Chapter 2

Native Nationalism and Re-Writing Native History : Louise Erdrich and Thomas King

> The historical is present in the Native American novels --- present as the story which has to be told not only for people to re-member and re-capture what otherwise would be lost, but also for story itself, the story of Indian America, to continue. Through history there is an identity and a future for Native Americans.
>
> (George Findley NAF 172)

The Native Movement of the post 60's was an important step towards the re-definition of Native people. It was an attempt to make Native people realize their past and traditional histories as a means to contest their received status in White discourse and discursive practices. Like the other movements such as Black Power Movement or Feminist Movement, the American Indian Movement too was a movement for the upliftment of its Native people by engendering self pride and dignity in them. The Movement also questioned the received hierarchies and power structures of the dominant order. With an element of strong vehemence and protest involved, it called for a re-examination of the position of Native in the dominant White order. Past and history were the two chief modes of regaining this lost identity. The resurgence of Native nationalism called for a Native world view of life untainted by White metaphors or cultural symbols.

A sense of minimal history or an absence of an adequate past has constituted one of the major obstacles to the acquisition of a "rooted" Native identity. According to Terry Goldic, "The image of the indigene is often spectacle, particularly in works which concentrate on the grand view of history" (169). Very often this image is manipulated to suit the focus of White cultures. We still carry a host of assumptions and expectations informed by Hollywood western and television by the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and childhood cow-boy and Indian games. The ill-defined image of Natives as savage, red or dusty romantic brown have further caused belittlement of the Natives. To contest this notion, a serious consideration of Native history becomes very essential.

For the marginalized people the question of "Voice" and "Being" is important to counter the inappropriate image of themselves. This voice is not just the voice of dissent or protest but the voice of colonised Native who proposes to recover and reinvent the un-given truth of the Natives in White discourses. In other words, a revisionist view of history is given from the praxis of their mother culture. This revision or recovery of historical facts becomes a necessary political act to contest the received version of the Natives in the dominant discourse.

The need to rewrite their history is also a viable post colonial strategy for re-writing their indigenous self. In this chapter it is proposed to examine selected novels of Erdrich and Thomas King from the praxis of Native History and resurgence movement of the 1960's. In the three novels, *Love Medicine*, *Beet Queen*, and *Tracks*, Erdrich retells the multigeneration story of her inter-related Chippewa families in North Dakota. While Thomas King in his novel, *Green*

Grass and Burning Water and *Truth and Bright Water* explores the cross cultural problems like Native rights and race relation while incorporating critical Native issues within the narrative structure. The narration set in the present time recollects a wealth of stories and characters from Native history. In their depiction of Native history there is a constant flux and circular vision which is part of the Native world view. By going back to their past / history the writer's need to assert continuity / inter-relatedness of Native world view also gets realised.

It is now almost a clichéd expression that "imperialism frames indigenous experience". For most of the indigenous communities across the globe, writing about experiences under imperialism and colonialism has become a significant project. As a group they have felt the need to challenge and talk about their history, the psychology and politics of imperialism and colonialism as an epic story of huge devastation, painful struggle and persistent survival. According to Linda Smith "the talk about the colonial past is embedded in political discoveries, an humour, poetry, music, storytelling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history. (*Decolonising Methodologies* 19).

Indigenous people have critiqued the way history is told from the perspective of the colonisers. At the same time, these indigenous groups have argued that history is important for understanding the present and that reclaiming history is critical and essential aspect of decolonisation.

In the following pages, a detailed reference of Native nationalism is made in order to contextualise the varied issues of Native writers within the dynamics of nationalist struggle.

Native Americans have had to travel a varied legal and political terrain in their quest for tribal survival. Their strategies for action reflect the diversity of this legal landscape. Thus, Native Americans and their supporters have responded in many ways to frequent and diverse historical and contemporary challenges to Native rights. During the twentieth century, the two major strategies to secure and protect Native American right have centered on organization and activism. Among the earliest organizations dedicated to protect and further the rights and interests of Native Americans, were the Women's National Indian Association founded in 1879 and the Indian Rights Association founded in 1882. This was followed by an early Indian Rights organization, such as the Lake Mohawk Conference of the Friends of the Indians founded in 1883, the Society of American Indian founded by six Native Americans in 1911 and the American Indian Defence Association founded by John Collier in 1923. These early organizations varied in their emphasis on preserving indigenous cultures. Their agendas for reform tended to combine concern for the rights of tribes with an orientation towards assimilating Native Americans into the larger Euro-American culture through moderate tactics of lobbying, education, social programmes and legal defence.

The post-war period witnessed a transformation in the composition and focus of Native American political advocacy organizations. Beginning with the

establishment of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in 1944, the membership of advocacy organizations tended to be exclusively or primarily Indian, and the focus shifted from assimilation to tribal sovereignty and self-determination. This shift towards indigenous membership and tribal rights was the renewed view of the place of Indian in American society by the Native American veterans of war. Further more the growing Indian urban population provided an inter-tribal point of view on Indian affairs. This was also the time of Civil Rights era in American history, an era of protest and activism. The political times were also reflected in American Indian Movement (AIM) founded in Minneapolis in 1968. The NIVC and the AIM formed the organizational backbone of the activist movement in 1960's.

The Post-Second World War period saw an increase in Indian activism, again organized mainly at the tribal level, often directed against U.S. government public works projects which threatened Indian land holdings and sacred areas. Federal water and power projects were among the most common targets of Indian protest. The various nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, for example, resisted several water projects affecting Iroquois land: these included Seneca legal challenges and protests against the Kinzua Dam project in Pennsylvania during the 1940s and 1950s; Mohawk and Tuscarora legal and activist resistance to the St. Lawrence Seaway project in New York in the 1950s and 1960s; and Tuscarora armed resistance to the seizure of tribal land for a reservoir associated with the Niagara power plant project in New York in the 1950s.

The use of dramatic symbolism in Indian protest was especially characteristic of the Red Power Movement, but could be seen in many earlier protests. For example, Iroquois protestors during the 1950s and 1960s led annual delegations to the United Nations in New York to report American and Canadian violations of various treaties. Delegates wore traditional ceremonial clothing and used their visits, which captured media attention, to spot-light their grievances. Protestors were often sensitive to the nuances of international politics in staging these events. For example, two Iroquois delegations arrived at the U.N. in May and September, 1950, at the height of the Cold War, and the second delegation met with Soviet foreign minister Andrei Y. Vishinski.

Indian protesters also drew protest themes and tactics from American political culture. For instance, in December 1960, a group of Ute Indians in Utah captured national attention with a strategy that resonated with American domestic history – the True Ute seceded from the United states in order to protest the Bureau of Indian Affairs' control over funds paid by the federal government for mineral and land holdings. Still other tribes employed protest tactics from their own cultural repertoire. In September 1953, a group of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians protested the draining of water from their hunting and fishing grounds at Canton Lake in Oklahoma, by breaking a peace pipe and invoking a curse in a drum-beating ceremony.

Alcatraz heralded the beginning of the Red power movement, a period of greatly increased levels of Americans Indian activism in urban centres as well as on reservations. Red power activists took their tactical cue, in part, from the

Alcatraz occupation. After federal officials retook the Island, Indians of all Tribes moved their protest to an abandoned Nike missile base in the Beverly Hills, overlooking San Francisco Bay. While this occupation lasted only three days, it set in motion a pattern of similar occupations during the next several years-many of which involved unused or abandoned federal property- at government buildings, or at sites in national parks. Members of the American Indian Movement often led these protest events.

