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Tewahia:ton Tipaacimowin--

Two Stories Seen Intertribally: The First Novels of Ruby Slipperjack and Thomas King.

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Submitted in respect of the partial requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
at Lakehead University.

Tewahia:ton - Kanien'Kehaka (Mohawk) for "Let us write"
Tipaacimowin - Ahnisnawbe (Ojibway) for "a story"

1997

Niawen:
Eunice McDonald-Rice
Renate Eigenbrod
Ruby Slipperjack-Farrell
Jeanette Lynes

Abstract

Ruby Slipperjack's Honour The Sun (1987) and Thomas King's Medicine River (1989) are the two novels I discuss. Slipperjack's novel investigates the adolescence of a female protagonist known as the Owl, who passes through the vicissitudes of many family changes and yet sustains her will to grow into adulthood. Her mother is also a key character who shows the reader her view of a Northern Ontario land and her love for her children. The second story examined has a male principal character. King's work employs humour, the situating of traditional people in modern times and a Trickster-like character, Harlen Bigbear, as the reader views relationships that are common to people of any colour. Will, the central character, explores both his ancestry and his love for Louise as the reader follows his life in the past and present.

One significant aspect that is used to examine both works is the Gayanashagowa--The Great Law of Peace and Power and its respect for and interplay between the community and the individual. Rooted in the formation of the Six Nations, this law has grown to be a part of the constitutions of the United States, Canada and the United Nations. It is my view, therefore, that this way of life has also influenced Native people in general and more specifically Native literature in some instances.

Supported by my traditional Indian perspective that is intertribal, the reader of both works is introduced to Canadian Native Literature. Enduring images of the land and community life that all Canadians and readers of any nation can relate to carry the novels through their unique landscapes. The Medicine Wheel, an

aboriginal way of viewing the world, is examined by me as an interpretive entry point to a wholistic understanding of the actions of the characters and their families. I discuss the metaphor of the circle, with its journey through the Four Directions, as a effective way to look at the writing of these two authors and Native literature generally.

As an outgrowth of the Native practice of storytelling, these books are part of the growing body of aboriginal literature. The experiences of King's and Slipperjack's characters are set in Canadian contemporary times so that we may learn more of Native people; yet the stories are timeless in their vision of a world all may appreciate.

I lay on my back, staring into the blackness of the room. Everything is alright again. Everything is the way it should be. Smiling, I imagine being a blackbird. The warm air gently lifts my breast, filling me, through me, and I become one with the night, only to emerge again as Me, to honour the sun, in the early morning light.

Ruby Slipperjack, Honour The Sun

The earth was created by the assistance of the sun, and it should be left as it was. . . . The country was made without lines of demarcation, and it is no man's business to divide it. . . . I see the whites all over the country gaining wealth, and see their desire to give us lands which are worthless. . . . The earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are the same. Say to us if you can say it, that you were sent by the Creative Power to talk to us. Perhaps you think the Creator sent you here to dispose of us as you see fit. If I thought you were sent by the Creator I might be induced to think you had a right to dispose of me. Do not misunderstand me, but understand me fully with reference to my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with as I chose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it. I claim a right to live on my land, and accord you the privilege to live on yours.

Heinmot Tooyalaket (Chief Joseph)
of the Nez Perces from Dee Brown's
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

I think over again my small adventures
My fears
Those small ones that seemed so big
For all the vital things I had to get and
reach
And yet there is only one great thing
The only thing
To live to see the great day that dawns
And the light that fills the world

Old Inuit Song--from the film Never Cry Wolf

There is some confusion about the word Indian, a mistaken belief that it refers somehow to the country, India. When Columbus washed up on the beach in the Carribean, he was not looking for a country called India. Europeans were calling that country Hindustan in 1492. Look it up on the old maps. Columbus called the tribal people he met "Indio," from the Italian in dio, meaning "in God."

Russell Means in Where White Men Fear to Tread

....I would caution readers and students of American Indian Life and culture to remember that Indian America does not in any sense function in the same ways or from the same assumptions that western systems do. Unless and until that is clearly acknowledged, it is virtually impossible to make much sense out of the voluminous materials available concerning American Indians.

From The Sacred Hoop by Paul Gunn Allen

Table of Contents:

Foreword
In and Out of the Circle: Families, Native Writers and Critics, Nia:wen/Acknowledgements. . . .

Pan-Indianism informs a good part of the work to follow; this philosophy briefly defined, implies, in my understanding, the shared visions of different tribes working towards common needs and desires. Where Thomas King would seem to support Pan-Indianism, Ruby Slipperjack could be seen by many as not part of this way. As well, while I do view her as a key part of this thesis, I do not see her as necessarily supporting Pan-Indianism. Her work does share both a Native and non-Native perspective similar to King's vision.

Family is the central figure in Slipperjack's Honour The Sun and King's Medicine River. Nuclear families, extended families, tribal family groups and aspects of all families appear throughout these two novels. The lines of interaction between their characters pass through the emotional and "magically" charged word family as their stories unfold. And what unfolds and involves us is not only a story of characters in a setting but an unfolding of an art form, the contemporary aboriginal art

of storytelling.

This thesis began in the International Year of Indigenous People and continued into the International Decade of the Family. My family has always been an inspiration for much of what I do. As I grow older, find and get to know more of all my relations, I am often reminded where much of this writing begins.

Kahnawake is a fairly well known reserve south-west of Montreal. My father belonged to this Kanien'Kehaka band and met my mother in Montreal. As I grew older I became more and more aware of the significant roots in my life. And my relations and "family" have grown larger with every investigation into the past. It was partly because my late father had registered my brother and I in the band that I later explored my heritage. And like many Native people it is more than birth links that make us aboriginal or Indian; it is also Mother Earth and all the Grandmothers and Grandfathers that walked this land before us.

To be Kanien'Kehaka, which is Mohawk for "People of the Flint," or a Status Indian in general, is not a case for partiality. Canadian law declares, at present, that one becomes 100% Indian no matter what one's actual ancestry. For me it has been a never-ending growth process to find more and more of what this ancestry means. Despite the Government of Canada's laws, though, I can never deny what both parents have given me. Both spoke English and French and both reflected cultures born in this oldest part of Canada. In this personal reflection can be seen the growth of a new culture with all the implications of a "new

land" for those who came from Europe.

There is another more profound family-linked reflection that is part of the Native culture of Turtle Island or North America. Specifically, it was in what is now called Quebec that the Onkwehonwe, or Iroquois as the French called us, first met Jacques Cartier. His misunderstanding about the word "kanata," which is Onkwehonwe for the words "small village," lead him to believe that the land he had "discovered" was called Kanata or as we know it today, Canada. With all the awkwardness of families meeting at a wedding, Canada had its beginnings. From this wedding many children were born. One child, grown to maturity some seven generations from that moment of contact and continuous presence of the European on Turtle Island, is the literature of North America's First People.

Called Indian Literature, Aboriginal, Native or Indigenous Literature, the naming, like the literature itself, is continually evolving. It is difficult to name this contemporary literary offspring or its beginnings; as the earliest "birth date" my research can determine is in 1968. With the publication of N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn in that year, and its Pulitzer prize recognition, Indigenous literature, or more precisely in this instance, Amerindian Literature, as my research indicates its name, entered the modern mainstream. I use the 1968 date as a possible guideline to what I mean by contemporary. Yet the form that influences our stories is as old as any other tradition. These contemporary stories share a past light with

all classic tales of different cultures. They are informed by the visions and myths of an uncommon heritage. Entertained and informed by the primordial tradition of storytelling, this child, new to another language of expression but linked to an individual past, is at once aged and young.

Maria Campbell's Halfbreed, which was published in 1973, was the first of this literary form in Canada. As the contemporary forerunner of Canadian Indigenous Literature, it contains much of the type of struggle that is part of Momaday's tale. The central characters of these two stories struggle with identity and community in much the same way Slipperjack's and King's characters do--despite Campbell's autobiographical perspective. Thanks to Momaday's and Campbell's literary explorations, the focus in Honour The Sun and Medicine River is more comfortable within a literary and cultural milieu.

Though not of a contemporary presence, E. Pauline Johnson-Tekahionwake's literary production must also be considered part of Canadian Indigenous written expression. From such works as The White Wampum, to Flint and Feather and Legends of Vancouver, Johnson-Tekahionwake, like many of our contemporary Native authors, expressed herself as both an individual and part of the Aboriginal community. The duality of her self-image can be seen in the photographs from her lecture tour in which Johnson-Tekahionwake would often dress in Iroquois clothing and then the Victorian style of her time. She reflected a similar duality in both her hyphenated English and Mohawk name, her poetry, and her

prose. She was an individual and part of the tribe. Whatever the characterization or setting, the Native people of Turtle Island have not been stagnant in the art of story making. We move easily within the written form, yet retain the elemental orality that was natural for our ancestors.

Thomas King, in the introduction to his compilation of Native stories, All My Relations--An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction, speaks of a Native and non-Native duality similar to Johnson-Tekahionwake and her writings. He predicts a "matrix" that will herald greater definition of Native Literature. He explores the question of ancestry and its impact on this definition and concludes that the clarity of this term is nebulous. A working definition that King explores is notably linked to an elder's voice:

> Perhaps our simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by Natives will suffice for the while providing we resist the temptation of trying to define a Native, for, as Wallace Black Elk reminds us in Black Elk: The Sacred Ways of a Lakota, "You know straight across the board, hardly anyone really knows what is Indian. The word *Indian* in itself really doesn't mean anything. That's how come nobody knows anything about Indians." 1

King continues by saying that the defining is still in process and that there is also an entrance for the "non-Native" (sic) reader that sheds light on "characters, themes, structures and images." [2] Whatever this new voice is, King says, it is beyond the stereotypical and therefore in the present and not of the historical novel genre.

If my reader will bear with me, I will discuss two non-

Native scholars at this point. The inter-relationship between Native and non-Native scholarship and authorship will be explained after the following.

It could be taken from King's perception above, that as our people write our history and rewrite the history that presently exists, within a more informed perspective, then there will be historical novels and more. If literature starts between history and philosophy and then transcends these limitations, as Northrop Frye promulgates in his essay "The Archetypes of Literature" which is the predecessor to his Anatomy of Criticism--Four Essays; then, Native literature is developing and evolving as it defines itself within what it portrays as an accurate historic account of its present. And it is determining its philosophy as not only part of what we were before and after contact, but, as we are now in what has always been a world view that included continual change. It is important to note that Frye's observation also seems to share an inheritance with Sir Philip Sidney's The Defense of Poesy which states:

> So that truly neither *philosopher* nor *historiographer* could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgements, if they had not taken a great passport of poetry, which in all nations at this day, where learning flourisheth not, is plain to be seen; in all which they have some feeling of poetry. [italics mine] 3

Besides history and philosophy, I draw your attention to Sidney's phrase "all nations," which resembles our Native expression "all my relations," and to the time in which Sidney wrote, to the period shortly after contact within North America and, the

profound influence of the meeting of peoples. It is also important to note that almost immediately after the above quote, Sidney then speaks of the "poesy" that he feels will be assuredly found among the Indian of North America. Thus, with our growing contemporary presence in the literary circle the concept "all nations" from Sidney's time takes on greater significance today. Our Native Nationhood, which has always existed, is growing in recognition politically and artistically in literature.

It may seem unusual to refer to two non-Native scholars at this juncture but, first of all, the language is not historically our own. But what is worth noting is the shared vision of the land on which we all write. Not only does Sidney give recognition to the Native in his work, but Frye, to some degree, draws attention to the Native in his writings also. Particularly, I am making a comparison between the Medicine Wheel and Frye's image of the encircled cross implied in the Anatomy of Criticism's third essay. A graphic likeness of Frye's concept can be found in Robert D. Denham's Northrop Frye and Critical Method. The image seen here is very similar to the Medicine Wheel illustrated later in this text.

Therefore, it is my contention, that within our cultural and tribal inheritance, the aboriginal author is also working from a centre between history and philosophy. My understanding of philosophy, in this regard, broadly includes Native spirituality, an emotional context, intellectual perceptions and physical realities. The direction is still around the metaphor of the

aboriginal Circle, but working outwardly from its centre within a "naturally" formed atmosphere of poetic imagination to a transcendence beyond.

King indicates this centrality when he states clearly that the chief choices that have occurred for the Native author are "concerned with the relationship between oral and written literature and with the relationship between Native people and the idea of community..." [4] This is evident, too, in both Slipperjack's and King's first novels in which the community and the individual are an interlocking focus. The connecting point is "between" and therefore central. Community is a complex term that takes in Indian culture but also communicates largely through the English language and an inherent blend of cultures. The central characters in Slipperjack's and King's works move horizontally back and forth from these poles. They are also vertically influenced by the "poles" of two cultures--Indian and Euro-Canadian.

