and mileage signs and billboards. This road was a wild thing, bounding across the prairies, snaking sideways, and each time they came to a rise, Lionel had the uneasy feeling that just over the crest of the hill the road would vanish, and they would tumble out into the tall grass and disappear (301-02).

Their journey to the Sun Dance entails a move away from the predictable non-Native trajectory to a non-domesticated, vital path that virtually fuses with the natural world.

In many respects, Alberta's journey mirrors Lionel's. She, too, is escorted to the Sun Dance by a woman who, like Eli, knows where home is and understands the importance of Native tradition. As they turn off the lease road, Alberta's guide, Latisha, observes that, for as long as she could remember, her aunt Norma's lodge was "always in the same place on the east side

of the camp. And before that Norma's mother. And before that" (307). Both Lionel's and Alberta's guides have internalized a sense of Native history and, therefore, can reckon their place in the world and help others to do the same.

Throughout the novel, primarily owing to Eli's reminiscences of the ceremony, readers are given a foretaste of the power and centrality of the Sun Dance. At one point, while driving Lionel to the ritual site, Eli pulls onto the side of the road as they reach the crest of a hill, so that Lionel can survey the scene that lies before them. As the narrator explains: "Below in the distance, a great circle of tepees floated on the prairies, looking for all the world like sailing ships adrift on the ocean" (302). Images of ships and the ocean recall the text's overarching emphasis on water imagery. Taken together, the images in the passage suggest that, in contrast to western culture and its great Map (a fixed concept associated with Bursum's tv screens and the Great Baleen Dam), ideally, the Native peoples live a nomadic existence invested with the meaning of ceremonial performances, which, although based on the principle of the circle, remain open to the contingencies of chance.

The vision of the "great circle of tepees," however, provides far more than a simple contrast between Native and non-Native philosophies. Throughout the novel, the circle and the Sun Dance, in particular, are offered as alternatives to the Map. The importance accorded to the Sun Dance only makes sense when readers understand that its goal lies in furnishing participants with a map of the universe in which their location is clearly demarcated. Yet readers lacking knowledge of the Sun Dance miss the numerous and intricate allusions to the ceremony scattered throughout the text. Before going on to analyze the novel's treatment of the ceremony, an overview of the elements associated with it and an explanation of its principal function might be helpful.

The Sun Dance is an annual, communal festival, celebrated out of doors during the summer. It takes place in ritual space defined by a tree that is cut and replanted for the purpose of forming the centre of a circle. The tree selected is always the "rustling tree," also known as the cottonwood. In Black Elk's tale of the Sun Dance, the warrior Kablaya explains the purpose of the tree: "He will be our center, and will represent the way of the people" (47). All the ritual action of the dance takes place within and around the circle, which is typically 40 to 100 feet in diameter. Spectators watch the dancing from the periphery, generally under an awning made of evergreen boughs.

The Sun Dance circle is variously described as the sacred hoop and/or the mystery circle, and, as many Native spiritual leaders have argued, it serves as a tangible model of the universe. At the centre of the circle is an altar, also in the shape of a circle, in which a cross has been inscribed. The lines of the cross are oriented to the four cardinal points and represent the four winds; hence, at the centre of the Sun Dance is a map of the Sacred Circle. Within this map of the cosmos, the dancers move in a sunwise or clockwise direction in harmony with the motion of the earth.<sup>12</sup>

In Black Elk's *The Gift of the Sacred Pipe*, the leader of the ritual, known as the intercessor, sums up the meaning of the dance at the end of the ceremony:

By your actions today, you have strengthened the sacred hoop of our nation. You have made a sacred center which will always be with you, and you have created a closer relation with all things of the universe. (148)

The "sacred center" of which Black Elk speaks is, in fact, a map of sorts. Participants create a "sacred center" by inscribing the map of the universe onto their bodies; a black circle is drawn around the face, representing *Wakan Tanka* (the Lakota term for the godhead); next, a line is drawn on each cheek and the chin. Taken together, the four lines represent the four directions.<sup>13</sup> In this way, during the Sun Dance, the body itself becomes a map.

Armed with this cursory sketch of the ceremony, readers can appreciate how the references to the Sun Dance serve to champion Native modes of representation based on the circle over the Western culture's linear apocalyptic trajectory. An awareness of the Sun Dance ceremony alters the reader's perception of the text. Thus readers are in a position to understand "what Eli's dancing signifies, why Eli takes Lionel there to celebrate his birthday, and why Lionel's getting his face painted is not a trivial or childish birthday treat" (Fee and Flick 5). Moreover, rather than view the contrapuntal narrative structure of the text as a postmodern innovation, it can be seen as an attempt to replicate the structure and rhythms of the Sun Dance.