Red power protest activity shifted after the late-1972 BIA occupation, from mainly symbolic, short- term actions, to longer, more violent events, often on or near reservations, While these reservation-based protest actions further dramatized Indian grievances, they also revealed tensions within Indian communities, tension between urban and reservation Indians, and tensions that reflected political divisions on reservations. No single event of the Red power era more clearly illustrated the combination of Indian grievances and community tensions than the events on the Pine Ridge reservation in the spring of 1973, a ten- week long siege which came to be known as "Wounded Knee II."

Wounded Knee II involved a dispute within the Oglala Sioux tribe over the controversial tribal chairman, Richard Wilson. Some members of the tribe-including those associated with AIM-viewed Wilson as a corrupt puppet of the BIA. An effort to impeach Wilson resulted in a division of the tribe into opposing camps that eventually armed themselves and entered into a two and one-half month-long siege involving federal law enforcement officials, the BIA, local citizen, nationally prominent entertainment figures, the national news media.

Just as Red Power tactics in the early 1970s followed the pattern set by the Alcatraz occupation, Wounded Knee II reshaped Red Power protest in the mid-1970s in the direction of longer, reservation-based protest actions. These included a six-month occupation of a former girls' camp in Moss Lake, New York beginning in 1974; the five-week occupation of a vacant Alexian Brothers noviciary by the Menominee Warrior Society in Wisconsin in 1975; the eight-day takeover of a tribally owned Fairchild electronics assembly plant on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico in 1975; and the week-long occupation of a juvenile detention centre by members of the Puyallup tribe in Washington state in 1976.

During the 1980s, Indian activism shifted to more legal forums. American's courtrooms became the contended terrain in American Indian affairs. The members of American Indian attorneys increased greatly and Indian communities became increasingly sophisticated at negotiating the legal complexities of Indian resource right, land claims, and sovereignty issues. The law became a double-edged sword, to be wielded by Indian tribes and organizations, not only against them. American Indian protest energies were more and more spent in these legal arenas.

The history of treaty-making, diplomatic relations, and military conflict between the indigenous nations of Canada and migrants from other continents is at least 450 years old, yet the existing political organizations of aboriginal peoples in Canada were all formed during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

There are many reasons for this. First, until 1953, it was illegal for status Indians in Canada to raise funds to form political organizations. Until 1959, status Indians did not have the right to vote in the Canadian federal parliament. These circumstances and the close administration of Indian bands by federal officials called Indian agents, inhibited political organization. Compounding these obstacles was the simple poverty of many aboriginal people in Canada, who did not have resources to mount political campaigns over large geographical areas for sustained periods of time. In yet others cases, as for Inuit and some northern Indians and Metis, people lived in areas relatively undisturbed by the migration of non-aboriginal people or by industrial activity. They were able to live their lives with limited contact with out side forces, and thus perhaps did not see a need for political organizing.

For more than Fifty years there were no more treaties, even through the treaty-making process was far from complete. Large parts of Canada were not covered by treaty, including British Columbia, both northern territories, and parts of northern Quebec and Labrador. Then, in the mid-1970s, the treaty-making process resumed. The new generation of treaties were called "comprehensive claims agreements" by the Canadian government, which indicated its willingness to negotiate these agreements with those First Nations whose territories were not yet covered by treaty.

The comprehensive claims processes and the new national political organizations were launched by a number of changes in post-war Canada.

First, a growing consciousness of civil rights, and the strength of progressive movements in Canada after the Second World War, led to many political movements to enfranchise the disenfranchised. In Canada, these movements were often state-funded, or at least were encouraged through state policies. Thus aboriginal peoples' demands for political rights and for recognition of treaty rights found resonance in the broader movements for a more democratic society, and the new aboriginal organizations eventually received public funding to represent the interests of their constituencies.

A second political impetus came from the economic changes that followed the Second World War. The war had knit the Canadian and United States economics more closely together than ever, and in particular had established markets for Canadian natural resources in the burgeoning U.S. economy of the post-war period. This in turn led to the opening of mines, to hydroelectric projects, and to oil and gas exploration in the Canadian North and mid-North, and to competition for land use with the indigenous peoples who were harvesting food and fur from the same areas.

Finally, and perhaps ironically, a policy reversal occasioned by a new, liberal Canadian government in the late 1960s galvanized status Indians across Canada into a most vigorous period of political activity. The pivotal document was the White paper on Indian policy, released by the federal government in 1969. This document contradicted the findings of a federal royal commission of inquiry (a process of research and public hearings, named the Hawthorm Inquiry after its chairman), which was formed in response to protests and

political advocacy by Indian rights activists across Canada. The 1966 report of the Hawthorn Inquiry had responded to the arguments of status Indian across Canada by acknowledging that their treaty right gave them special status within Canada, in addition to the range of citizen rights enjoyed by all other people living in Canada.

Soon after Hawthorn reported, however, a new government was elected in Canada. The Liberal Party of Pierre Trudeau entered Canadian politics in a fashion somewhat analogous to the Kennedy administration in the United State a few years earlier. Many felt that the new Trudeau government represented the forces of democratisation and progressive change then surging through Canada as through most western nations. Yet it was the new Trudeau government that released the 1969 White paper on Indian policy. A White paper is a government discussion paper, meant to engage public debate about a proposed policy change. The White paper on Indian policy proposed the abolition of special rights for Indians in Canada, recommending instead strong measures leading to their incorporation into the mainstream of Canadian economic, cultural, and political life. It is a measure of the ignorance then prevalent in non-aboriginal Canadian society that a putatively progressive new government could so misunderstand broad currents in aboriginal peoples' political life.

The opposing principles and perspectives between the red man and White man dates back to the earliest declaration of White territorial ownership. These cultural collisions have relegated the Native to the figures of White Society. In each era of North American literary history, "writers have turned to the Indian

and his culture for standards by which to measure the values and goals of White society, for patterns of cultural destruction, transformation, and survival and for new heroes and indigenous myths." (Monkman 3).

The absence of written historical records among the Indian of North America, led many observers from the Renaissance onwards to dismiss the pre-White history. In *Quebec Hill* or *Canadian Scenery* (1797), J. Mackay gives early literary expression of this view that the landscape of Northern Canada was populated while Greek and Roman empires rose and fell and these inhabitants benighted until the arrival of White man :

> No musty record can the curious trace,
> Engross'd by annals of the savage race
> Involv'd in darkness their achievements
> Till fam'd Columbus sought a western way (J. Mackay Quebec Hill)

Like Mackay, Cornwell Baytoy echoes a similar concern in his poem *Canada a Description Poem* where he refers to the long dreary night that spread chaos over the valley of the St. Lawrence before the White Man's arrival.

The central concern of the White settlers : possession of the land and conversion of its aboriginal inhabitants. The Indian was labelled as savage in order to justify the above two tasks of the Whites. The narrative poems of immigration and settlement written before 1840 consistently present Indian as the savage inhabitant of a landscape that must be tamed and as the antagonist

of the White men who will tame it. Published in 1789, Thomas Cary's *Abraham's Plains* identifies the double task of the European immigrant.

> How blest the task, to tame the savage sail,
> And from the waters, bid the woods recall!
> But oh! A task of more exalted kind,
> To arts of peace, to tame the savage mind
> The thirst of blood, in human breast, to sham,
> To wrest, from barbarous vice, fair virtue's name;
> Bid tomahawks to plough shares yield the sway,
> And scalping knives to pruning hooks give way.