While the genre of Native Canadian novels is a relatively new adjunct to the North American Aboriginal literary voice, it is a voice that illustrates a southern to northerly direction of growth in the case of Thomas King. He is of Cherokee, German and Greek descent. King has worked on both sides of the border--and world wide, for that matter. But as King has worked more and more in Canada, he shows us the pre-contact practice of some of our people to further explore northerly lands. King's successful appeal to a readership beyond just the Native also illustrates

his individuality and need to explore, and the reader's interest in his efforts. He has found success in the north, just as many of our people in the past did, in moving away from the ancient city of Cahokia and its restrictive practices that hampered individuality and the power of the people. [5]

The story of the Owl, Slipperjack's Anishnawbe central character whose Christian name is not given, is about a young girl growing up in Northern Ontario. Her race and cultural imperative become, in many ways but not completely, secondary to her story. King's main character, Will, is of mixed blood and like the Owl, his ancestry is often secondary to his story. He is an older character than the Owl and therefore we may assume he has a more developed sense of autonomous self-awareness. The literary appeal appears in the popular interest in these authors exhibited by both a transcultural readership and maybe more so, in the case of King, a viewing public, as the film adaption of Medicine River illustrates. By the word "transcultural" I mean that at the same time we glimpse Indian life in a specific community, there is also a reaching out beyond just a cultural or even national readership to a commonality of experience, socialization and interaction for people individually.

As much as these novels are about family and community, underscored by a cultural complexion, they are also stories of individuals. Interplay between the central characters and their milieu is their hallmark. Aboriginal beliefs find the strength of community in the respect for individual freedom and community

endeavours. In the middle of the last decade, when I was involved with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, the inter-relationship and interplay between community and individual was also part of the larger topic of cultural awareness. It has been said by many of our people that the goal of self-government will grow out of individual awareness "when every Native man, woman and child has an understanding of self-government." This quote has many sources and therefore no specific attribution; rather, it is from my people only. Slipperjack's and King's literature contributes to the engendering of the idea of individual self-government balanced by the need and direction of community. Self-government is both a community and individual concern. The central characters of these novels respect and work solely within the community. Even when away from it they are influenced by it, yet they seek and achieve self-awareness, self-reliance, self-determination and thus self-governance. Slipperjack's Northern Ontario community and King's urban setting are sides of the same feather that fans the interaction between community and the individual.

As Pan-Indianism opened this work, I will return to this issue with Kateri Damm's remarks from Looking at the Words of our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature edited by Jeanette Armstrong:

> ...in some ways pan-Indianism and other such simplistic generalizations become self-fulfilling prophecy: some of what we share is the result of having been treated in similar fashion, as if we were one people. However, along with this cautionary note we

> should not underestimate the power of the bonds of shared experience. (14)

While I do not see Damm or her remarks as supporting Pan-Indianism, I do particularly find agreement with her view of shared experience as a starting point. Those that are farthest from an issue often see it best. This thesis certainly does not espouse "simplistic generalizations" but it does support a unity of vision in many issues, but not all. More importantly, the unity I encourage is to support both our being remembered and our continuing prosperity. Should one of us be stereotyped then we all suffer; therefore, we should not only recollect our individual pasts, our community singularity and individual Nationhood, but join in the defense of those outside each First Nation that might be diminished in vision and the reality of their ongoing existence.

So, let us read the works of other First Nations, and therefore broaden our horizons, as Gerry William does in Jeanette Armstrong's "First Nations Analysis" when he examines King's Medicine River. William's inquiry sees both the laughter and incongruity, and he also speaks of King's literary methodology, character creation and community scene--plot, character and setting. It is also worth noting that Penny Petrone, in Native Literature In Canada--From the Oral Tradition to the Present, looks at Slipperjack and King in almost the same order as I do--first Slipperjack and shortly after King. Their photographs also share the same page in this text. These two occurrences, and others to follow, helped point me in the direction of

appreciating their works together. Not only are our Nations working together for greater benefit to our individual tribes, but, the sharing of views moves us closer to the world around us.

Turtle Island's Gayanashagowa--Great Law of Peace and Power is also supportive for this work. Olive Dickason's award winning aboriginal history text Canada's First Nations--A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times, Ronald Wright's Stolen Continents--The "New World" Through Indian Eyes, Paula Gunn Allen's The Sacred Hoop--Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions, the Mohawk text 7 Generations--A History of the Kanienkehaka, Native Indian journals, electronic and internet media of a Native nature, and even our Indian songs are part of the writing that enter and surround what you are about to read.

Like the land, lakes and colours of this Turtle Island that profoundly envelope all Canadians, there is also in Slipperyjack's and King's stories the people, past and present, who walk life's road in our land of beauty.

In the spirit of the relationship between community and individual I am indebted to the people and the community I live in that fostered this work. Nia: wen (thank you) to the Kahnawake Education Center staff who have administered the funding which helped support this work and my graduate education in general. In the university community, Professor Ruby Slipperjack has been very helpful in giving me a sounding board for ideas expressed in this work as well as insights to her novel

Honour The Sun. Dr. Jeanette Lynes, my thesis supervisor, has guided me well along the paths of an effective literary criticism and the many aspects of a thesis project. And Professor Renate Eigenbrod has kept me informed of new areas in the growing body of Native Literature. Eunice McDonald-Rice, my partner and wife, has also contributed to this work. She has often made sense of my ancestry and heritage in ways she and I cannot readily verbalize but we know intuitively. To her, most of all, Meegwetch, Nia:wen.

Chapter One

Eagle's Eye View: The Medicine Wheel and the Gayanashawgoa or Great Law in Reading Native Literature. . . .

A fundamental aspect of literature is to tell a story. To listen to or read a story, we are given not only a plot, character and setting but we are also given a sense of culture. And culture is bound up in language. What makes Canadian Indian Literature unique is that it reflects both Indian and Canadian culture. It does this by giving the listener or reader an Indigenous perception in the English language within a Turtle Island and Canadian setting, and a contemporary regional culture. My starting point, if there is a starting point on an endless wheel, is found in the words Tewahia:ton and Tipaacimowin. This is Onkwehonwe and Anishnawbe for let us tell a story. In writing a story, orality has evolved into a written form which retains its heritage and now links unique Native and inter-tribal perceptions that retain individual prerogative.

What I examine in this thesis is the nature in which the Indian art of storytelling is now being guided by both Native and

non-Native cultural perceptions. This storytelling is also rooted in Native mythology and symbolism. This thesis will illustrate specific Indian modalities such as the Great Law, moments of mythic vision as illustrated in both Slipperjack's and King's first novels, and motifs and their accompanying symbols that are part of these two author's way of storytelling. Coinciding with this cultural specificity is an intercultural perception. In these works are archetypal structures and implied modern perceptions that cross cultural boundaries. These stories bridge cultures, and though having a cultural complexion, they go beyond culture as many Native authors have done and continue to do presently in their writing.

In the first four chapters of both books an initial aspect that becomes apparent is the movement through the Four Directions. What also arises is an exploration of the relationship between oral and written story-telling and an embedded wholeness that is inherent in the history and philosophy of the original people of North America.

A transcritical approach--that is, criticism which is similar to my term transcultural or crossing boundaries interculturally--to Slipperjack and King, and possibly many other Canadian Native literary works for that matter--can also be traced through the Gayanashawgoa or Iroquois Great Law of Peace and Power. My basis for this argument is as follows:

1. The embeddedness of the Great Law in Canadian, American and United Nation's constitutions.

2. The Five Nations or Iroquois Confederacy has

recorded within its own historical accounts a Peace treaty with the Ojibway. This is symbolized by a wampum, the Friendship Belt, which was created after the last period of conflict between our two Nations.

3. The Cherokee were considered part of the Civilized Tribes which had a social and political structure similar to the structure of the 5 Nations Confederacy.

4. Our three tribes are conjoined through English which is the current language of the American and much of the Canadian constitutions. The Ojibway and the 5 Nations are also joined by the Friendship Belt created in the 1700's. Therefore the Great Law's embeddedness in the American Constitution also engendered a change of culture for the Cherokee by the American population expansion. The exposure to this new, growing, American culture, which was profoundly influenced by the Great Law, also conjoins the Onkwehonwe and the Cherokee.

5. Finally, the language of Turtle Island, North America, is largely English, a language adopted by most North American Native tribes. The drive to maintain our original languages still persists, nonetheless.

It should be noted that the Cherokee did, according to Wright's Stolen Continents, adapt well to the new technology and cultural invasion and yet kept much of their own cultural imperatives. The overall preference of North American Native people in general has been to adopt English as their usual language of communication outside of their own reserves. The English language often co-mingles with our own languages on our reserves, too.

Pan-Indianism also lies at the root of this argument. What does this mean? It begins with inter-tribalism much the way pow-wows have inter-tribal dances, but does not stop there. This is a view as old as the Biblical Tower of Babel, or in terms

appropriate to the indigene, it is a return to the mound cities, such as Cahokia, which flourished well before contact and even The Great Law itself. Without going back too far into the prehistoric, the concept I am purporting is that there must have been a commonality of language. It should be noted that this is speculative on one way--there is not much culturally historical evidence to support this contention--but in another way it is instinctual in how I see our people sharing mutual concerns. This is to the benefit of all tribes.

The prehistoric societies of Turtle Island lived unified and centrally, and later diverged into different Nations. Whether one accepts the Bering Strait theory or a solely North American continent origination, it is likely that this continent's first inhabitants had a common language and therefore a similar pre-culture. The language may be presupposed by the co-ordinated effort needed to survive in the variances of a North American climate both challenging and beautiful--all part of a time span at least 40,000 years old as current anthropology and history would have it. This presupposition of a shared language, climate and culture lends itself to Pan-Indianism.

Olive Dickason in her text Canada's First Nations also illustrates the elements of Pan-Indianism. Though she does not discuss the term directly, much of her examination of our history shows many intertribal moments. For example, with her discussions of Joseph Brant and Tecumseh, we see a past of Native leaders who realized the strength of unity in different tribes

bound together in a common cause to work for the betterment of all. The concept of unity in diversity was historically present before its current attention by today's politicians. This view of unified but diverse views is also inherent in the Medicine Wheel or Circle imagery.

You see it on posters, hanging from rearview mirrors, in Native art and in places not necessarily thought of as Indian. It is a circle surrounding a cross. In astronomy, this symbol is ascribed to the earth and in mathematics it is an operation in a system (as a group or ring) denoting the sum of two elements. [1] In Aboriginal philosophy it is the Medicine Wheel, the Sacred Hoop or the Wheel of Life and it is a symbolic representation of the four directions and the **Whole Circle of Life.** East, south, west and north are its compass points. It is a primary figure of orientation for many North American Indian Nations and many cultures around the world.

My earliest exposure to this figure was the compass. In the Scouting movement, orienteering is centrally involved with the compass. My father owned one and also told me of how it could be used. A magnetic metal needle balanced on a pin often floating in a light viscous fluid could lead you to excellent fishing spots or even save your life. The ancient symbolism of the four directions can be found in this, too. The Sacred Hoop aids in the search of place to the age-old query of man--where are we and how do we get from here to where we want to go?

The eagle feather, correspondingly, is often used as an

allegory for choices. The central shaft symbolizes the one true and straight path, the vanes are alternative choices that assail the individual choosing the best path. Where one should be or want to go is a personal, individual decision, unique and known primarily to everyone. The symbolism of the feather is the matrix of decisions within which each person acts. Or to cross the ocean again, as in the words of John Donne from his oft quoted piece that "no man is an island," each is "a part of the main"--individual choice is counterbalanced by group will and betterment. The symbolism of the feather, often an eagle feather is used as a visual aid in discussions of this nature, is also a quaternity in that the directions lie in what is ahead, what has been left behind and what choices appear on either side.

In Slipperjack's novel, as will be illustrated, the symbolism of four, or to use the term the quaternity, plays an important role, as it does in many Aboriginal stories. N. Scott Momaday's pivotal novel House Made of Dawn revolves significantly around this image. The story encompasses four passages in the life of the novel's central character, Abel, who has just mustered out of the service after World War II. In fact, the novel is arranged in four distinct sections. The story begins in the physical arm of the Medicine Wheel and passes through Abel's mental, emotional and spiritual awakenings. It is not a story for the squeamish and yet within very brutal moments Momaday leads the way to the eloquence of Native orality transposed to page. In the lilt and flow of the prologue, an aura of Magic

Realism subtly underscores what seems to be a simple description of setting. I see Magic Realism similar to the manner John Updike sees it in Odd Jobs--Essays and Criticism. What begins here and follows in the body of the novel is the story of Abel returning home with the double "vision" of the Native who has had a dual existence in two worlds--the Navajo and the American. This novel is a precursor to the growing genre of Native fiction today that describes the bad and good aspects of being Indian. Momaday's novel depicts that the old ways are not lost but changed by the meeting of cultures.