King's novel oscillates among at least nine different narrative perspectives, all overseen by the narrator and his companion, Coyote. In many ways, the narrator serves as the intercessor or announcer at the Sun Dance, who supervises "the constant activity in a general way" (Holler 174). Typically, the announcer provides a running commentary on the dance, makes necessary announcements, enforces order, and introduces various leaders; he is also responsible for enforcing "a standard of traditional behaviour," which,

during a dance that Holler attended, “occasioned an intermittent stream of censure directed toward those present who lacked sufficient knowledge of traditional ways” (173). In King’s novel, the narrator acts as an intercessor, by overseeing the different focalizers and by teaching Coyote about Native stories and modes of storytelling; at times, the narrator also chastises Coyote for his ignorance about Native history and tradition.

The carnivalesque rotation among focalizers also parallels the multi-faceted structure of the Sun Dance. As Holler explains, “since the ritual takes place ‘in the round,’ different points of view on the dance reveal different aspects of it,” and the effect is “kaleidoscopic” (174). The circular or kaleidoscopic structure is both implicit in the constant shift in focalizers and reflexively underscored by the four Indians, who each ceremonially take a turn and narrate one of the four sections (see 87, 192, 273).

At various points in the novel, the mythical Indians emphasize that everyone, save Coyote, perhaps, deserves to take a turn and narrate his or her version of the story. The use of the word “turn,” in these instances, denotes both a change in the speaker or player of the narrative game as well as a physical shift or “turn” in the story’s narrative direction. Viewed cartographically, the sum of the turns taken by each of the elderly Indians comprises a circle.

In the novel, the word “turn” is also associated with the act of turning something on and off (see 201, 273). For instance, while they are discussing whose turn it is, one of the Indians suggests that maybe Coyote “can turn on the light” (192). Shortly after this episode, they admire a sunrise:

As the old Indians watched, the universe gently tilted and the edge of the world danced in light.

“Ah,” said Hawkeye. “It is beautiful.”

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

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

“Yes,” said Robinson Crusoe. “I believe he did.” (195).

Through the various meanings associated with the word “turn,” the text links the circular structure of its own narrative with the circular motion of the sun and, by extension, the Sun Dance.<sup>14</sup>

What is perhaps most astounding about the novel is that it does not simply refer to the Sun Dance. Instead, like a participant in the dance itself, the text internalizes and embodies the cosmic rite with its sacred circle. As

noted earlier, *Green Grass, Running Water* serves as a map—a tool with which one can reckon one's place in the world. To come to grips with the nature of this map, readers must pay attention to Native codes. For example, at the beginning of each section is a word in Cherokee. Rather than signify a linear progression, such as chapter one, two, and so on, each word announces one of the four directions and the sacred colour associated with it. The narrative begins with east and red, then proceeds to south and white, west and black, and north and blue, in that order (Hoy). In *Wisdom and Power*, Native spiritual leader Fools Crow offers a catalogue of the directional and colour system of the Cherokees and identifies these colours with the cardinal directions (Mails 60). At bottom, these references to the sacred directions and colours, in conjunction with the description of the four Helpers and the Sun Dance, suggest that King's novel does not simply describe the Native ceremony, but is itself an evocation or map of the ritual.

Thinking along cartographic lines, readers can appreciate that the text physically inscribes a circle, ending as it does on page 360. It also now makes sense that on page 180, the text portrays Lionel asleep in his chair with the "tumbling light [of the television] pouring over him like water." Here the "tumbling light" foreshadows the novel's conclusion—the tumbling water that destroys the Great Baleen Dam. Thus, midway through its own circular journey, the text looks across its horizontal axis and catches a glimpse of events that take place at the end (or should I say beginning) of its narrative orbit.

In the end, the escapees from Fort Marion, together with the community, fix the world by defending the Sun Dance against an intruder, Latisha's abusive husband, George. He tries to take pictures of the ceremony and sell the images for profit; his behaviour uncannily echoes the treatment of the Plains Indians' ledger art. When the ordeal is over and the spiritually vacant opportunist has been vanquished, Lionel turns to the four Indians and asks, "Is that it? . . . This is how you help me fix my life?" The Lone Ranger replies, "You bet." Robinson Crusoe goes on to explain that, in "years to come . . . you'll be able to tell your children and grandchildren about this" (322). Thus, in keeping with their real-life counterparts, King's escapees from Fort Marion continue to safeguard Native tradition, while engaging in acts of resistance that highlight the significance of representation, in this case, storytelling.

Although they magically return to Dr. J. Houvagh's asylum, where they are once again confined "by some ass who is in authority," to borrow

Lanier's words, the fate of the warrior-artists remains ambiguous. Despite the fact that they are imprisoned, in the light of the trip they have taken and the message they have conveyed to the younger generation, the novel implies that it is possible for Native people who are lost to escape the restrictions imposed by Western culture and to find direction. According to the text, gaining a meaningful direction in life involves earthshaking the map,<sup>15</sup> the seemingly entrenched plot, and opening oneself to tribal ways of understanding, which arise "in pre-novelistic, oral performance contexts more closely associated with land and community" (Gray 4). Perhaps, then, there is no definitive answer to Helen Mooney's question about what happened to the prisoners. On one level, as the novel demonstrates, they are alive and well because their subversive energy remains available to contemporary Native artists such as King, who adopt the book and draw the circular map of Native ritual and tradition over the space of foreign calculations.