After 1840, the Indian as savage antagonist disappears from narrative poem of immigration and settlement, Alexander McHachlan's 'The Emigrant' (1861) replaces the conventional battle between savage Indian and civilised White settler with a conventional literary piece in which the doomed red savage fights doomed red savage. The Indian as savage antagonist survives, however in the poetic genres, historical fiction and drama of nineteenth and twentieth century. Beginning with WaCouste (1832) and ending with Hard Scrabble (1851), Richardson repeatedly exploits the Indian as savage antagonist.

The assumption that the Indian would inevitably disappear grows less pervasive in twentieth-century literature as his continued physical presence demonstrates his obvious survival. Thus, many writers shift the focus on the red man from his extinction to images of death and destruction associated with his survival in

an eroded and degraded culture. Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904) captures the annoyed surprise of Whites forced to acknowledge that the Indian has not disappeared. Later writers insist on an acknowledgement of the contemporary red man and his culture and on the White man's responsibility for the condition of that culture. Whether focusing on the contemporary reservation or on the Indian in an urban ghetto, these works are frequently dominated by images of imprisonment and the figure of a dying child; they chronicle not the extinction of the red man but the living death he endures.

Contemporary English-Canadian writers treating past red heroes more frequently locate them as source of visions and values denied by White culture in North America. The red hero becomes the mediator between the red and White worlds whom the White man tragically failed to acknowledge and to understand in the past but who now is a guide to potential new harmonies between man and man and man and nature. The potential and limitations of language as a vehicle for reconciliation and understanding recurs throughout these works as contemporary writers reconsider the careers of Indians such as Tecumseh, Big Bear, and the self-identified 'prophet of the new world,' Louis Riel.

In *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Rudy Wiebe bridges these cultures through his introduction of a Cree leader rarely seen in heroic terms by the Whites. Old and wrinkled, Wiebe's Big Bear is physically unprepossessing in comparison with his nineteenth-century predecessors; yet what *The Temptations of Big Bear* documents is the tragic defeat of 'the head and soul' of the Plains Indians. What

Big Bear lacks in physique he gains through association with the sun, the focus of all life within Cree culture.

Louise Erdrich, belonging to Turtle Mountain Chippewa and German ancestry, has woven together five interlinked novels that span twentieth century and thus moved towards an epic portrayal of life in North Dakota similar to Faulkners fictional recreation of Mississippi.

Erdrich builds the novels around certain events where stories stand as metaphors for the major episodes in tribal life. She creates her own myth about the life of her people. In doing so, she utilises the storytelling cycle to recount her story in the Indian way. Readers do not learn Chippewa history from anthropologists, missionaries, nuns and sociologist. Rather she appropriates the role of the traditional tribal storyteller to serve as a receptacle and bearer of culture. Stripes believes that "Erdrich's novelistic interventions in history are not unique; many writers of tribal descent reflect historical themes and employ complex rhetorical figures" (31). Even so, Erdrich and James Welch (from *Fool's Crow* all the way through *Indian Lawyer*) remain unique among Native American authors who are able to encompass so much tribal history in their novels.

Tracks presents a historical perspective and reveals the extent of what has been lost. The smallpox epidemic combined with the severe 1886-87 winter has decimated the population. Nanapush is the sole remaining tradionalist, one who has guided a buffalo hunt and who practices the old ways. He exemplifies

traditional culture and old ways of knowing. He buries Fleur's Pillager family in traditional grave houses scratching in their clan markers. He smokes a pipe and offers tobacco to the Father while admonishing their spirits to be at peace. He can speak the old Anishinaabe language, and his ability to seek a vision and employ hunting songs to lure game saves his life during times of starvation. He has the powers to cure and is responsible for saving the lives of Moses, Fleur, and Lulu, the entire Pillager clan. He is the traditional culture hero who ensures that the old ways will be passed on, and when he merges his fate with the Pillagers, the promise of tribal survival is assured.

The novel is about the Chippewa's fight for their land and culture. Already the Catholic Church has made inroads against the traditional Chippewa religion, and Pauline the fanatical religious mixed-blood pitted against the traditionalist and culture hero Nanapush, dramatically underscore the fight taking place at large in the culture between the mixed-bloods and the full-bloods. Pauline denies her Indian heritage while Nanapush labours to continue Chippewa culture, and the juxtaposition of the traditional voice with a proselytising Christian one serves to remind readers of the very different identities Natives have adopted since the initial contact with European trappers and missionaries.

The government's allotment policy was primed to promote disunity in an already fragmented tribe. Nanapush laments that Anglo settlers are making "wholesale purchase of our allotment lands" (T 98) and waiting expectantly for Indian lands to fall "underneath the gavel of the auctioneer" (T 99). Tribal members are pitted against each other when unexpected fees for their land

come due; Margaret and Nector sell off the Pillager land by defaulting Pillager and Nanapush fees in favour of Kashpaws, and thus keep their land, but sell their tribal integrity. While the Dawes Act provided that women and children be given the rights to land, with the dearth of available property, the older Kashpaw children are assigned land on the Montana reservation, far from their tribal homeland and family.

The friction between the mixed-blood families – the Morriseys, Lamartines, Puyats and Lazarres – and the traditional full-blood families – the Kashpaws, the Pillagers, and the Nanapushes – reach a climax over property rights. Bernadette Morrissey becomes the Bureau of Indian Affairs agent's secretary and asserts her influence in sending out tax notices, and so lands pass into the hands of the mixed-bloods who have gained government favour and influence. The best farmers, including the Morrisseys, seize prime lands for themselves, but other mixed-bloods also position themselves to take over defaulted lands. The Lazarres swarm onto Nanapush's land and into his house within weeks of his losing it because of dubiously assessed late fees. Nanapush bemoans the fact that the Lazarres seem so ready to usurp traditional homesteads, "It seemed they were everywhere now, multiplying and dividing, taking up the cracks and cervices between the clans, the gaps the illness had left. No house stayed empty, no land unclaimed. There was always a Lazarre..." (T 184). To exacerbate the land problems for the traditionalist, lumber companies were ready to pounce on ill-gotten allotment lands. The Turcot Lumber Company easily bought lands from mixed-bloods who were quickly eroding the original reserve which the government had set aside for the tribe. The Lazarres and the

Morrisseys signed purchase agreements with the company and urged others to do the same. Trees fell, and lands passed into the hands of White farmers, and tribal property continued to shrink while the factions raged on.

Tales of Burning Love is remarkable for the degree to which it picks up threads of stories from the four previous books and mingles the lives of the Chippewa with the German immigrant descendants. Jack's wife is June Morrissey Kashpaw, and Dot Adare Nanapush is his fifth wife. Jack's second wife, Eleanor, and her father Lawrence Schlick runs the funeral parlour in Fargo, where Mary and Celestine took Sita when she died. The idling car Lipsha steals at the train station in an attempt to spirit Gerry away turns out to be Jack's car with his son in the backseat, whom Jack has just kidnapped. Then, when Jack follows the car in a snowplow and ends up walking off into the field looking for the car he has just seen, it is June who comes to him in a wedding dress and leads him to Lipsha and the baby. Lyman saves Jack from financial ruin by hiring him as the project manager for the bingo palace to be built on the reservation, since the tribe wants to make the entire project Indian built and run. As Erdrich tells us in *The Bingo Palace*, "One story hinging into the next" (48), the stories which connect in often mysterious ways the people of this particular area of North Dakota.