The value of the changes occurring in this story, and in Slipperjack's and King's stories, lies in the continual dialogue between the individual and the community. Momaday's novel carries one beyond the future shock dislocation of the contemporary Native with the power of a description that is simultaneously realistic, psychological, harsh and surreal. Furthermore, while it should be noted that it is unlikely that Momaday's work influenced Slipperjack, as one of the early contemporary Native novels, the imagery of four that it contains is significant to looking at her work. I will discuss more on the quaternity later. As well, by utilizing Paula Gunn Allen's Native American critical view from The Sacred Hoop, Abel's story begins and ends with a visionary oratory transferred to, but unfettered by, the form of the printed page. And as will be discussed, this unfettering is certainly a part of Slipperjack's manner of composition. And, similar to Abel's returning from a

Figure 1.

war outside Turtle Island, the meeting of cultures is a turning point for the Owl in her going to school and travelling to the city life outside her small community and its vast northern land. Equally important is that the journey of understanding is completed in travelling back to their community and their Native land.

What the stories do reflect is an encircled fourfold imagery of Native culture that is archetypal. Though it is without any specificity of origin, it is prevalent in one form or another in many Native legends, stories and Nations. At its centre is another circle bisected by a line from east to west as the artwork of the eagle carrying the Medicine Wheel shows. (See Figure 1, previous page.) The usual movement around the circle is as the sun goes, east to west or clockwise, and this direction is significant whether one is reading, meditating or dancing at a pow-wow. The values I ascribe to the four aspects of the circle are:

East, south, west, north,
Black, white, yellow, red,
Child, teen, adult, elder,
Eagle, (panther), turtle,
an "unseen" spirit animal,
Physical, mental, emotional, spiritual,
Spring, summer, fall, winter,
Caring, sharing, honesty, determination,
Needs/drives, ideas/morals, love/feelings, beliefs.

It is important to keep in mind that the circle is unbroken; and, the image that is presented above should not detract from a movement continuously and seamlessly around the circle. The eagle is usually considered the first creature which one sees or is seen by. The panther is in brackets to signify that other Nations which may ascribe to this figure may have other animals in this, and also in other sectors. The spirit animal is a guiding force for those who subscribe fully to this Traditional philosophy. This animal's nature and type is unknown to whomever it watches over.

Additionally, the four sacred plants--tobacco, sweetgrass, sage and cedar--are part of this configuration. They reflect, correspondingly, the qualities of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

The colours associated with the four directions were confirmed to me by Dr. Richard Lyons, an Anishnawbe (Ojibway) elder who is also a well known Traditional dancer. I have also seen these colours and the many other aspects of the Wheel referred to or present in the areas of Native art, legends, pow-wows, and most importantly by Native elders and teachers, and subconsciously and consciously by our people.

There are paths inherent in this imagery. The first is awareness, as in the child who senses the physicality of his family and environment. Next is the hunter who has acquired the concepts and skills of searching from within him or herself and from the family. This is often the young teen who still

remembers the inner child and yet thinks of the next stage in life. The warrior is next. The word "warrior" is misleading in English. More accurately, in Native culture, we have those who have the burden of peace or are peacekeepers. One who balances the forces and factors of the physical and mental has achieved the harmony of emotion which is usually a keynote of adulthood. They perceive, think and feel with patience and maturity. Seer, elder and shaman are the people of the spiritual and northerly direction. Here the qualities of awareness, searching and self-knowledge, come together and act to create wisdom, determination and beliefs.

In the circle's centre, the symbolism usually associated here is fire and water or male and female. This duality begins a short numerical climb in the factors of the Wheel. The numerical factor of two symbolizes the duality of male and female and the balance between the individual and the community. And by bisecting again the four quadrants of the circle then counting from the north-east to east and south-east and so forth to the north-west there is the numerical factor of seven then eight. Thus we have duality, four directions and seven generations now.

The aspects of the Medicine Wheel that I have described are similar to many tribes, the Ojibwa and Cherokee specifically, but not exactly for these two as I describe them. What is offered here is the manner in which I have interpreted the works to follow.

In our Native history there have been seven generations

since Columbus. Today's seventh generation is a pivotal one that is now in a period of education and rebirth of our ways. We are guided by our elders and the recorded history of our nations. This record is both oral and written. And as technology gives us new means of recording, it is becoming part of music, computer technology, television and many other diverse accounts and chronicles.

Whether as an astronomical or mathematics symbol, the imagery of four is also embedded in the ancestral memory of many other races. Carl Jung, in Man and his Symbols, notes the presence of what he calls the motif of four: "Animals and groups of four are universal religious symbols." [2] Jung psychologically places this within the "archetype in dream symbolism." [3] Two photographs in Jung's text contain both Christian symbols of the cross and a Navajo sand image which also clearly shows a figure of a cross. What should be differentiated here, though, is that the term "religious" need not necessarily apply to the Navajo image or for that matter to many other Native characterizations of a cross. In the first photograph, a bas relief, the Christian Cross stands out from a group of awestruck men. Conversely, the Navajo sand painting shows an overall connectedness between the central quaternary figure and its complementary background--the circle of life surrounds the Four Directions. Artistically and psychologically there is a subtle harmony in this portrayal that bespeaks both the individual nature of Navajo tribal perceptions and, as these sand pictures are used in healing ceremonies, the

qualities of the shaman's "patient" for whom the images are drawn. Community, family and individual work together in the healing environment.

Nonetheless, Jung's analysis of this essential figure does indicate a similarity of vision for people from different continents. For Columbus, the direction was from the east to the west and lead to the moment of contact with a Turtle Island that lay south to north. The elemental symbol of the Four Directions, like the Navajo sand image, is now augmented with a world of people. The North American presence in world consciousness, both Aboriginal and post-contact, augments the larger connected sphere of communities, families and individuals.

The Gayanashagowa or Great Law of Peace and the Power is another element which clearly contains the imagery of four. The great white pine, which is the central image of the law, is described in the Law as follows:

> The peacemaker [Tekanawita] said: 'Our League is a Great Tree. It reaches high into the sky so that all peoples will see and know of it. The Eagle watches from its top as our guardian bird. The tree has four white roots, White Roots of Peace that go to the four winds. If any man or any nation shall show a desire to trace these roots to their source and obey the Law of the Great Peace, they shall be made welcome to take shelter beneath this tree.' Many nations took shelter beneath this tree, becoming a part of the first United Nations. Weapons of war are buried deep in the earth. 4

Eagles and their feathers have and continue to play a key part of the culture of many of our tribes. For me, the eagle has often entered my life at key times; and, as the Law states, it has often forecast many important changes. The four white roots of

the White pine which extend over all the weapons of war are symbolic of the red, white, black and yellow races of man. We are asked to seek out the most compelling root and trace it to the source of peace. The Peacemaker's name is held in such reverence that it is only used in relation to the Great Law. The Great Law is for me influential and part of the interpretive center for this work.

I have only dealt with the Law summarily. The oral presentation of this often takes about two weeks to recite but shorter versions and excerpts are found in many places--most recently on the World Wide Web under the title "Iroquois Constitution." Historically, Benjamin Franklin and other founders of the American Constitution met with our people and studied this form of rule and adopted parts of it in their constitution. Its influence, but only in part from our law, came also to the new nation of Canada and later in part again to the United Nations' statutes. The Law, in its original but evolving form, is still practiced by my people today.

Kimberly Blaeser is a mixed blood Ojibway critic who can also be addressed at this juncture to further one's understanding of the spirit of Native sharing. Her essay "Native Literature: Seeking A Critical Center" from Looking at the Words of our People, while focused on American Indian critics and authors, does apply to the two writers discussed below. As this thesis examines the inter-relationship of Native writing and non-Native influences, so too, Blaeser's essay speaks of the intertextuality

of our writing. That is, she sees modern Native writing as providing its own critical background just as our past storytellers did in their oral presentations. Thus, the Law is told as it was before but modernized and applicable to our present time and times to come. So too, Blaeser sees the interplay of Native writers today as the key to intertextuality. In this way Native authors share our images and qualities such as the Trickster in a greater fashion than just the orality of the past. As to the Trickster in this thesis, a written definition is illusive by his very name and spiritual power; but, further definition may be found in oral sources.

It is said that our people who met the first missionaries were struck by the imagery in the Christian cross. And there are similar comparisons which can be found in other cultures of which Carl Jung, for one, speaks. Regardless, the earliest comparison to the image of the Four Directions can be made to the anatomical figure of the human body with outstretched arms. However one may interpret and relate to Native literature, humanity is the starting point. The literature has been created by people and for people, within the Creator's world in all its splendour, and is for us and all our relations.

Chapter Two:
Ruby Slipperjack Honours the Sun

The Two Row Wampum belt is a key treaty for Native people in early Canada and North America today. It consists of two rows of coloured shells, travelling the length of the belt, on a contrasting background. This signifies that Native and European peoples were and are two distinct cultures and that they are figuratively situated on one river which is the intended symbolism of the contrasting background. Ruby Slipperjack's novel, Honour The Sun, has a similar structure.

While the Two Row Wampum is not part of Anishnawbe culture per se, its importance, visual structure and influence may be seen in the context of all North American society today. The literary perspective of self and other reflects this. The cultural polarity of people of colour and those who are white may reflect this. It is intrinsic to government with the duality of those who make the law and those who follow the law. The Great

Law itself was born out of a time that necessitated the end of inter-tribal war for the greater benefits of peace, individual and group power, practical human needs and harmony between individual prerogative and group welfare. And The Law is one way of interpreting Slipperjack's novel in the Owl's individuality and connection to her family and community.

As a story about a woman within her culture, Honour The Sun can appeal to readers of Native heritage and experience. As a story of a woman passing through youth and puberty and at times outside her culture, it is a story that appeals to anyone who has struggled with the vicissitudes of youth. These two perspectives are symbolised by the two rails of the CPR that run past the Owl's community and pivotally through her story. These two rails have a striking similarity to the structure of the Two Row Wampum Belt.

Duality permeates the novel. One of the central conditions of belonging to a tribal society is the constant interplay between the individual and the group. In fact, individual will and group will are often concerns in any social structure. For modern Canadian society, the will, desire and direction of the individual is much regarded and protected. All those elements that comprise a democratic, free enterprise, capitalist society are generally founded on the right of singular expression. Even though the laws of the land apply to the commonality, it is inherent that usually one individual is at the top of the pyramid of power. Whether they are the heads of government, corporations

or households, the apex of power is usually in the hands of one person.

A radical change occurs in Aboriginal society. More often, the position of power is in the commonality--the baseline of the triangle is now inverted. Certainly there are chiefs, elders and leaders who have considerable sway with the direction of the group but as the admonition of the Law states, the Roiner, Sachem or chief should have seven thicknesses of skin to deal with the magnitude and power of the group's concerns. Therefore, they are, despite their chieftainship, at the bottom of an inverted pyramid. The commonality rules. Slipperjack's protagonist, who we know only by her nickname the Owl, is intentionally nameless for this reason. In many ways she is everywoman and represents the individual acting within the group.

The Owl, Christian and unnamed, fishes well, loves her family and is determined. She speaks to us directly in the present tense of her life in a Canadian northern land of "old Indian legends" (Slipperjack, 15), bannock, children and school. The framework that supports this story is that of the Four Directions. The Owl weaves her story with the harmony of Native and non-Native seasonal imagery: "spring, summer, fall or winter" (Slipperjack, 36). This quadruple imagery appears throughout the novel and equally present, like the duality of the railroad track imagery, is an interwoven story intended for a non-Indian readership as much as it is Native-focused. The intent of a dual readership is subtly implied in the railroad

track imagery; as well, Slipperjack's setting is not on the reserve but close to the non-Native community and coloured by a seasonal imagery which is recognizable to all. The imagery of four is further amplified by their occurring in Chapter Four of Slipperjack's novel.

A further emphasis and directional statement is found in the closing paragraph of this chapter which dramatically brings out the trauma of the shooting of the dog. This is emphasized by the description of the determination of the story's individualistic central character contrasted with the family bedtime closeness. Slipperjack places the Owl in the darkness but flying without fear through the passing night and she soars towards daylight. The moment is accentuated by the stating of the book's title:

> Long after the lights have gone out, the girls are still whispering and giggling. Wess makes a comment here and there that sets the girls off laughing again. Vera has given up her bottom bunk for Wess. She now sleeps with Barbara on her double bed with Cora cuddled between them.
>
> I lay on my back, staring into the blackness of the room. Everything is alright again. Smiling, I imagine being a blackbird. The warm air gently lifts my breast, filling me, through me, and I become one with night, only to emerge again as Me, to honour the sun, in the early morning light. (Slipperjack, 39)

In the opening four chapters Slipperjack has given us character, setting and an introduction to plot and visual imagery with which to interpret the story. Furthermore, this quote pulls together the elements of the Owl's family, her individuality and her imaginative vision.