## NOTES

- 1 Brotherson's understanding of the relationship between mapping and writing recalls the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman's assertion that maps are merely one form of "modelling system"—a system that also includes literary texts. (For a discussion of Lotman's views, see Huggan 5).
- 2 As Clyde Holler notes, after the end of the Civil War in 1865, Americans began to pursue the project of westward expansion, and the army turned to Indian fighting. Although the benevolence of those who advocated moving Indians onto reservations may well escape contemporary readers, it is important to understand that, within the historical context of the Indian Wars, the attempt to relocate the Indians and to civilize them was, in fact, the era's liberal humanitarian response to the army's ongoing slaughter of the Indians (see 111).
- 3 This experiment had tremendous repercussions in Canada, since Pratt's system of penal education and subsequent creation of industrial boarding schools were used as the prototypes for Canadian Indian education. When Nicholas Flood Davin was charged by Prime Minister Macdonald to develop a school system in Canada, he took the simplest solution: he went to the United States to inspect their schools; he arrived at a time when Pratt's system was "enjoying its heyday" (Samek 138).
- 4 The Indian prisoners at Fort Marion were incarcerated for three years, whereas the entire Chiricahua and Warm Springs Apache people—men, women, and children—were held as prisoners of war for twenty-six years by the United States (Meredith 101).
- 5 See Ewers, ch. 10: "The Making and Uses of Maps by Plains Indians Warriors," 180-90.
- 6 A number of critics highlight the hybrid status of the text, including Fee and Flick, Andrews, Donaldson, Gray, and Matchie and Larson.
- 7 Latisha's first husband, George was pleased that she was, "as he said, a real Indian" (112).

Similarly, Eli Stands Alone's girlfriend, Karen, also liked the fact that he was Indian and referred to him as her "mystic warrior" (138).

- 8 As the spiritual leader of the American Indian Movement, Philip Deere stated: "[Y]ou hear the Indian people talking about the sacred book,—or the circle. That circle is important to us because we do not believe in the square measurements. But the ancient belief was in the circle. The moon is in a circle, the sun is round, and our ancestors knew the earth was round. Everything that is natural is in a round form." (qtd. in Lutz, "Circle" 85)
- 9 Alan Kilpatrick 46-47, 55 offers a more extensive description of this Cherokee ritual.
- 10 Dr. J. Houvagh first appears in Thomas King's story "A Seat in the Garden" from *One Good Story That One* 83-94.
- 11 Fee and Flick note in this volume that there is an important intertextual reference at work in this episode. Five hundred years after Columbus, three cars, a red Pinto, a blue Nissan, and a white Karmann-Ghia (235)—the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria—crash into the already-stress-fractured Grand Baleen Dam and break it during an earthquake.
- 12 The purpose of the dance is multi-faceted and has also changed over the years. Initially, it enshrined the fundamental aspects of Plains Indian life: "war and the buffalo hunt" (Holler 180). The principal reason for dancing to the sun was to "secure victory over enemies," although it was also viewed as a way of offering thanks for recovery from "some sickness or trouble" (Holler 42, 69). However, the Sun Dance also served other important functions: for instance, it was an effective mechanism for the redistribution of wealth, providing a means for "the poorer people in the society to obtain the goods needed to survive the extreme Dakota winter" (Holler 180). In addition, studies also confirm that the dance served an important teaching function, "inculcating and preserving the values and mythology of the society" (180).
- 13 Holler 146-47; see also *The Gift of the Sacred Pipe* 62. For an account of the symbolic meaning of the colour black, refer to Black Elk's comments 146.
- 14 The episode cited above not only highlights the importance of the sun, but further details the Judeo-Christian narrative by suggesting that Coyote, rather than God, is responsible for turning on the light and initiating the circular pattern of night and day, as well as the seasons.
- 15 The role played by the earthquake in King's text recalls Aritha van Herk's rejection of the desire to "fix" the prairie by imposing what Rudy Wiebe described as "great black steel lines of fiction" (259). In response to Wiebe, van Herk asserts that the west has to be "earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated" ("Women" 24). To an extent, her feminist project mirrors that of King's. In this case, however, the earthquake and the flood specifically signal the crying out of the earth. As Fools Crow explains:

"Grandmother Earth is crying out about it [environmental destruction]. She is shaking the land [earthquakes] more and more to tell us how she feels, and to get our attention. Waken-Tanka has told me that the Thunder Being will be sending great floods to show us the great cleansing that needs to go on within people." (qtd. in Mails 67)

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