June's story lingers in the air, and the novel is as much her story, although she is voiceless, as it is the story of the four narrators. The novel opens with the same scene that opened *Love Medicine*. There is familiar dialogue ("You got to be different," she breathed); but in *Tales of Burning Love*, Jack is going an

assumed name. After her death, her presence haunts him, who knew her only a few hours, just as it haunts the lives of her family throughout the reservation novels." Jack knew what he had done (married June) but kept telling himself that he was not the one. He was not the one. Still, he saw her constantly, wherever he looked, in his mind's eye" (10), and "He lived that one-night marriage every night" (382). Each of his subsequent four marriages is an attempt to redress the wrong he did June by letting her walk off into the snowstorm and not immediately reporting it to the authorities". In spite of all his other wives, he's stayed married to a ghost" (381), for "Here was a truth he knew: he couldn't hold on to a woman even since he let the first one walk from his arms into Easter snow" (13).

Dot is his fifth wife, although she is still legally married to Gerry, who is back in prison. *The Bingo Palace* reunites the lovers June and Gerry. Gerry believes Dot has divorces him (incorrect) and remarried (correct). When June in her blue Firebird leads Lipsha and him off the highway and into the field during a blizzard, Gerry leaps into her car, a victim of a surge of feelings for his former lover. However, as a trickster, Gerry does not follow June to Chippewa heaven, for he reappears with Dot and their daughter Shawn. June remains to lead Jack through the snowdrifts in order that he can rescue his son Jack Jr. and her son Lipsha. Dot and June, two dominant figures in the North Dakota novels, remain as intertwined in June's death as they were in life. They both have loved the same men, Gerry and Jack, but June is finally able to let the living return to their lovers, Gerry and Dot, Jack and Eleanor.

All the stories in *Tales of Burning Love* revolve around the person of Jack Mauser, as told by his wives, present and former. It is a true communal tale of four women who love or have loved Jack. Eleanor Schlick, his second wife and true love, is spoiled, sensual, neurotic, and brainy. Her father's passionate love for her mother has spoiled her for life as she seeks to replicate with Jack and others that same intensity and depth of feeling in her own life. Candice Pantamounty, wife number three, is Jack's old high school girlfriend and now a prominent family dentist. Unable to have children because of a perforated uterus and subsequent hysterectomy, she adopts Jack's baby with his fourth wife, Marlis Cook, and becomes her lover. Marlis, who lived off accident payments and had been living under her ex-sister-in-law's trailer, is as unpredictable and flighty as Candice is predictable and solid. Her relationship with Jack is brief and stormy, but long enough for them to marry and for her to get pregnant. Her complicated relationship with Candice, who is her child's adopted mother and her lover, brings her stability and brings Candice unremitting joy.

Just as the reservation novels end with a great guarded hope, so does *Tales of Burning Love*. Lovers reunite – Dot and Gerry, Eleanor and Jack, Candice and Marlis, and Lawrence follows Anna to be with her in death. Jack's Indian self finally emerges. Going to the reservation to work on the bingo palace means reuniting with a part of himself he thinks dead. "He had the sense of a swift undertow, pulling from beneath the glazed Formica table, tugging Home" (408). Thus, one more acculturated tribal member reconnects to his Indian community.

It is no accident that *The Antelope Wife* focuses on the lives of urban Chippewas living in Minneapolis. With Erdrich currently residing in the Twin Cities, the lives of urban Native Americans becomes a natural subject for her fiction. These are the Chippewa who remained in Minnesota, first on the reservations and then migrating into the cities when part of their numbers splintered off to hunt and live in North Dakota. These urban Indians differ from the Chippewa residing outside the reservation in the North Dakota novels that have left both the reservation and their Native American identity behind. These Chippewa, in *Gakahbekong* have formed their own community, and the Shawno, Whiteheart Beads, and Roy families function similarly to the Kashpows, Nanapushes, Lamartines and Morrisseys on the North Dakota reservations. They intermarry, they feud, they celebrate and mourn together, and *The Antelope Wife* is the story of their contemporary urban reservation.

These urban Indians are the product of the 1950s and the U.S. Government's effort to "terminate" Native Americans from federal support and protection. House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 108 and Public Law (PL) 280 served as official notice of the government's abrogation of Indian stewardship and led to federal efforts to relocate Native Americans into the cities where better education and employment opportunities existed. In 1954, the BIA established Relocation Branches in most of the major U.S. cities and were responsible for shepherding more than 30,000 Native Americans off their reservations and into nearby cities (Trigger and Washburn 242-43) Although the effort at first saw a majority of these relocated Indians returning to their home reservations due to

an inability to adapt to city living, this marked the beginning of the migration off the reservations and into the nearby cities. Grandmother Zosie and Mary come from this older generation of tribal members born on the reservation, raised with communal values as speakers of the tribal language and alternating living between their reservation and the city.

The second generation urban Indian may have been born on the reservation, but they are definitely at home in the city. This group still retains certain Indian values and orientation and prefers Indian communities, yet Arther M. Harkins and Richard G. Woods in *Attitudes of Minneapolis Agency Personnel Toward Urban Indians* describes this group as a basically stable, employed, middle-class, married Chippewa population residing in Minneapolis (27-28). Richard Whiteheart Beads and Klaus Shawno both work for the first Native American Disposal Service in the United States and, until their drinking binge, live comfortably in the city. Rozin Whiteheart Beads is a teacher, and her lover Frank Shawno owns and runs his own bakery.

The third generation urban Indians (like Cally Whiteheart Beads and Cecille Shawno) represent a fairly assimilated group. They were born and raised in Minneapolis, do not know the tribal language or culture, and have little contact with their home reservation. While Cally spends time on the reservation after her twin sister's death, both she and Cecille are acculturated Chippewas. Cally's stay on the reservation from her eleventh year to her eighteenth year fills in a cultural void that living in the city created. Even so, she is unfamiliar with many Chippewa traditions, and her grandmothers, unlike the traditional

grandparents, only pass on stories and traditions when Cally presses them to do so. Cecille, on the other hand, has no desire to learn the stories, language, or traditions. She runs a Kung Fu studio, dyes her hair blond, and is an Indian only by heritage. Nevertheless, even for these assimilated Anishinaabeg, their Indian community centers their lives. They live in the same part of town ad gather in a traditional manner for celebrations like Rozin and Grank's wedding. These communal occasions reinforce their Chippewa identity and culture and illustrate that living in the city is not a negation of traditional values but rather is only an adaptation to economic circumstances that have forced them away from their home reservations.

In *The Antelope Wife*, Erdrich completes the story of Chippewa people in the twentieth century. From the forming of the North Dakota reservation in the late 1800s to the exodus off the reservations and into the cities at the end of the 1900s, the story of the Chippewas is that of a people who survive despite disease, attempts of cultural and physical annihilation by the U.S. government, and the acculturation lure of the dominant Anglo culture. Erdrich's fictional stories of her Indian ancestors through the last century are her tribute to their adaptability and amazing powers to endure in a world that alternates between seeking their powers to endure in a world that alternates between seeking their extermination to encasing them in a governmental bureaucratic web.

Vizenor writes in *The Everlasting Sky* that "Stories are the circle of believable dreams and oratorical gestures showing meaning between the present and the past in the lives of the people. The stories change as the people change because

people, not facts, are the center of the Anishinable world" (69). Erdrich is a contemporary-traditional storyteller who draws portraits in order to construct a living history, a record of her people in the last century. Stories of people and stories of significant tribal events are fictionalised in her offering of Chippewa history and the history of immigrant families settling in North Dakota. Her technique includes her use of first person narrative derived from traditional autobiography, her rendering of tribal life through the voices of different community members, and her utilisation of the traditional story cycle, (stories centering around a central theme and pointing up particular people and events) to frame her various narrative voices. All these techniques are signs of cultural continuity. Her contemporary fiction signals a renewal of Indian values and ways of knowing as she transcends the old forms to render anew the story of her people.