An even more revealing adjunct to the above scene is that Slipperjack has noted to me in discussing her writing environment that she writes at night, in the dark. She has developed a method of writing whereby she tracks her place on the page with her alternate hand, not by eyesight. Her stories are created in darkness at the kitchen table when all the family has retired. This gives further meaning to Slipperjack's main character, the Owl, a creature that flies at night. This method would also seem to further intensify Slipperjack's ability to get "closer" to the creative process itself. Her writing becomes an unusually powerful way to practically circumvent the page and transfer an imaginative power directly into her storytelling.

By having the Owl tell her story in the first person and largely in the present tense we have a close vision of not only her character but her family and friends. The everpresent poplars that characterize Northern Ontario open the novel's first paragraph. Slipperjack utilizes the particular sound of windblown poplar leaves to accentuate the laughter of the Owl and her friend Sarah. The setting naturally harmonizes with the two characters. Unlike non-Native literature which may establish a moment of tension or a "hook" in the first few sentences to garner the reader's interest, this beginning simply describes a setting and introduces characters. But a sense of tension is not long in coming as the youthful exploration of snuff illustrates. This tension is different, though. Rather than waiting for the other shoe to drop, the reader is carried along by subtler

sensual descriptions of summer heat, drowsiness, pungent snuff and the Owl's face being whipped by branches as she hurries to her home and into the story.

For Native readers who may practice the spiritual way, pungent snuff or tobacco is an important offering for the reader and the Owl at the novel's beginning. But it is an offering tense with a youthful exploration of new ways. It is an offering nonetheless.

Slipperjack ends her first chapter with a family round of storytelling which is important for the nature of the novel both as a home image of the Owl and, with her mother's key guidance, of telling properly recited Indian stories. Mother, siblings, stories, Cree Bible and Ojibway prayer book seem painted into this domestic summer scene which springs to life with laughter and flickering coal oil lamplight. Immediately with the opening of the next chapter the image of "other" which ends the previous chapter is contrasted with the perception of "self" by the personal pronoun "I" and the Owl's special rock which will reappear significantly in the book's last page.

With the sensual touchstones of youthful play with her family, bannock, wood smoke, the smell of bacon, rain and sunshine, Slipperjack weaves an imagistic, impressionist picture of the Owl's life. Her brother, Wess, who has replaced the lost dog, brings a balancing male presence to the group. He is notably present at the closing of Chapter Five, as he was in the previous chapter by bringing the puppy, first in his observations

that the kittens, though their lives are spared, would probably die of starvation. And he is there at the end of this chapter as Slipperjack ends with the Owl within the company of her family and a hint of plaintive guitar chords from Wess playing as everyone lies in bed. Slipperjack accentuates this evocative closing by the Owl's remembrance of her Uncle Daniel to whom she wishes to reveal her troubles. She is reminded of him by his cap hanging in the corner of the cabin.

This image works symbolically on many levels. Similar to Roman Catholic religious icons that may be found placed high in a European ceiling corner, the image inculcates a subconscious harmony for the non-Native reader who may be reminded of past relationships and events within the hallmarks of a home setting. For the Native reader, the everpresent baseball cap is a touchstone image harking to such times as pow-wows and family gatherings. The cap prompts the Owl to remember her familial attachments, the other in her life, and simultaneously evokes her apartness, her image of self, as the "Indian Maid" with skin and hair darker than the rest of her family. The final paragraph subtly closes the tableau with an encircling of the four directions that has transpired in the previous four chapters: "The two boys, Brian and Tony, are laying small stones in a *circle* on Wess' bunk" (Slipperjack, 47, italics mine). It is the gathering of the family that quietly gives magic to this social setting. The magic of each in his or her place, the boys laying the Grandfather stones, the family circle and the guitar music

bring all together.

From this family circle Slipperjack moves closer to elemental settings. "Camping" is a chapter that delineates the character of the Owl's mother and does so within the earth mother backdrop of the Northern bush. The Owl's mother begins and ends this chapter as the camping day begins and ends. She tends the fire while sitting on "pine boughs," with the aroma of bacon permeating the campsite and the rest of the family just beginning to rise. She is preparing a fish net, weaving at first carefully by the fire, then later colouring it with the resin from pinecones which the Owl and her brothers and sisters have gathered.

As the Owl's mother weaves and assembles her net to the coming and going of the family she sews up the fabric that is her family. Slipperjack ends the day with the family within the blanket of protection that the Owl's mother has woven:

> Mom, grunting and sighing, settles down on her bedding beside the tent door. Quiet settles over the group as she digs in her bag. She clears her throat and reads from her worn Cree prayer book and a chapter from the red Bible, a nightly ritual. Small lights flicker across the tent front from the dying campfire outside. The reading is done and the nightly jokes and stories start. Mom tells a legend of two sisters who went on a journey. They had looked longingly at the brightest star and that star came and took them up to where they found an old woman fishing from a hole in the sky. They asked her to let them back down to earth with her fish line. My eyelids grow heavy as Mom's voice drones on and on. . . . (Slipperjack, 55)

Clearly this "blanket" surrounds the Owl as she settles into sleep and the magical, the metaphysical, the psychic aura of

safety that the Owl's mother has created is "real" in the sense that Paula Gunn Allen refers to generally in The Sacred Hoop. Allen draws the image of the whole of the family, the family encircled by nature, not a hierarchy of earth, animals, family and god in a non-Native sense. Moreover, the story of the two sisters becomes "real" as the Owl accompanies Jane outside as the clouds part to flood their night walk with moonlight. They do not become lost in the dark but are easily guided back to the tent by the psychic "cord" of security the Owl's mother had let loose in her storytelling.

The Owl remains nameless in the Christian sense throughout the novel and her mother is also intentionally left unnamed throughout most of the novel. In Slipperjack's story the Mother is a key character who binds the family together, protecting them, teasing and laughing with them, and yet in her naming becomes a mystical presence in the background. The Mother becomes Delia with the visit of the gruff John Bull who calls her by name. It is also at this point that the Owl realizes what she has not known:

> A thought comes to me. It's like I've just discovered Mom's secret. A smile tugs at my lips and I look at Mom. I've just discovered her name. Delia! I just never thought about the fact that she had a name. She was always just, 'Mom' or 'your Mother' or 'my Mother'. Now, I was looking at Delia. (Slipperjack, 85)

This moment of recognition passes as quickly as it came but heralds character growth and change for Delia (Mom) and for the Owl. It is shortly after this revelation that the Owl's mother

admonishes her that she will not need to carry her slingshot around anymore; she has outgrown it. As the Owl leaves her supper and goes outside she is confronted with what she thinks is the body of a dead dog washed up on shore. The image of the dog lingers and effects the Owl. In her dreams that night the Owl's imagination spins a tale of elongated breasts, bearskin, baggy stockings and a pursuing canine. This is a Northern rite of passage for a girl suddenly turned young woman. For the Owl there are moments and images that are both real, as we all might see, and mystically "real." The image of the dog predicts changes yet to come.

We have reached a time now in Honour The Sun, where the dark side of life begins to strike the Owl as much as the sun stuns the eye when looking from the shade to sunlight in the fall leaves. But as much as the Owl is slowed by the break-and-enter of their home she is still brightened by "a perfect heart" (Slipperjack, 83). It is a bittersweet likeness Slipperjack draws of the Owl in having her leave her childhood behind by fleeing a dog. This is the dog of her dreams revisited in real life. The pain she feels in running and in her tears gives way to the enchantment of her family at home. The Owl's mother still brightens the supper in harmony with her other children despite the brazen John Bull. For the Owl it has been a day of changes and discovery. As the Owl drifts into sleep at this chapter's end, the image of the dog in bearskin and symbols of old age are haunting contrasts for a young girl growing older.

The chapter entitled "Coal Oil, Crayons and School Books" is also featured in King's All My Relations. King's foreword places Slipperjack among authors like Tomson Highway, Jovette Marchessault and Emma Lee Warrior in that they write of an Indian sense of family and community. In the novel, day breaks for the Owl to music on the radio as she dashes out into autumn weather. One very observable aspect of this work is the ever present pronoun "I" which dominates the work. This chapter is no exception. This is a style that is often present in many works by Native authors, be they beginners or seasoned writers. It is a personal affirmation of their ownership of their work. And it is certainly a reflection of the Owl's own preoccupation with her life within the demands of her family. This chapter is set in the fall and the Owl's life will change significantly with her beginning school. As the Owl and her mother set off for a rare moment together, a new stage in the life of Owl begins.

The image of the four fish that are trapped in the net the Owl's mother raises, along with the sounds of the train fading in the distance are magical moments. Mother and daughter do not often share time alone and when they do, it is a portent of things to come. Though there is a world outside they will face together they weave another silver thread into the tapestry of their times in their own "real" world. And who should follow this moment of enchanting serenity on the autumn lake? The Medicine Man. He appears at other important moments of the Owl's life too. We know his relevance from the Owl's reluctance to the

leave when he is around and that, as she says, she could listen to him talk all day even though she cannot understand all he says. They are connected not only by the Owl's interest in the plants she harvested, but also by the smiles they share. The Owl leaves her Native world of magic, sunlight, private moments and medicine for a white world of school and different experiences.

School and learning fascinate both the Owl and Slipperjack. Slipperjack has both a B.A. and M.A. in Education and like her main character reflects the wonder of the classroom with its whirling and never-ceasing motion of students, exercises, recesses and learning. Though the Anishnawbe language is not directly used in this novel, it does enter this school scene and other scenes indirectly as the children and other characters speak to one another in their language, a language that, in this case, Teacher does not know. The Anishnawbe language is the background music that hums throughout the novel, not only in this chapter of fishing, school and homelife. It communicates as all languages do but the Native language is particularly spiritual in its intent as the children's teasing chant reflects in its bittersweet mix of love, sexuality and something unknown they see in the teacher's gesture towards the Owl. This gesture will arise later in the story.

As a teacher herself, Slipperjack is familiar with the vagaries of learning, children and teaching. But by far, like the Owl's mother, her best lessons have been with her own mother. Though Slipperjack's father passed away some years ago, her

mother just recently passed away. The primary similarity between her fiction and reality is in the early mornings both Slipperjack and the Owl have shared with their mothers as Ruby has informed me. Slipperjack's mother has raised her with a firm grounding in both Native and Christian ways and the early morning sunrise is that moment of contact with Mother in both the Owl's and Slipperjack's lives.

As with most anyone, there have been many teachers in Slipperjack's life. For Slipperjack, the duality of cultures once again is key. Just as it is in Honour The Sun, so too it is with our author's role as a teacher. In a lecture at Lakehead University during the fall of 1995 she gave a cosmology of her views. The image of the circle was the central focus of her talk. On the board she drew an image of six concentric circles that she stated were akin to a "slinky" shape. This circle with a spiral implication was segmented with the four directions' physical, mental, emotional and spiritual qualities. And this was related to the classroom, practical knowledge, teaching method and cultural foundation. Slipperjack's view places the occurrence of data analysis in the emotional/practical knowledge sector. As the Owl's story progresses through school we can see the power with which Slipperjack's writing and her career in the university converge.

This cosmology, this way of seeing the world, is central to her role in life in and out of her novels. As the self is at the centre of her theory, her direction clearly becomes centrifugal,

similar to the sense of which Northrop Frye speaks of in "The Archtypes of Literature." In this essay, Frye says one is carried away from literature. For the Owl, the emotional sphere of her relationship with her new teacher will become as her cosmology indicates. Though teaching and emotion are intrinsically joined, the path of learning spins outward to the surrounding world of experience.

Chapters Eleven and Twelve distinctly show a growth in the Owl's maturation. And they show the elemental qualities in the Owl in her perception of the Joker whose angry and mysterious ways disturb the Owl who is now becoming more of a young woman. She becomes an even more complex character with her feet in the commonality intersection of the Anishnawbe and white culture. The Owl's brief moment with the teacher shows the hesitancy about revealing her fellow student's academic dishonesty and dishonouring their cultural and tribal link.

Examining Slipperjack's life at times leads me to think that I am playing Boswell to her elements of Johnson. In many ways I envy her ability to sustain both her work in education and in authorship as well as work with her husband in raising three daughters. The Owl's youth is an area Slipperjack is familiar with, not only in her own upbringing but also in raising her three daughters. But her commitment to learning and youth is also reflected in her thesis Native Teaching Methods which examines the role of a traditional Native view and its practicality in class. She has travelled to many northern

communities and her research reflects her thorough nature. Her thesis also examines the non-verbal forms of expression that permeate the Native classroom. She identifies the need for more research by Native researchers and the inherent, albeit often subliminal presence that aboriginal teachers, as opposed to non-Native instructors, bring to the classroom. My intention in adding this biographical information is to show Slipperjack's deep interest in education; and school and learning are certainly a part of the novel in the Owl's progress through the novel. For the reader involved in teaching we can see the cultural contrasts in this story that are a part of the Indian's life in school. But just as there summer vacations and holiday transitions for students in real life this juncture of the novel has a similar change for the Owl as the fall term ends and winter begins.

The Owl is a Christmas child. In Chapter Thirteen we find that she celebrates her birthday the day before Christmas. Importantly, it is the Joker who appears just before her birthday. He is a bright spirit filled with mischief and humour and a "gift" of something new, a chain saw. Old meets new as the Owl marvels at the ease with which he cuts wood. They play in the snow and sawdust and the Owl, through Slipperjack's words, sings to her world on Christmas Eve. Comings and goings of family friends and a Christmas bell close this seasonal tableau.

When the Owl becomes eleven, Slipperjack's emphasis of dualities continues into the next chapter with there being eleven people in the house to celebrate the season. As in other

significant moments Slipperjack seems purposely to tie together the Owl's age and the number of people in the house to show the changes in this character's life. Her awareness of her world is growing, too. Now the Owl will see herself change physically with moments of her teenage clumsiness, Christmas gifts, turbulent visitors and yet the serene microcosm of her family. The Owl stands like many Native people on the cusp of a mixed world of old and new ways. Changes. The alcohol the home's visitors bring with them, like the wonder of the Joker's chain saw, point to the meeting of two Nations that has not changed since the contact of Columbus.

There are many descriptions in both novels of bannock and other Native foods like fish fresh from the lakes but they are prepared in European ways. What Slipperjack illustrates is how we may be close to our origins in the land in what we eat, but, like the Owl and her family, positioned near but not directly on the reserve, the author shows that we as Native people are moving into a melding of old and new ways. The Owl's mother, who we now know as Delia, brings the traditional and non-Native together with her supper of "fried fish, bannock, canned peas and mashed potatoes" (Slipperjack, 119). Though we did not celebrate Christmas before contact, we did and still do bring our families together at pow-wows in this season. East does meet west in this chapter as a coal-oil light designed in Europe glimmers in a Christmas tableau first found in Jerusalem--now it is all under a Turtle Island skyline.

There is a subtle undercurrent in this part of Slipperjack's story that also occurs elsewhere. It may slip by many readers who see solely the black and white flow of a young woman's life. The author seems to write for both the Native and non-Native. And what does occur, that may leave one with a feeling of Magic Realism, are the stories told by the Owl's mother, certain backdrops or scenes with the presence of the Joker that have a mystic aura.

John Updike, in Odd Jobs--Essays and Criticism, describes Magic Realism as occurring as early as the works of Hawthorne and Poe. [2] He sees it, too, in Borges, Chesterton and Stevenson. In a further note Updike also sees this element as a sly undertone that seeps into fantasy. Updike goes on to link this to the oldest of Mayan legends, The Popol Vuh; and, he traces this saga to the German critic, Franz Roh and also to the Guatemalen novelist Miguel Angel Asturias. Briefly defined, this is a way of story creation replete with wavering invention, exaggeration and mystery; and, there is a presence that is starkly supernatural.

It is the land that has the greatest influence. Whether it is seen by Hawthorne, Updike, the Mayans or the Oji-Cree of Northern Ontario there is sustenance, splendour and magic. While hunting in Sandy Lake I saw an aspect of the North as the Owl might see it. There were poplars, some birch, few high hills and many jackpines. It is wide and broad and flat--how the Owl might have seen it when canoeing with her Mom and her family. I saw

many lakes and four eagles, including one mature Bald eagle. The others were too far away and possibly either immature or Golden Eagles which my companion Dave said are there too. And flies, flies, flies. But it was calm and serene, as life seen from a power boat can be on wide and narrow and twisting rivers. We met his friends (or cousins) camped by the shore and one asked me to speak in Mohawk. We were each given a piece of fresh bannock which we ate as I listened to them speak in Oji-Cree. Dave was generally quiet and asked very few questions. He was constantly eyeing the shore line for moose. We saw none but he did spot on the way home a stranded boat of two men who we brought back to Sandy Lake and then we went home. There, on the water, heading homeward, we were all linked to the land as Slipperjack's art in painting realistically portrays. This artistic talent might well be an area of exploration for those who wish to explore other aspects of this talented woman's life.

In the spring of 1963, school, for the Owl, is beginning to wear and with school cancelled for a day she is able to escape and ice fish with her mother:

> There we sat and fished, facing each other about twenty feet apart. She told me stories about Indians of long ago and the magic people who lived inside the rock cliffs. Mom caught three large jackfish and I caught one. Oh, that was great. (Slipperjack, 125)

These brief moments of legends and magic subtly reach out to both the Native and non-Native reader. Like many pow-wow songs, the words Slipperjack uses are few but there is a kindredness with the land that the stories emphasize and with which the environs

weaves support. Good fortune goes with the Owl's day because they are in unison with all that is around them. Slipperjack accentuates this with their four fish which are reflective of the four directions and all that the Medicine Wheel implies.

After the glory of the wintery day the Owl returns to school and the mystery of the Teacher's action when he tries to touch her physically and wrongly. Though she does not exactly know what is going on, the Owl feels fear and runs away. In returning to home and her mother again, though Slipperjack has been criticized for her frequent moments of bannock and other foods, [1] it is purposely bannock that the author chooses to bring the Owl back to, to assuage the threat she has just escaped. It is her Mom and all the power of ways older than the dangers of her present life at the school that protect her.

The spring of 1963 closes with Mom and the Owl contending successfully with lice. This chapter also shows the influence of the church in Native life. Both the "black-clad" priest and the minister come seasonally to tend to the religious needs outside the traditional ways of these people. Despite their poverty it is interesting to note that all the families compete generously to the support of their respective churches.

With the return of summer, Slipperjack re-introduces her key image of the train track again. Its arrival is a hint at the changes in our heroine's life. Growing older, taller and often hungry--a hunger born of her mother's poverty and a pursuit of knowledge--she meets with her brother Wess who has also changed.

He has changed while away at school, having lost much of his tan. He introduces the Owl to their mother's .22 calibre rifle. More importantly, he brings back an image of strength, protection and now music as this chapter ends with Wess singing cowboy songs. He sings from the heart and only notices his audience when the songs he sings end and he escapes to the house away from his family's unexpected praise. And it is Wess who returns again in the next chapter, mischievously mocking both his mother and the minister with his mother's clothes. He plays the role of both the trickster and father. He brings protection and laughter to this family but it is the Joker who slips into the last of the section, literally sliding on the new linoleum that the family has acquired. Again, old meets new ways as slippery moccasins must be protected from the new flooring by a rug of safety.

Fall 1963 brings the early snow and the Owl's first "meeting" with a Christmas tree. Again, two cultures meet and Slipperjack shows their intersection with Teacher putting up the tree and the children speaking in their language in wonder. What brings more wonder and light are the decorations which help the children make the tree's conversion of imagination from simply an outside tree to a real Christmas tree. On returning home that night, the scenario is repeated. Evocative and touching, this part of the chapter closes with sounds of the home's residents quietly breathing and watching the light from the stove. In these short descriptive passages Slipperjack once again implies a quiet magic of one culture gazing into aged fires as a new

culture rushes up to them: "I fall asleep to the sounds of people breathing softly and the flickering lights from the wood stove" (Slipperjack, 152). There are many moments in the story that can easily escape an unprepared eye. Most Native readers would likely sense the import of these brief moments of almost handpainted realism. Slipperjack also paints in a realistic style, as her book covers show. She embeds this same realism in her stories. But non-Native readers might miss the subconscious intent of portraying reality subsumed with magic.

As the intensity of the story increases, more elements are brought to light, and light is an important word in this. Following the Noel lights of the tree are the Owl's mother "sewing beads on moccasins" in a coal oil hue (Slipperjack, 155). Then there are the unexplained lights in the sky and the next chapter, significantly, has moonlight illuminating the Owl's new night wanderings. Sister Moon, and this seems intended in an Native way, follows all of the Owl's night ramblings: "The moon is out again and the lake glistens like a sparkling, living thing" (Slipperjack, 162). The metaphor of light returns again at the beginning of the Fall 1964 chapter. The sun setting brings shinings, campfire light and even a "light brown" glistening to Jere's hair--presaging the coming glow he will raise in the Owl's heart (Slipperjack, 165).

What is growing here is the Owl's maturity. She is becoming a woman and Slipperjack gracefully eases the reader into her character's adolescence with quiet forewarnings. But first we

hear the warning of Mom who says not to pick the wildflowers as they are best seen naturally. Her mother's words are there to predict the love triangle of Jere, Freddy and Ross with the Owl at its centre. It may be Jere who captures the Owl's heart first but Freddy's physical presence stirs her too: "He looks so beautiful to me this morning. He reminds me of Tarzan in Annie's comic books" (Slipperjack, 167). And then there is their partridge hunt in the Owl's pre-adolescence in Chapter 18. No doubt he has grown also since then and he soon comes to reach out to the Owl's special spot, the rock that first appears at the beginning of "Blueberry Days" and at the book's end. And in all this sudden passion a more harrowing thought comes to the Owl's mind as this chapter ends--the spectre of boarding school.

Though Slipperjack does not deal with this in any sustained way, it is an area of mixed blessings for many of our people. Education in non-Native ways has become a part of our life since Confederation. Our right to free education has become a part of the Medicine Chest treaty which not only supplied goods of need such as medicine, but also education. It is an area of mixed feelings, as the Owl observes, because it often has taken many of us away from traditional methods of learning. But we realize its usefulness in this world of new ways as the Owl herself draws our attention to in her observation of foreign chain saws and other similar moments. The Owl is filled with trepidation at leaving her community and family, and moreover, sees it more as a sentence of execution. In a sense this is true, for a part of

her life will be forever lost; we also see this in how the upcoming chapters accelerate in time and experience. Adolescence comes quickly for the Owl but so does the white world outside her Anishnawbe environment.

What comes now in the Owl's life is the change in her mother and alcohol which the Owl has tasted by accident earlier. Though her mother's alcohol use may allow the Owl to speak to this main person in her life more freely, it frightens her more. The Owl's respect for her mother seems to decline temporarily as alcohol is often feared in our culture. And in some ways because she must fend for herself more, she becomes prepared for the loneliness of boarding school. She is also drawn to the memory of her father in this as much as she is drawn to the young men in her life. At this Christmas of her thirteenth year we see a young woman who smokes more frequently and experiences loneliness as the spring 1965 chapter indicates.

As the Owl is threatened by the changes in her life, she retreats into art as the beginning of this section shows. How many of our people have found solace in this poignant outreach to a better vision? For the Owl this fall into the darker world of her surroundings is short-lived, but she does cry out: "What a totally rotten world. What a damn hopeless life" (Slipperjack, 180). She must also fend off the unfair advances of the men who visit her mother but in doing so, she asserts her individuality. And it is in this dark time that the Owl hears her mother speak out the hopeful words of the book's title. As this period

closes, the Owl retreats further into herself, almost becoming lost in her loneliness until her sister reaches out to her. Once again the Owl is saved by her family.

Much of what Slipperjack draws in this book may be seen as a reflection of a Native vision of the world. The text tells of an individual threatened by and working with all the single challenges and rewards of a unique world on the cusp of change. The white world comes nearer and nearer to Owl in almost every scene and gives her a mixture of good and bad. The old ways of the Anishnawbe world surround her, too, and press her to grow and fight what is wrong, accept the good and ultimately do the right thing.

The book's end is quickly approaching and the Owl's life is changing with an acceleration of her physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth. What could show more of the quickening in both the novel's plot and the Owl's maturation than her first experience with menustration? As a man I cannot honestly fully understand the bittersweet imagery of this life change--a fact that Slipperjack has also implied to me in discussion. For the Owl, as for all women, the immediate entrance into a monthly physical summons to one's sex can be daunting and yet it must also profoundly signal entrance into femininity and maturity. Men do experience physical changes in adolescence, too, but there is no outright moment of maturity in quite the same way. It is no wonder that tribal societies have often incorporated rites of passage to aid men in a similar

manner of entering manhood. Slipperjack does not overtly dwell on this, but continues to reflect the youthfulness of her main character in her speedy return to the world of people around her. No sooner is she back to the joys of summer than her journey to the world away from her family begins--residential school. Slipperjack describes this touchingly:

> Will anything be the same when I get back? Will I change while I'm gone? I have a tremendous urge to get off at the next stop and take the next train back. But I can't do that. Where would I go? I angrily wipe the tears off my cheeks that escape from my eyes. (Slipperjack, 191)

Residential schools mark a combination of factors in the lives of our people. On one hand, we had a need to learn the new ways of the European but on the other hand, there will be a permanent scar on the union of Native and non-Native cultures in the treatment our people received. Fortunately, the errors of those times are being recognized and attempts towards reparation are dawning.