Like Faulkner's Snopeses, Bundrens, and Compsons, Erdrich's Morrisseys, Lamartines, Nanapushes, Kashpaws, and Adares are individuals who come to represent the history of an entire region. Because of their emphasis on Chippewas living on and off the reservation, Erdrich's novels offer versions of history that are marginal to the American story of declaring independence to reap economic progress.

Despite their attention to historical contexts and subtexts, Erdrich's first two novels became a source of some controversy regarding their commitment to Native history. In a 1986 review of Erdrich's second novel, *The Beet Queen*, Leslie Marmon Silko argues that Erdrich is more interested in the kind of

dazzling language and self-referentiality associated with postmodernism than in representing Native American oral traditions, communal experiences, or history. In Silko's view, the kind of "self-referential writing" Erdrich practices "has an ethereal clarity and shimmering beauty because no history or politics intrudes to muddy the well of pure necessity contained within language itself." Whether or not one agrees with Silko's characterisation of postmodernism, with her criticism of *The Beet Queen* as apolitical and ahistorical, or with the implicit agenda she proposes for Erdrich, it is true that mainstream reviewers of Erdrich's first two novels, *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*, tended to praise her lyrical prose style and applaud her subtle, understated treatment of Native American issues. *Tracks* published in 1988, almost seems to be an answer to Silko's criticisms of *The Beet Queen* in that it overtly enrages political and historical issues. But writing such a novel did not come easily to Erdrich: the original four-hundred-page manuscript for *Tracks* lay in a drawer for ten years, and it was not until she had already worked backward in time from *Love Medicine* to *The Beet Queen* that Erdrich returned to the manuscript and began to link it to her already completed novels about contemporary generations of Chippewa and immigrant settlers in North Dakota.

In fact, concerning *Tracks*, Erdrich commented to one critic, "I always felt this was a great burden, this novel." Erdrich's choice of words in this comment is striking, for "burden" is precisely the term Hayden White uses to characterise history in a chapter titled "The Burden of History", where he argues that "it is only by disenthralling human intelligence from the sense of history that men will be able to confront creatively the problems of the present". White's

comments about history are an extension of Nietzche's caution, in *The Use and Abuse of History*, that excessive historicism can lead to paralysis rather than action, that it can lead to carrying on traditions and values that have lost their utility. How might such an excess of history weigh on Erdrich, writing in *Tracks* about the forces dividing the Chippewa as a tribe in the early part of this century? One of the problems of Native American history is trying to record these losses and tragedies without falling into the pre-dominant late nineteenth, early twentieth century image of vanishing Indians, of totally victimised and colonised Native on the verge of extinction. On the other hand, the writer-historian cannot ignore the painful events of the past simply because they seem to lend themselves to being organised along the lines of a tragic narrative.

Most of the Native American novels are looked upon as texts that "emphasise the important role of memory and orally transmitted history in ordering and understanding present experience" (Findlay 159). Especially Momaday, Silko and to a certain extent Welch structured their plot upon an "archetypal" (Campbell 1949), mythic pattern of the quest, thereby imparting their protagonists' personal histories with a rather ahistorical, universal quality. At the same time each of the three novelists develops a special concern for Native American history. While Momaday is primarily concerned with the (inter)cultural history of ideas, Silko's view of Native American history is embedded in a vision of world history, seen as the story of man's relation toward his environment. Welch, on the other hand, develops a view of Native American history mainly in terms of blood and kinship.

The documentation of history in fictional mode is visible in *Slash* by Jeannette Armstrong. Published in the year 1985, *Slash* is the first novel by a Native woman in Canada that deals primarily with the protagonist Tommy Kelasket's struggle for human rights and self determination. Slash is the story of one Indian man's search for a "way out of this living death by way of prison, spiritual conformation and active political struggle". (Ryga 9). It was primarily written to give the Native perspective in the North American Indian protest movements of 1980's for a contemporary social studies grade eight to eleven. This kind of political activism in the form of nationalism in a post-colonial society is an act of liberation for the Natives from their imperialist oppressors. Bearing the shape of an oral tale, the narrative is broken down with historical events like Wounded Knee, Red Power movement, battle of Alcatraz and the early land claims struggle. The growing militancy of 1960's movement was essential since "violence was sometimes needed when nobody listens, but it is needed now mostly to help Indian, people wake themselves up more than to wake up the White (Slash 73). These struggles were also meant to show the discriminatory attitude in handling Indian matters and also unearth the manipulation committed by Bureau of Indian Affairs over the control of Indian affairs in the event called 'Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan'. These political events developed group consciousness among the Natives where they felt proud in being an Indian. In Slash's view "the biggest victories won't be in politics and deals made, but in the putting back together of the shambles, of our people in their thinking and attitude". (148).

The historical thrust in the novel is well marked and is defended by Armstrong "as a tool to use in education to give not just the feeling of what happened just prior to the American Indian movement and military period ..... what the people were feeling what they dreamed, and what the pain and joy were during that time. (Lutz 14).

In sharp contrast to the novel mentioned above is the text entitled *Fools Crow*, by James Welch, a historical novel that uses myth to instill survival among the Natives. Although the texts includes the historical events leading to the massacre of a band of Blackfeet by the United States Cavalry on January 23, 1870, Welch tells this history for the most part, from the Blackfeet point of view. Welch develops his novel as prose epic where he presents a hero who must survive for his people. For this he connects his hero to these myths and historical events. This epic development within the novel serves to emphasise the importance of survival myth in Native culture.

Within the nineteenth century time frame of the novel, Welch evokes the past by retelling ancient Blackfeet myths, describes the present by implicitly paralleling Fools Crow's life to the lives of his contemporaries and to a certain extent to culture hero myths, and predicts the future by explicitly connecting his hero to an extension of the myth of Feather Woman ---- the Woman-who-married-the star. The myths of Fools Crow is timeless in that even now Native Americans are called upon to embody a courage not unlike Fools Crow's to achieve cultural survival. Like *Fools Crow*, Robert J. Canley uses historical

novel form in his *Mountain Windsong* (1992), the love story of a couple separated by trial of tears.

Unlike his contemporaries, Thomas King is one of the first Native Writers to generate widespread interest in both Canada and the United States. A mixed-blood with Cherokee, Greek and German descent, his fiction / work too are placed in an 'in-between' position – as a part White and part Native writer. In the words of Weaver, King takes a pan-Indian stance, concerning himself with issues than run across variety of tribal groups, without necessarily being limited to one.

His pan Indian self positioning becomes a powerful tool, which acknowledges post-contact interaction with non-Natives, yet focuses on the experiences of contemporary Natives.

> I think a lot of people think of pan-Indianism as a diminution of "Indian", but I think of it as simply a reality of contemporary life. Native culture has never been static even though Western literature would like to picture it that way . . . . (T)here are Indians upon Indians in novels who go off the reservation into the city and are destroyed, who come back to the reservation and can't make it. In reality there are lots of Indians who go off the reserve, who come back to the reserve, who work, who go off the reserve again, who keep going back and forth and they manage. (Weaver 150).

In his first novel *Medicine River* (1990) the story is narrated by Will, a colourless good natured 40 year Metis photographer who has moved from Toronto to Medicine River, a small prairie town where he had lived as a boy. He soon gets involved with the Native world of the community – the Friendship Centre the basketball team, and the bar of the American Hotel which King portrays in a lighthearted manner. Various local Native characters make brief cameo appearances in accounts of birth, wedding, funerals as well as wife abuse, RCMP unrest and a jail sentence, drinking and suicide – (a normal feature / way of life in most Indian reserves).

The novel encompasses fragmentary recollections that intersect the present time. Will, the protagonist re-experiences painful childhood memories of family life without a father, as well as memories of a broken relationship with a White woman. The ending is inconclusive. The reader is not sure whether Will's psychological journey has enabled him in the end to make peace with his early unhappy years or bury the past. According to Gerry William, the novel is structured with chapters having their own themes "ranging from love to hate to abuse to deception" (53). The most fascinating thing about this novel is a deep and abiding sense of humour and compassion that runs across the stories.

In keeping with the stories that are termed as borderland fiction – a term borrowed by Gloria Anzeldua, Thomas King's stories reflect and critique the border dynamics across Canada and USA. When the narrator of *Truth and Bright Water* crosses into Canada with his father for a day trip, Thomas King's characters look at the border racism and the resulting power associated with it:

'Border's coming up', he says. 'Time to get rid of it.'

'What?'

'The grass'.

'Marijuana?'

Canadian guards find even a little bit of seed, and they go ape-shit', says my father. 'Better lose the booze too'.

'you're kidding, right?'

'Canadian jails are worse than the Mexican ones'.

'But you're kidding, right?'

'You know why?' My father gears down. We slide through the American border and roll to a stop at a log office with a Canadian flag on the pole. 'Mexican jails are full of Mexicans', says my father, 'but Canadian jails are full of Indians.' (85-6)

In *Green Grass Running Water* (1993), as in much contemporary American fiction in which altering is an issue the narrator demonstrates an insiders knowledge of two culture : the heritage the deprives a discrete cultural or ethnic community and the dominant culture's Euro-American traditions.

Thomas King's novel encompasses political contexts which define Canadians against the negative examples of United States history and popular culture, but at the same time situate the First Nation peoples of Canada as other in relation to Euro-Canadian culture. Thus, the positioning of individual characters and groups of characters with respect to the dominant culture is unstable. On

occasion, Thomas King's Native characters identify themselves as Canadian. Latisha and George Morningstar – whose name Latisha likes because it sounds slightly Indian, although George is not (King 143) – articulate the tensions of their marriage in terms of a nationalistic debate focusing on the difference between Canadians and U.S. Americans. Before George's psychological imperialism and Latisha's strained forbearance lead to the collapse of the relationship, Latisha is reduced to whispering in the dark to her infant son "a chant, a mantra, 'You are a Canadian. You are Canadian' " (176).

Thomas King is a persuasive teller of community tales. His first novel, *Medicine River* (1989), is "peopled with delightful characters, threaded with emotion and poignancy, and rippling with human, Will's tales of Medicine River bring to life a wonderful and wondrous community," (Tony Hillerman). His feel for land and his people are exemplified in the setting of the novel:

> Medicine River sat on the broad back of the prairies. It was an unpretentious communities of buildings barked law against the weather that slid off the eastern face of the Rockies. Summer was hot in Medicine River and filled with grasshoppers and mosquitoes. Winter was cold and long. Autumn was the best season. It wasn't good, just better than the other three, then there was the wind. I generally tried to keep my mouth shut about the wind in Medicine River (I).

While King acknowledges that his material is Canadian, he disavows fundamental concern with nationalism or with distinctions between the Euro-American cultures of the United States and Canada:

> I guess I'm supposed to say that I believe in the line that exists between the U.S. and Canada, but for me it's an imaginary line. It's a line from somebody else's imagination; it's not my imagination. It divided people like the Mohawk into Canadian Mohawks and U.S. Mohawks. They're the same people. It divided the Blackfoot who live in Browning from the Blackfoot who live at Standoff, for example. So the line is a political line, that border line. It wasn't there before the Europeans came. (Rooke 72).

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, when Lionel Red Dog, "Canadian citizen, government employee, and status Blackfoot Indian" (King 62), gets caught up inadvertently in the series of confrontations between AIM (American Indian Movement) activists and agents of the United States government that culminates at Wounded Knee, Lionel's allegiance to his Native identity ultimately costs him his place in the Canadian government. Later in the novel, the narrative "I" offers a bitter parody of the words of the Canadian National Anthem ("O Canada, our home and Native land....") that articulates Native resentment of exploitation by Canadian Europeans:

> "I know that song", says Coyote. "Hosanna da, in-in the highest, hosanna da forever..."

"You got the wrong song", I says. "This song goes 'Hosanna da, our home on Natives land'."

"Oh", says Coyote. "That song". (King 299).

The title of the novel is itself a metonymic allusion to the bad faith that separates Native and European Americans. It is a coded reminder of a history of appropriation and the instability of European intentions. "As long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn't mean anything. It was a metaphor. Eli knew that. Every Indian on the reserve knew that. Treaties were hardly sacred documents. They were contracts, and no one signed a contract for eternity". In contemporary usage, the meaning of the phrase has been inverted: it is understood to mean "not forever". But the slippage has occurred not so much in the text as the context – not the "forever" of sacred documents, but the "forever" of contracts, which Eli figures is at best five or ten years (King 296).

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the narrative "I" is the voice of a trickster, the companion or alter ego of coyote. The complex narration proceeds on two levels that gradually converge. The "inner" story space offers a narrative about a group of Canadian Blackfoot characters, who are drawn back to their reservation for the annual Sun Dance. Interspersed are conversations among six transcendent characters who are attempting both to tell a proper story, from the beginning, and, and "fix up the world" (133) by intervening in the lives of the characters in the inner story. These transcendent figures include four Native elders (masquerading as Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and

Hawkeye, but actually avatars of First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman) who have escaped from a government-run sanatorium in the United States, as well as the trickster Coyote and the narrative "I".

Thomas King's work and his focus on the Canadian-U.S. border, provide a useful alterna(rra)tive to the current concerns of border studies by exploring the relevance of the forty-ninth parallel for Native peoples. Certainly what is at stake at the forty-ninth parallel is considerably different from the overt and often deadly policing of the border at the Rio Grande. The economic disparity between Mexicans and Americans also creates a tension that is much less apparent in the case of Canada and the United States, where levels of poverty are quite similar, and basic amenities are often identical. As Clark Blaise describes it, the forty-ninth parallel is more concerned with 'psychic death', especially for those who go south of the border (4). Nationalism, in this context, operates on the level of ideological and emotional commitment.

Thomas King's third novel *Truth & Bright Water* challenges the reader's abilities at border crossing. Within a narrative set in the present and written in the present tense, King has embedded a wealth of stories and characters from Indian history. Events and names in the narrator's story reveals events in the tragic history of Indian removals "The bark reads history as story and story a history" (Ridington 80). It is set in the border communities of Bright Water a Canadian Indian reserve, and Truth, an adjacent American railroad town. One side is Native, the other White, but the character cross often, if not easily, from

are side to the other. The narrator is a fifteen year old boy whose parents have shop on either side of Division Street in Truth. The actual town that correspond too Truth and Bright Water are Sweet Grass, Montana and Coutis, Alberta.

The novel pairs the narrator with his cousin, Lum, to suggest "right and left handed twins from oral stories, creative figures, halves of a pair" (Hoy). The narrator is a thinker, a storyteller, and as the book ends, a minstrel. Lum is a runner, a wounded warrior, "the boy with the bad eye" (102) and in the end, a jumper (resonant with the American paratrooper's cry, (Geronimo"). Geronimo was trained to be great runner and fearless warrior. He was a "war shaman" (Opler 200; Barrett 32). He had a bad eye as the result of a bullet wound (Barrett 101). Apache tradition attributes eye defects to "coyote sickness" (Opler 226). In the novel, Lum is training to race in Bright Water's Indian Days celebration, but he is troubled by the ghosts of lost Indian children. He shoots bullets into the ground by his cousin's feet, like Apache boys who train by slinging rocks at each other (Barret 23). In a remarkable display of daring, he even runs across a rail road bridge in front of a moving train (73). According to Opler, Geronimo had coyote power, ghost power and power over guns (Opler 311). Behind Lum's story is Geronimo's tragic history.