In the flow of writing for Honour The Sun there is a marked transition after the Owl's departure to school. The opening paragraphs of Chapter Twenty-five are longer to reflect that the Owl is wiser; and, she is more aware of the forces in her world and the depth of her thoughts are reflected in Slipperjack's longer paragraphs. The Owl shows this in saying that though her mother has been drinking it is not overwhelming. The Owl's new spirit is captured in the brief words "I just want to have fun" (Slipperjack, 194). Shades of Cindy Lauper aside, the Owl is now

approached by Ross, then manly Freddy and finally Jere. Ever present over these night time teenage trysts is the moon, that female reflection of the masculine sun's light in the Native way. It is Jere who captures the Owl's heart. In the close to this chapter the three men are categorized comically, blunt and steady. Jere's steady balance is key.

Our heroine is pursued by all three but there is tragedy in Jere's successful seizing of the day. We are lead into the growing love of Jere and the Owl in the book's second last chapter by water images. This is both a Native and non-Native metaphor in that at the centre of the Medicine wheel there is always a sharing of the male and female in fire and water--contradictory as it may seem. In fact, this image is mentioned four times, a Native significance again, in the first paragraph. First dew then the word water follows three times and then the sun as a male symbol oversees all four. And though it is Jere who "wins" the Owl near the chapter's end there is a foreshadowing of sadness in this chapter's closing with the last cigarette that is smoked. Jere's death follows.

With the final images of the Owl visiting the cemetery and Jere's grave--his death is unexplained--we are brought to Mother Earth at the last. The Owl does not linger there, though, and Slipperjack utilizes her setting to bring the reader up to a brighter ending. The poplar and pines silently eye the Owl in this ending, in my interpretation, in a Native way. The trees may be seen as the spirits of people gone before. They witness

quietly. And a great serenity comes on the Owl with her meeting the Medicine Man; in fact the word "calming" is repeated twice to presage the symmetry of the Circle. This is both a real time and realistically magic encounter. For one who has been seldom present, he seems to anticipate--Slipperjack's vision is intentionally Native here--the Owl's focus. And this is so because he has been present in the novel as a Native image of maleness in the rock the Owl rests on now, the night time fires, and as part of the poplars and pines that often looked over the Owl's wanderings. The closing harmony of the last paragraph balances the maleness of the honoured sun and the rock on which she sits with the feminity of the great water that reaches out.

Chapter Three:
Thomas King and Medicine River

The four colours of the four directions are just one part of of Thomas King's first novel but they are a meaningful part of his first book. There is the physical journey of Will in his world travels as a photographer before the present of the novel's story. There are also the intellectual insinuations of Will's childhood and its meaning to the tale's presentation of his community of Friendship Centre, elders and character insights. This past and present, like the black and white colours of the Medicine Wheel, seems to correlate with the black and white pictures with which the beginning photographer often shows us. As Will's world of the novel becomes more coloured with the intricacies of his story and characters--his friends, his family and the woman he comes to love more and more--we may feel the emotional and spiritual inter-relationships that Will explores in coming closer to Harlen, Louise, Will's mother and brother from

the past and all the other members of Medicine River. Here are the yellows and reds, the emotions and spirituality, beyond the black and white beginnings. Here is a story's progress through basketball, the birth of a child and that child's growth, and the laughing pleasure King has in naming the characters we meet and the Trickster-inspired story he presents to us.

There can be no denying the opening passage of Medicine River. It is *in media res*, and my double entendre is intended. The first "voice" we read is Will's father giving us the kernel of the story to follow: "I bet you never thought you'd hear from me again" (King, 1). This opening letter, precursor of others to come, contains hints to the central character thrust, plot and setting. The story would seem to be about a family without a father and set in the prairie. And the reader must ask: Why would Rose, Will's mother, be angry? This is a sudden and personal snapshot of a family in flux.

The book could begin with the next paragraph in the accepted literary sense and the image of the prairies with the mountains, summer heat and the wind rising in the background would do but it would miss Will's quest, the family tensions and our twentieth-century desire to know the intimate. The ellipses that close that opening are more than a typographic pause; they are also a carefully laid clue to the four directions. The first four chapters, as I will demonstrate, will take us around the Medicine Wheel, through the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, as these four minuscule points presage. The opening letter in

italics reflects this.

Chapter One is oriented to the physical with its focus on body imagery with the choice of names such as Harlen Big Bear. Each letter from Will's father reflects the tangible, too, with the physicality that begins with the rodeo and continues with such references as the "new saddle" (4), then "good-looking boys" (5) to the color and animal imagery of the last letter. The last paragraph "reaches" out physically with its sensuality of the colour yellow--this colour will significantly arise again in the last chapter--followed by the darkness of hair and eyes, then fingers and lastly the duality of sunlight and shadow. The rational comes to life in the second chapter with references to the number four, or forty not being too old, Native power and thoughts of family in general. The emotions of the next chapter are seen in the feelings that we first see arise between Louise and Will, and more significantly in the moments of humour that arise throughout this chapter and the novel generally. The laughter of this chapter does blend into the next chapter with the spirituality that Jake's death naturally implies. With all the physical description of Jake's parting, the thoughts of who did it, and the emotion implicit in that question, the reader can easily come to the spirit and mystery of both the beginning of the story and how Jake's act will be dealt with beyond Mother Earth.

In Chapter One, we see how King's character Rose is in one way an essential example of a physical entity. We know it is a

woman's name and a flower both by sight and feel and by its scent. If the mental is the next arm of the wheel then it is appropriate that King writes next: "I'll bet you never *thought* you'd hear from me again" (King, 1, italics mine). The letter then queries the boys' welfare and thus touches on both the emotional and parental arms of the Wheel. The tension that is reflected in Rose's anger (Will's father suspects she is angry) springs from the previous two sentences and places us within the spirit and intent of the words to come, not only here at the novel's beginning, but throughout.

Equally significant are the seven occurrences of the word "you" in this passage. For the reader, the word "you" becomes emotionally significant. It has impact and offers assurance, comfort and speciality. Here it certainly contains the character Rose, who we will soon meet, but it also subconsciously draws us into the tale with the directness of new acquaintance. Within an aboriginal understanding, the number seven, as mentioned, has importance in denoting the seven generations since the contact of 1492. The cover of the text 7 Generations--A History of the Kanienkehaka, and there are numerous other graphics and references of this nature in Native texts and oratory, depicts the first moments of contact with the traditionally garbed warrior followed by six other vignettes from periods since Columbus. Next there is Christian contact, then the alliances of war; a woman of the Confederacy has the central position in the cover's art; the turn of the century Mohawk, the ironworker and

lastly the student are all in the panorama. Each tribe has its own affiliations with the changes that have evolved since contact and they evolve out of the inter-relationship of two cultures, Native and European. The relationship that King draws here is from the first love of Will's mother and father through their own seven generations to the "broad back of the prairies" (King, 1). The body of the novel depicts the contemporary and specific illuminations of what these seven generations signify in both a "Pan-Indian" fashion and a tribally specific manner for his characters and all their relations.

King's primary characterization of the physical and feminine, before the entrance of the larger persona of Louise Heavyman, is Rose, Will's mother. A rose is a rose is a rose. Gertrude Stein's epigraph lives on. As Slipperjack has the Owl and Bobby at the first of Honour The Sun, King too introduces the essential joining of the feminine and masculine spirits in this first letter. The letter then queries the boys' welfare and thus touches on both the emotional and parental arms of my interpretive stance of the Medicine Wheel. The tension that is reflected in Rose's expected anger, and, as I have said, Will's father suspects she is angry, springs from the tentativeness of this first inquiry. It directs us towards the spirit and intent of the words to come, not only here at the novel's beginning, but throughout. A tone is set.

Matching this tone is the Trickster-like Harlen. Jace Weaver, in a Publisher's Weekly interview with King, first noted

the Trickster comparison. In any case, with Harlen's first imitation of the slang greeting of "Hey-uh!" we meet this oft energetic, constantly going, and inquisitive alter-ego to Will. He is largely indomitable but has a darker past and he will buoy up all the changes that Will will experience. As he will often do in the story, his first entrance is to lead Will out to some awaiting adventure and to delve into other people's lives. Harlen is the connective tissue for the interactions of almost all the novel's characters as the story's beginning indicates. He often links past and present. And with his brief entrance at the story's start, King brings the reader Will's search for meaning in his mother's letters.

These letters are a source of tension from the onset. King stresses them with Rose striking young Will and by twice repeating that she had "never" hit him before. Further emphasis is added by Will telling his mother that they were addressed to both he and his brother. As the emotion of their discovery subsides, Rose turns to what she remembers most of Will's father, his physical prowess in the rodeo. The letters are not destroyed either, as Will observes. King also uses young Will's discovery and adult reminiscence of them to freely suspend time in quick movement from the tale's present to the past. These missives add more depth to our understanding of Will who only remembers his father through them:

> I must have seen my father, heard his voice. But there was nothing. No vague recollections, no stories, no impressions, nothing. He was from Edmonton. I knew that. (King, 8)

As Will is reminded more of his past by them, he remembers more of his origins, too. He recalls Calgary, his Granny, his uncles and returning to Medicine River, but not the reserve. Nonetheless, the Native trait King seems to emphasize before citing another letter from Will's father is pride. In the letter, King draws on the non-Native corollary of Native pride, innocence. In this way, we may see pride and shame, and guilt and innocence.

The underscoring of this chapter's final letter to Rose is the indirect hint of guilt that Will expresses in being absent and his wish of "a good Christmas" for his sons (King, 9). And who should be there in Will's moment of childhood memory? It is none other than the Trickster-like Harlen who, like the Trickster of legend, feels and participates in the bad and good. The counterpoint of these two together and Will's emotional mixture of memory from his past is highlighted by King's closing line: "His hand lay on her shoulder lightly, the fingers in sunlight, his eyes in shadows" (King, 10). This chapter's end is filled with the imagery of light and dark in which King joins in a tentative harmony the mother of dark hair and eyes with the father's "eyes in shadows."

In stopping on the rim of the reserve, King plants the reader between two cultures and like Slipperjack, we are brought to awareness of both. A good example of this awareness occurs near the beginning of Chapter Two. Since basketball will become a large interaction area in the story, the description of running

shoes in this chapter is an important metaphor not only for the game to come but for the kind of "running" Will does also (King, 13). My earliest recollection of the power of these shoes was in Ray Bradbury's Dandelion Wine (15) and similar to King's words I felt imbued like the character in Bradbury's story with the ability to jump high and a new quickness in running. I did get tired, though, but only after I took them off. Basketball has become increasingly popular in the last few years. In fact, as Canadian baseball has grown to the point that we have won the World series, two new NBA teams were just formed in this country. Significant also is the evidence that the game has origins in the tribes of Central and South America. For Will, the game has had a chequered past but Harlen, with the power of number four (as in the four directions), lures our hero into playing. Louise's possible presence is an added incentive.

Despite Will's ineptness they have a good team. The occasion of the game is time for the men to socialize and get drunk--a point that Harlen recognizes soon and lectures the players on respecting the origins of their power to jump: "You're standing on Mother Earth" (King, 15). This point further emphasizes Harlen's sense of respect. King does this by relating the setting of his pep talk to Chief Mountain which rises clear and wind blown in the background, a background that often arises throughout the novel. This moment with the men also has King jump to the past in recalling Will's brother James and his gift of art. The subject of James's art at this point is eagles,

which could easily be imagined flying around Chief Mountain.

The image of the eagle returns again later in this section with another reminiscence of James drawing a larger eagle picture which comes to rest outside their bedroom window. One aspect of the eagle, aside from its place at the top of the Great Tree of Peace, is that it sees all. Its presence here may draw the Native reader's eye to Harlen once again as we see when we find out more of his injured past. Though the story may twist and turn around the past and present, and truth and lies--or should I say fable--when speaking of the Trickster-like Harlen, it is intended to make the reader think, as I see it, of the southern direction of the Medicine Wheel. One enters the pow-wow, as I have seen, from the southern door. And we are left with many questions here: Why does Harlen cover up his past? What has the eagle seen outside Will and James' window so long ago? And, what do the eagle and Chief Mountain see?

Before answering these questions let me jog back to King's time shifts to the past of Will and James. In an interview in the Native Journal, King speaks of his influences from Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich and the late Okanagan elder and storyteller Harry Robinson. [1] King says that Robinson affected his style immensely:

> He had the ability when telling a story to make a right turn at 150 miles an hour. You'd be following along close behind and run right off the road.

There are these same quick changes in Medicine River and Green Grass, Running Water; they show King's writing to be similar to

Harry Robinson's manner of storytelling--an influence he has stated he has grown with, but these quick shifts are also as Lee Maracle speaks of in the preface to Sojourner's Truth. Maracle says that Native orators often start with "no explanation, no set-up to guide the listener--just the poetic terseness of the dilemma is presented." [2] King does this too when he starts right into his story in Medicine River with the opening letter of Will's father. As always, one can go back to the timeless traditions our people have learned since time immemorial here on Turtle Island.

As to my previous questions, from last to first, the eagle and Chief Mountain are silent sentinels that see all as does the eagle outside the brother's window. And not only does the delay in finding out more of Harlen's past press the reader to read on, it also creates tension between who he is now and what he was. James's drawing, in fact, comes alive in a way and the image becomes embedded in the wall overlooking both the reserve and the city.

Emotion is next, and the third chapter is replete with many feelings: Harlen's positive vision, Will at forty, Louise giving birth, and King's humour. And what makes a good emotional frame in the start of this chapter is tax time. Our two heroes are lost in the complexities of taxes and after briefly reminiscing on their previous tax agent they turn to Louise for help. For Harlen, the issue goes beyond paying the government its due, and King, after revealing that Louise is unmarried, plays out his

Trickster role for Harlen by having him regale Will with Louise's marrying potential. He says she has good teeth, good hips for having children and that no man is good without a woman. Moreover, the proof of Harlen's argument, as will often occur, balloons into a brief story of a ninety-year old man who is unlikely to live another ten years without re-marrying.

In this chapter, King skilfully accelerates time and events. No sooner is there discussion of marriage than Louise is pregnant, but not married--a point that does not escape Harlen. Using the imagery of four, as in the Four Directions, King has Harlen send four men to court Louise; and it is Will as the fourth man who succeeds at last in dating her. King's sense of humour prevails in this period of their first date with three short but good laughs in the space of a page; also, his timing works well to climax the jesting in bringing the two together in a touching moment. Following a dinner date, Louise takes his hand and says "Here, Will...you can feel her kick" (King, 35). King then has the two talk of names for the baby and accents the relationship of Louise and Will with the possibilities of Wilma and Jamie. We are reminded of Will and James of course.

Though their relationship is platonic, it is Will Louise calls to take her to the hospital. What King has done carefully throughout is enhance our perception of Will and he confirms this with Will thinking of Louise and realizing that "for the first time since [Will came] to Medicine River, [he] felt good. Clean and strong" (King, 38). Worth noting here, too, is that the

scenes that follow are well handled in the CBC film production of the book; the screenplay is by King as well. The difference between the two works, though, is that the birth is placed much later in the film than its occurrence in the book. In either case, another deft touch for King is in having Will, while he stares at the ward's name, tell the maternity nurse they will likely call the baby South Wing. In both works, the nurse deadpans "Is that a traditional Indian name?" (King, 40) And in both Will is touchingly seen gazing at the baby.

This is a fundamentally important image that King leaves reader and viewer with in these two forms of his work. Paula Gunn Allen, in her seminal work The Sacred Hoop--Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions, says in her closing essay that the "male principle is transitory...the female...is permanent; it remains" (267). She draws visions of men and places such as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse or Wounded Knee where there were noble battles against extreme odds and death alone or a great chief standing honourably but apart at a distance from our sight. She says that it is the women who are lesser known but earth-centered and enduring: "He is what comes and goes, she is what continues, what stays" (267) She continues by writing that this view of men is largely seen by the reader outside the culture, but 70 percent of the tribes were woman-centered, gynocentric with "dream/vision" centered female gods (264). It is King who reflects the latter picture with Will alone at the end but watching his daughter, concerned for her welfare, her

place in the family and the community and the world around her. As the novel continues we see more and more that it is Will who comes to the desire to stay and he does.

At first glance, Chapter Four and its spiritual intent is not easily understood. What does occur seems very physically oriented in that Jake Pretty Weasel is continually assaulting his wife January. At first we are lead to believe that he commits suicide in shame over his actions but by the chapter's end, though it is not directly said, it may have been January who shot Jake and wrote his eloquent suicide letter. The chapter is descriptive at first, then reasons for the death are postulated and the emotion of the funeral comes next. King does leave us with that most spiritual of inquiries, though, by the chapter's end. Harlen first poses his observations of the relationship of the sexes, then others suggest their reasons until King eloquently returns us to Jake's last moment of holding a pen in one hand and his rifle in the other that we might ask ourselves which is mightier.

Harlen's character continues to pop in and out of the story as King chooses. Harlen is of a type that is found in many tribal groups in that they are often involved in the community, supporting individuals in need and chasing down the latest news. As I write this I have come to realize King's description of Harlen bears a close resemblance to a man I worked with in Sandy Lake. Ralph Bekintis is the Vice-principal for the Thomas Fiddler Memorial High School. He has lived outside of this

reserve for periods of time both to take in the life of the city and to pursue his education but he is now firmly rooted in teaching, organizing and supporting various endeavours. He laughs as I would imagine Harlen laughs, is often telling me of his past experiences in and out of the classroom, and he has, too, often popped by at unexpected times for me to accompany him to community events or fishing or whatever springs into his ceaseless mind. During my stay in his community, I was told that there was a death of a well known member of the reserve; and I accompanied him and his wife (he is unlike Harlen in being married) to the start of a three-day wake. Harlen and Ralph are of a kind that gives me a greater understanding of Medicine River.

In Medicine River, King adds more depth to the nature of the community and its people. These are vignettes with Native-sounding names that border on both the reflective and satirical and yet they are not like any real person. He does touch on the politics of the local Friendship Centre. The Indian Friendship Centre is part of a Canada-wide system of some autonomous and some affiliated meeting places that service the needs of Natives living in the city. They also make themselves available to the non-Native to further advance the understanding of Native people in general. Both my wife and I have been involved in this movement for many years. She has spent a far greater time in this area and has held the position of Executive Director. These places are often a mix of politics and personalities that are

unlikely to be found elsewhere as King himself indicates in his discussions of Big John Yellow Rabbit and Eddie Weaselhead.

The conflict between these men is largely centred around the traditional and urban views of Native groups. King is completely accurate in saying "Indian politics are complex" (King, 55). The tension between Yellow Rabbit's urban tastes and the more traditional Weaselhead almost causes the two to come to blows by bringing out those time-honoured insults such as "pretend Indian" and "apple"--as in red on the outside, white inside. As King takes the reader through the confrontations of these two, he also makes another quick shift to the past of his mother's friend Erleen. Despite the time shift, King is able to sustain the reader's interest because the tale of both the two men and two women are touching on the same figurative territory, Indians in the city.

Whether it is on the reserve or in the city, the difficulties are often complicated by blood relations. Often in one way or another, tribal leaders are cousins or closer relations to other members of the power structure. In fact, it is almost the case that all members of a group are cousins, distant or otherwise. For Big John and Eddie the name calling strikes at their pride. King also creates an excellent sidebar in discussing the confrontation of both pairs in injecting that most popular of Native games, bingo. As for the two men, King uses a similar element of luck to assuage their differences. With the Bone game, a form of Indian gambling, they are able to

resolve their differences. Ultimately, the Friendship Centre wins out as both men remain there, but more importantly, the practices of conflict and friendship resolution are successful once again. The focus is that one does not have to die or be punished for the problem to be dealt with; but rather the sense of balance between good and bad is maintained by never-ending interaction.

There are many stories of warriors in my tribe meeting opponents on the battlefield and stopping their full contact warfare to sit and discuss how various relations in their families were living before proceeding, basically to gossip. Moreover, aboriginal warfare seldom ended in the kind of death rate that was and is characteristic of European battle. The lack of iron and steel weapons, of course, made a difference but the focus was more on winning with pride than force. And it is always better to have the loser remain to further appreciate his loss. Erleen and Will's mother Rose are not dealt with in quite the same fashion as the two men but the nature of their story is similar in the element of pride lost and won. As King indicates in chapter five's closing, the area of inter-relation is around friendship and family ties. It is not what is acquired but how we live with what is acquired that matters.

What King develops well in Will's understanding of self is a balance of humour and growth. Since it is his father's words to Rose that open the novel, and though both his mother and father are deceased in the present tense of the story, they are

spiritually present for Will to develop self-knowledge. Two things are likely to strike one in reading of Will's view of his father. First, Will continually embellishes his father's trade and position; he is a doctor, lawyer and physicist and in many other noble positions. And secondly, as King has Will say, what becomes more important is not the job title but the nature of his work and how Will comes to see him. Therefore, we see how Will sees himself. It is also worth noting that two of the longest paragraphs occur in this section where Will endeavours to construct a plausible vision of his father. The paragraphs point to the subconscious drive Will has in his quest to understand his father.

It is Rose, from the spirit world, who once again closes this introspective moment. Her gifts of shirts remind us that it is Will's mother who has cared for her son and also that he must eventually care for himself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Chapter Seven has an intriguing link to my earlier reference to the teaching text 7 Generations. As the last generation is that of the learner and student, much of the book focuses on Will's education in the connectedness of his life. He finds that though he is not being paid by Harlen he is benefitting from business from the community who have come to see his work and from his links to Medicine River. King also gives us important background material that Harlen's last name is Bigbear and this last name adds greater meaning to the role Harlen plays. The

implication is that Harlen is of the Bear clan and therefore a bringer of medicine and that is what Harlen is often doing in travelling around the community to "heal" others.

The best way for Harlen to become closer to many of the people in which he is interested is through basketball. As I have said, while this game is thought of today as American in origin, there is archeological evidence that its design is aboriginal. And as such, it serves King well in bringing out the natures of his Native characters. From Chapter Eight onward, the game plays a key role in bringing Will, Harlen and others together. As well, as the game complicates the inter-relationship of the novel's individuals, it is an opportunity for King to inject many funny asides. This chapter also goes back to an earlier period in Will's life and a love interest with a non-Native woman.

First, Harlen and Will, while on a basketball roadtrip, stop at the Custer Memorial. Significantly, King introduces this section with brief words from Harlen about the sweatlodge. King does so because things will "heat" up for his main protagonists both at the Custer Memorial and in basketball. At the same time as King has Will and Harlen at the Lakota victory site he also goes back to an earlier but short love story for Will. This passionate affair ends sadly when our hero discovers Susan Adamson (her last name seems to have an intentional Christian ring to it--son of Adam) is married. Simultaneously, King has the two men unable to enter the former battleground and he uses

this failure as an insight to Will's persona--Will had "fallen" deeply for Susan and does not give her up lightly.

At this chapter's end, Will and Harlen are in a hotel room ruminating over their unsuccessful Custer endeavour and suddenly, with Harlen asleep, King injects Will's love loss also. This is one of those inarticulate moments that King handles so well. He shows all the tensions in the two men unable to reach their goal, and having prepared us so well for the frequent memory shifts, he adds the last few words of the last sentence of this chapter to compare this to Will's discovering the depth of Susan's deception. This typifies King's writing skill to adeptly weave together the connectedness of events in his character's lives.

It may become more apparent to the reader at this point of the story that we are more accepting of these fictional characters as more like real people. King's writing talent shows this in the Whiteman chapter, Chapter Nine. Clyde Whiteman is a challenge to the rest of the team to perform better and they do. I recognize in Whiteman some of our people whom I have worked with in the past. They endeavour to do well, often recognize that they are falling but are unable to stabilize their descent. Some accept their choice and do not wish to change it, but for others, the mere reaching out is an attempt to stop their fall.

In the novel, King seems to point to the team's improvement as being due to Whiteman's skilled presence, but it is more than this when the team wins the championship without him. Even the Trickster Harlen gets on the court and though they are unable to

prevent Clyde from doing crime again, they win the championship. They win not just because of Clyde's earlier mastery of the game but more for their own discovering the talent within themselves and the team as a whole. The basketball team becomes a metaphor for the Native community and its striving for cohesiveness as a path to success by working together.

Three things occur in the tenth chapter: Will and Harlen visit one of the elders; Will's last name, Horse Capture, is revealed; and Louise and Will consummate their relationship. The order of the events is central to King's style in that Will and the Trickster-like Harlen must first go to the reserve and to an elder for greater knowledge. Here we are given Will's Indian name and Will receives a gift of a rattle for South Wing. Its image is found on the paperback's cover. We find later Louise has also received the same type of rattle from the same elder. Thus, with the recognition of an elder, Will and Louise are able to enter a new phase of their relations.