The challenges inherent in creatively reconfiguring the border and addressing Native concerns, far more immediate than those of nation, are graphically highlighted at the end of Truth and Bright Water, when Lum, Tecumseh's cousin and friend, commits suicide, jumping from the unfinished bridge that straddles the forty-ninth parallel. Lum, who is haunted by memories of a dead

mother who abandoned the family, and who is the victim of paternal physical abuse, is eager to leave his home town, telling Tecumseh that nobody 'comes back to Truth and Bright Water, unless they are crazy or dying' (67). But Lum is a young boy who lacks the practical means to come or go as he wishes; still searching for a summer job, and, in the meantime, without money, he relies on his father for food and shelter. Over the course of the novel, he is severely beaten and thrown out of the house by his father. Although Tecumseh notices the bruises and asks him about them, Lum remains silent, retreating instead to a fantasy world in which he wrestles with the legacy of his mother, asking himself repeatedly: 'Did you really think she was going to come back?' (176).

Green Grass, Running Water was a comedy in the sense that it ends, if not with a marriage, then at least with an annunciation, a conception and the Sun Dance. *Truth & Bright Water* is tragedy that ends with the death of Lum and the faithful dog, Soldier. It is a tragedy in the same way that removing the Cherokees from their homelands and placing the bones of Indian children "in drawers and boxes and stuck away on dusty shelves" (250) are tragic assaults on Indian people. Both novels, however, end with an Indian ceremony.

Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) is hailed as the exemplary Native classic text. The novel has underscored the Native people's solidarity in encountering exile and territorial dispossession. It has displayed an authentic understanding of the dialectics of settler invader reality. It has involved in succinctly subverting the whole range of western representational strategies: the linear narratives, circular narratives and literary stereotypes. King alludes

to the historical events described by Sidney Lanier in the epigraph and pays homage to the voice of Okanagan storyteller Hary Robinson. In the opening section readers are introduced to the significance of historical event by a professor of Native History Dr. Alberta Frank at the University of Calgary. Thomas King repeatedly refers to the incarceration of seventy two Indians at Fort Marion in 1800 and forms this as a thematic touchstone to the crux of the novel. Here, the brief understanding of Fort Marion historical incident becomes essential to follow the thematic lines of the novel. In the summer 1874 US Govt. Officials indulged in brutal campaign in confining the Indian tribes on to the reserved plains. To protect the remnant of Southern herd various tribes Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Plains Apache and Comanche protested against the slaughter of buffaloes and artificial boundaries imposed on them. As a recreation, military hounded the tribes, burned their camps and cut off all the means of food supplies. The starving conditions and the freezing winter enforced the tribes to surrender. To complete the subjugation Government rounded up 72 individuals and accused them of crimes against Whites. They were considered guilty, chained to wagons and were transported to Fort Sill known as Oklahoma. In April 1875, these prisoners were believed to be executed at Saint Augustine, Florida.

Thomas King's novels depict the Fort Marion incident and focuses on the unusual fact that the prisoners have become warrior artists. The experimental attitude of the jailor lieutenant Richard H. Pratt decides the fate of 'Florida boys' or the prisoners. Pratt introduces the prisoners to reading and writing and offers religious instruction. He exposes them to manual labour and allows then

to earn money by producing trinkets and drawing books with autobiographical pictures. These books contained striking image of Native people lives. Pratt provides them ledger nooks, coloured pencils as a way to reduce the boredom of confinement. King's emphasis on the artwork of prisoners brings specific attention to Native acts of self-representation. The ledger books of the Native prisoners are in contrast to western maps and the European modes of map making. The act of writing in a ledger book is considered a gesture of defiance and self-assertion. Marlene Goldman in his article 'Mapping and Dreaming: Native resistance in Green Grass, Running Water' considers ledger book as a silent refill without necessary ammunition. He is of the opinion: "Maps play an important role in Native culture.....Natives possessed strong sense of history and they plotted history pictorially....modes of representation changed when non-Native explores and traders travelled across great plain and adopted different materials for inscribing history". (*Journal of Canadian Literature. 25*) Here King self-consciously positions himself as a warrior artist and speaks for the need of resistance and preservation of Native cultures by reflexively addressing Fort Marion episode. He considers the means of Native people to disseminate artistic representations of tribal life. Kings allusions to Fort Marion and Plains ledger art constitute a polyphonic discourses located at distinct cultures.

In the first section, the narrator tells Coyote a story, which focuses on mythical first women and Adhamn on a train to Florida. First woman and Adhamn along with imprisoned Indians chained arrive in Florida. First women disguising as the lone Ranger strolls out leaving Adhamn behind (Thomas King. 32.) In the

second section the narrator tells Coyote a story featuring changing woman. This story ends with changing women being dragged by soldiers. The changing woman sees the soldiers around and also Indians sitting on the ground drawing pictures. In the third section the narrator's tale of Thought women ends in similar fashion. The soldiers who arrest Thought women carry flowers in their hair and this reflects the changing times. In the fourth section, the narrator's story about the old woman concludes in the same way with military putting her on the train to Florida. The Thought Woman meets the same fate as the soldiers throw her in Fort Manor.

One of the important aspects in narrative writings is the ubiquitous presence of trickster figure or mythical figure. Thomas King subscribes to this element to the complete extent. This perspective is evident in the writings of West Indian writer, Wilson Harris. Wilson Haris creates the figure of Anancy (spider) for the imaginative exploration of the fragmented history. Thomas King creates the trickster with the same vision. Trickster figure is regarded as the transformer and cultural hero and is addressed by several names like Ravon, Old Man, Fools Cap, Crow mink Coyote, Blue jay and Badgar. His presence is considered to be heroic and he is identified with creative powers. Thomas King in his short story *The one about Coyote going West* identifies the cultural role of Coyote in the acts of singing and dancing. Thomas King through the trickster figure exposes the historical blunder committed by Narratives in allowing the White man. In the short story King says: "Every one knows who found us Indians. Eric the lucky and Christopher Cartier and that Jacques Columbus come along later. Those one's get lost. Float about. Work around. Get mixed up. Ho, ho, ho,

those one's cry, we are lost. So we got to find them. Help them out. Feed them. Show them around" (King 133). Thomas King fulfils the role of the historian in recuperating the History of Natives through the trickster figure as an explorer. Jeannette Armstrong subscribes to the same sense of exploration in her short story *This is a Story*. Here, the trickster figure is presented as a cultural awakener. The trickster figure addressed, as Coyote is known for sleeping all the time. When it wakes up it finds everything strange. Coyote finds one who talks in the language of the people. It sees lot of people in bad shape who walk around with their minds hurt: "Coyote had seen lots of people in bad shape. They couldn't see or hear good any more. Their bodies were poisoned". (*All my Relations 133*). Coyote decides to change the situation and work for the betterment in which the people were placed: "Now Coyote could see the reason for being awakened early. There was work to be done. It was time to change the Swallows from monsters into something but didn't destroy things" (133). The trickster figure provides space for the Native writers to create a world, which replaces the disorder with more Native concerns. In this novel King achieves success in forcefully conveying the cultural differentiation through the trickster figure.

Brian Swan characterises Native American poetry as "poetry of historic witness" which "grows out of a post that is very much a present" (xvii) in the introduction to Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry. Similarly in bis forward to the anthology *New and Old Voices of Wah'kon-tah: Contemporary Native American Poetry*, Vine Deloria, Jr. claims Native poetry will "tell you more about the Indian's travels in historical experience than all the books written

and lectures given" (ix-x). This clearly reflects the weight of history in contemporary Native American Literature. Deloria characterises the work of the Native writer as presenting a "reflection statement of what it means and has meant to live in a present which is continually overwhelmed by the fast axis of others of the meaning" (25).

In his introduction to the collection *American Indians and the Problem of History*, Calvin Martin, for example, discusses the standard imposition of an anthropological perspective on the history of Native American people who themselves proceed from a biological metaphysic and he characterises such a move as "ideological colonisation" (9). The situation is further complicated because, of course, the creation and interpretations of histories have also functioned directly as the justifications for possession or dispossession, and the forums for supposed historical accounts have always included the various literary genres. Among the many contemporary scholars who have recognised these connections between history, literature and colonisation are Richard Drinnon (*Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building*), Richard Slotkin (*Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*, 1600-1860), and Ward Churchill, whose recent study *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonisation of American Indian*. includes subsections entitled "History as Propaganda of the Victors" and "Literature as a Weapon in the Colonisation of the American Indian".

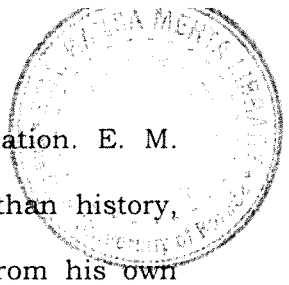
In the trenches of the Native American literary movement, responses to the representations and misrepresentations of history have appeared in many forms

ranging from Neihardt's rendering of Black Elk's account of Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee in the "autobiography" *Black Elk Speaks*, to Linda Hogan's dramatisation of the Oklahoma oil boom in her novel *Mean Spirit*, to Simon Ortiz's exploration of the history and implications of mining in the Grants Uranium Belt in the poetry and narrative of *Fight Back For the Sake of the People – For the Sake of the Land*, to Vine Deloria, Jr's challenge of the bases and tenets of Western history in essays like those from *God is Red*. Within these various literary forms, the tacks Native authors have taken also run the gamut of possibility and have included revisionist accounts, pre-emptive interpretations of contemporary historical events, "eye-for-an-eye" propagandistic distortions, attempts at completely autonomous representations, and multiple combinations of all the above.

Vizenor's book *The People Named the Chippewa* (the very title recalls the renaming of the Anishinaabeg) also has as its purpose the re-forming of history into personal story. The subtitle of the book identifies the pieces as "Narrative Histories" which Vizenor places in opposition to linear historical accounts:

> The Anishinaabeg did not have written histories; their world views were not linear narratives that started and stopped in manifest binaries. The tribal past lived as an event in visual memories and oratorical gestures: woodland identities turned on dreams and visions. (24).

In his accounts, Vizenor chooses a narrative form, he allows the historical significance of oral tradition, dreams and visions and perhaps most



significantly, he makes a place in historical telling for imagination. E. M. Forster claimed in *Aspects of the Novel* that "fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond the evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence" (63). Through the power of imagination (what Momaday called "speculation"), Vizenor attempts to "restore" the past, to bring it to life by imbuing the evidence with suggestion, implication and possibility.

Fools Crow is a familiar looking historical novel, more or less similar to Scott's Waverley novels. Like Scott, Welch writes about a romantic people whose wild, free way of life is over but not forgotten. In fact, the Blackfeet, like the Scots, are a warlike people who love nature, have little use for material possessions, live in the wilds, and are crushed and civilised by the less courageous but more numerous Anglo Saxons. Like the Blackfeet the Scots were tribal – gentile is the phrase Lukacs uses – clans being the chief social unit (57). The appeal of the traditional historical novel is that it makes the reader long nostalgically for a way of life that has been destroyed.

In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Gerald Vizenor has written a very different type of historical novel, a postmodern version of the genre in which he abandons verisimilitude for absurdist fantasy. This may seem "unhistorical" to those who expect historical fiction to look like a Waverley novel, but Vizenor is just as interested in historical questions as Scott or Welch; he merely uses a different set of conventions to consider them.

In fact, *Heirs* is only partially a historical novel: the sections on Columbus, Pocahantas, and Louis Riel are based on history, but much of the novel fits more closely the conventions of other genres, in particular the murder mystery and utopian science fiction tale. However, Vizenor's ideas of history when contrasted with those of more traditional historical writers like Welch, serve to point up the literary nature of all historical writing.

Vizenor's political ideas may seem different from Welch's in that *Fool's Crow* ends with the Blackfeet living among Whites in Montana, while *Heirs* ends with Vizenor's vision of a utopian separatist community. But both Vizenor and Welch are pragmatists who steer a middle course between confrontation and submission, advocating tribal basis of Indian life, and driving the best bargain one can with the Whites that circumstances allow. *Fools Crow* is set in the past; Welch endorses the course the Blackfeet actually took. *Heirs* ends with a futurist fantasy which explores what might happen if tribal sovereignty were extended and bingo revenue greatly increased.

In his non-fiction works Vizenor makes it clear he avoids the extremes of the confrontational policies of AIM, which he detests and has fought for years, and the collusional corruption of tribal officials who get rich by playing footsie with White developers (*Crossbloods xxvi*).

Vizenor shares Welch's organicist conception of history, though Vizenor's supernatural forces are less anthropomorphic. In the case of *Fools Crow* Blackfeet deities influence the course of history. In *Heirs* there is no mention of

a deity with a providential plan; history is working out of stories in the blood, stories passed from one people to another, from the Jews to the Mayas, descendants of the Lost Tribe of Israel, to Columbus and his heirs among the Anishinaabe. Columbus first sensed the stories when he met Sephardic Jews in Europe before his voyage to the New World. Samana lured him to San Savador with the idea of liberating the stories in his blood.

Right from the beginning the narrator Wills voice brings 'people, not characters' into life. His family history seeps in. Excerpts from his father's letters addressed to his mother are used as a narrative strategy to unfurl the family saga. The bitter-sweet experiences and ups and downs of Native women / men are thrown into relief. Native's community life and culture, with all its merits and defects are delineated imaginatively by Thomas King. No strict chronology is maintained, rather the past and present are freely coalesced.

Will, the narrator, now has a studio, 'Medicine River Photography', in Medicine River. Prior to that, for a long time he was in Toronto. The character that changed the very course of Will's life and attitude is Harlen Big bear. His is a pervasive presence in the whole novel, perhaps in the whole community. Let us have a feel of Harlen Big bear through Will.

> Harlen Big bear was like the prairie wind. You never knew he was coming or when he was going to leave (...) Harlen had a strong sense of survival, not just for himself but for other people as well. He took on a lot of weight, and the one thing he enjoyed more than helping someone out

with their burden was sharing it with others. 'If you pass misery around and get everyone to take a piece Harlen liked to say, 'You won't throw up from the taste too much grief'. (1-2)

Both Erdrich and King have depicted contemporary history and traditional history to bring about continuity and inter-relatedness of Native culture. In the light of the novels discussed above, it becomes clear that as a result of oral nature of Native American traditional knowledge and detrimental impact of U.S. federal policies, the Native history appears essentially fragmented. In their depiction of history, both the writers have shown their strength as great storytellers. Since storytelling is at heart of oral Native culture, the next chapter would examine the storytelling mode of narration of Leslie Silko and Ruby Slipperjack. This storytelling mode would incorporate the traditional voices of the Grandmother, trickster figures, other Native mythical characters in relation to the present time in order to achieve a holistic sense of Native identity.

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