If there is a weak part of the novel for me, it is Chapter Eleven. Though the dialogue is sustained and there is further character development, there is a subtle weakness. I am left feeling let down, slightly, that Will and Harlen are unable to leap from the bridge with Harlen's brother. This missed challenge does bring the two men closer together in keeping their secret of this event but there is a flatness in the ending that misses the usual eloquence and swiftness King frequently sustains. The irony of this ending seems intended to contrast

Will and Harlen from Harlen's brother, and from the other characters also. And, this irony works to the best interest of the story in giving the reader a better understanding of our main characters and their motivations. But, to leap is to meet the challenge of life face to face--an opportunity we do not often have.

The chapter does work to give the reader a more human view of Harlen; but, in his inability to live up to his brother's daring he is not Trickster-like at this moment, but simply mortal. What does work is that they do cement their friendship in staying together on the girder and not telling anyone of what they did not do.

What is developing at this juncture of the novel is Will growing closer to his heritage and ancestry. In meeting the elder and community figure Lionel we have the strongest indication of this. And, as often happens in King's writing, the environment responds to the needs of the characters. As Lionel, Harlen and Will sit in the shop talking, the "wind picked up, and the gusts rattled the front window" (King, 168). King also follows up this description with an accurate reflection of how I have also heard elders talk. This also harmonizes with his Pan-Indian view. He has Will ask Lionel a direct question about his knowledge of Will's father but Lionel says only that he has more of his mother's looks--without being blunt Lionel tells Will that he is Indian, be proud. At first it seems like Lionel is looking for help from Will for a credit card but by the chapter's end,

Lionel says he needs no card. His visit is simply to get to know Will better and to tell stories, not to answer direct questions but to answer the unspoken questions in Will's mind.

A marriage is a marriage is a marriage. Would Gertrude Stein agree? On that I do not really know, but Chapter Thirteen is about three couples and the possibilities of marriage. King introduces this topic nicely by having Bertha Morley ask Will to take photographs of her for a dating service. And in taking a page from Harlen's "book," Will tries to play matchmaker to Bertha's interest.

What this chapter captures well is King's ability to not only use dialogue effectively but to speak on the matters of relationships, marriages breaking up and new starts. King's deft lines reflect the nature of men and women in contact. He does this with phrases and expressions that are the argot of the way we as Natives see one another, if we choose. This phraseology is heard best from Bertha's mouth and as to her pursuit of companionship; she does date, but intriguingly, it is first with Harlen. Her directness comes out simply yet eloquently when she says plainly Harlen needs a woman. (King, 185)

At the same time, King parallels this relationship with Will's remembered involvement with the married woman Susan who is slowly taking leave of her husband. The undercurrent here, too, is that she is non-Native. What is also a basic underscoring for Bertha and Harlen, and Susan and Will, is Will and Louise. King does not give a firm resolution to their love interest but he

does hint at further developments. King's insight is best described, as often occurs, in the closing to this chapter with Will's recalling the words of Louise:

> The truth of the matter, she told me, was that marriage was always more of a burden on women than on men, that women always had to take on extra weight, while men just fell into marriage as if they were falling into bed.
>
> I tried to stay away from talk like that. (King, 188)

Through Will's voice we may also have a thinly veiled view of King himself. King's first marriage failed and before starting this novel he, similar to Will's affection for South Wing, felt an obligation for the care of his son and was at a point of decisions during his travelling to Canada. In an interview, King tersely describes his travelling to Alberta in a hail storm with his son: "My son, nine years old at the time, looks over at me and says, 'Just so we get this straight dad, this was your idea.' [3] King reflects what more men are doing today--they feel it is honourable to care for their children and not leave them solely with their mothers.

As much as the sixties were a time of turmoil and change for North American society they were also a time of rebirth for Turtle Island's people. King reflects this in having David Plume come to Will's studio to have him reproduce a photograph from the 1970's and this gives us a political revisitation of Wounded Knee. Russell Means has revived the spirit of that time in his autobiography Where White Men Fear to Tread. And this spirit of revival is King's character's intent in speaking of David Plume--

as long as the rivers flow, as long as the grass is green we must always remember our agreements. It is also in this sense that the parallel story that King weaves is of the mentally retarded Maydean. There is both a bluntness and subtlety comparing the events of Wounded Knee and Maydean's retardation.

On the one hand, King quietly reminds all readers of the past agreements, from the Two Row Wampum to current land agreements that are being forged. He picks up this theme again in Green Grass, Running Water. On the other hand, he may be said to imply that some non-Native people have forgotten the nature of the agreements that have been made in that they have become so enamoured with North American land they think they can own and completely possess it. The Native view has always been that we are caretakers only. One cannot truly own the Rocky mountains or a blade of grass but we can appreciate the freedom and beauty of nature. King, in my opinion, points to a non-Native desire for the land and misunderstanding of its meaning in describing and discussing both Maydean and David Plume. In both segments of this chapter, King ends with an outward direction--Will's mother sends the children outside--and the older Will ends his journey into David's life with the doors open. Look to the land and the vibrant world around us King says; Mother Earth is the only force that holds us up.

Chapter Fifteen takes up where the CBC film production of the novel ends. This chapter emphasizes family and makes for an excellent collective image with which the CBC production closes.

The novel, of course, continues to tie together better our understanding of Will and Louise and the irrepressible Harlen. It is Harlen who prompts Will to promote a family portrait special and Joyce Blue Horn takes up his offer.

Before King takes up the present-time theme of the photo gathering he once again travels to the past in a remembrance of a family portrait with his mother and brother. It is intriguing to note this interest in photography and compare it to the last century's photo efforts and the reluctance of many of our people to be captured on film. For Will's mother, the family photo becomes an image frozen in time that fades slowly on the kitchen wall. In the story's present time, the photography gathering is a metaphor for Will's greater entrance into the extended family of the tribe. At first, Will seems to be just the photographer but Joyce calls on him to be in the picture too and Harlen reminds Will of the time-delay button so that he may do so.

As all this transpires, King brings us a remembrance of Will, his mother and his brother having a similar photo session occur. King poignantly tells us that this was at the time Will's father passed away and this comparison of the old and new is another example of King's contrapuntal skill. Will's mother becomes a figure from the sepia-toned photographs of Indians from the past with her static expression. The present is an animated dance playfully choreographed with children, teens, adults and elders: "Only the grandparents remained in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them" (King, 215). Touchingly, King

brings the past and present together in this sentence and in the chapter's closing by having Floyd's grandmother, like Will's mother in the past, reflect the permanence and mystery of the past with her sombre expression harmonizing with secrets outside time.

The last three chapters of the text thoroughly illustrate King's skills at humour, telling a story well, creating imagination and being true to his roots. Sixteen brings Will together with three female entities and forces in the story--South Wing most definitely, Susan, and, as throughout the novel, Louise. Seventeen has Will look at the two women he loves and one man who reflects the spiritual that Will sees in himself. And the final and eighteenth chapter is the symphony resounding with conclusion, the images sparkling with love and life, laughter as always, and mysteriously and powerfully--the circle.

There is a conclusion for the non-Native reader as there is in Slipperjack's piece. In King's work we are not given a direct feeling or actuality that Will and Louise will truly unite. We do know that the love between the two adults will never be forgotten with South Wing's presence and the loving interaction shared by Louise and Will. And consequently, in Chapter Sixteen, the subject of Susan is concluded with the entry of Ralph as the man of colour for the woman of the same colour. King does not say that people of different colour cannot unite and marry but King does show by Susan's closing words that the meeting place--that is what the word Toronto means--exists today and grows

larger.

Will's mother passes away in the seventeenth chapter and very much in the Native way she goes without a farewell. But the feeling of Rose's passing does bring Louise and Will together in the present time of this chapter. Nonetheless, the final view of Rose at the end is from the vantage point of memory and therefore timeless. And it is a graphic image vibrant with passion, as Michelangelo's Pieta is, with which King has the Mother and children holding hands (King, 247).

There is a sense of climax, for those who wish it, in the closing of this chapter with the Trickster Harlen and Will canoeing madly down the river. It is to King's merit and writing skill that this chapter is juxtaposed with the sudden watery rush of the river and yet the memory of Rose alone with James at her death.

David Plume, Big John Yellow Jacket or Ray Little Buffalo are just some of the names with which King "paints" his last chapter. He paints with humour, if needed, the imagery of the Warsaw sausages. He paints Rose with the eloquence of simplicity in her closing words and epitaph: "That's the way things are" (King, 252). James springs up briefly at the end but it is at the last Louise, South Wing and finally Will by himself that predominate. What touches me most is King's effortless ability to conclude with Will solitary in the snow and yet sustain the brightness of the "perfect circle: red, yellow, blue, green" (King, 261). The four colours I spoke of at this chapter's

beginning are here but the colours are uniquely of King's own shading.

Thomas King chooses those colours because they ring with the Red man the figure which dominates the book. Yellow is the sun, and fire--the male half at the center of the Sacred Hoop--and blue and green are singular to King the individual. Blue is the sky and sunshine in the light of day. Green could be the first word of the treaty phrase "as long as the grass grows green..." Of course, this is heard again in King's most recent novel, but green, by far, is the resilient colour, the lingering colour, and lastly, the secret colour of Thomas King, whose writing, like the white snow, reflects all colours.

Chapter Four:
Slipperjack, King and Other Authors Compared

Water, the archetypal element, flows throughout both Slipperjack's and King's novels. It lies at the bottom of the bridge as Harlen and Will hesitate at the brink of leaping into the courage of their lives. The northern Ontario lakes that the Owl and her family travel to to fish are settings of family closeness and individual self-discovery. Water is elemental to Slipperjack and King in their later novels as well. In Silent Words Slipperjack's protagonist, Danny, learns much of the Ojibway tradition while fishing and camping with Ol' Jim along the Northern lakes and rivers. Aside from its presence in the title, the water that will be blocked by the dam in King's Green Grass, Running Water is the force that must flow and bring the story's characters together. They must decide if progress must march on, or the way of the land must prevail.

Chief Joseph, who is quoted at the beginning of this thesis, knew of the profound link between our people and the elements of the earth that give us the peace and power to live. Without the water of the Atlantic, Columbus could have walked to Turtle Island and the historic moment of contact that has changed the circle of life that now surrounds the world would have been less. It is water, symbolic of the female force that lies at the centre of the Medicine Wheel, that flows up to, around, touches, and even reaches into the male force of the rocks and mountains.

Chief Mountain is the first symbolic and significant image that King employs in the first chapter of Medicine River. And though it is not mentioned it would certainly seem to be there when Will walks out in the snow at the novel's end. For the Owl, water is prominently placed near the end of Slipperjack's novel:

> I jump down to my rock and stand there looking out onto the lake. How many times have I stood on this exact spot as a child? It seems so very long ago.
>
> My boxes are all packed. I'm leaving on the train tonight. I take a deep breath of the clean, fresh air and watch the sun's rays dance on the water's surface and think. . . . (Slipperjack, 211)

Not only the water, but also the rock which supported the Owl in her childhood is there.

In conversation, Slipperjack has revealed not only that she has written for Native and non-Native readerships; but that her imagery and symbolism take on new life in the key placement of characters and settings. The settings are imbued with the Northern Ontario spirit of the land which Slipperjack knows well

and at the same time are universal enough in their images to appeal to a broad readership. This, too, is what King does within Medicine River with images such as Chief Mountain and its ancient presence. The link to the land for King and Slipperjack is clear and direct. This is more than Nationalism or a political stripe. It is more than a regional flavour of sight, dialect or sound. It is more than a green forest within a heart-pounding vista. And it is somehow more than just Mother Earth imagery so popular in our times. This link strives to be a sharing with the magical, mysterious, powerful, life force of the environment in which we all live.

Four names come to my mind as writers representative of the directions this thesis has taken. Slipperjack, of course, is the North. King's centre of influence for Medicine River starts out in eastern Canada as Will's place of work before going to Medicine River. Busy Toronto, and, in fact, southern Ontario in general, has become more and more a central work place for King. Two others who have also contributed to this work are Russell Means as the south and Harry Robinson representing the western setting sun.

Russell Means came late to the analysis of these works but has nonetheless made a timely arrival. I was reminded of him just recently in a brief article in Wawatay News. His work in the Disney movie Pocohantas showed Means' honesty and natural sense of direction in addressing his Northern Brotherhood and Sisterhood. In a broad way, his book, Where White Men Fear to

Tread, gives an understanding of the male side of living in this land as Slipperjack tells the female; the book also harmonizes with the tribal qualities and life experiences described in both the works I have examined. His observation from the previously mentioned book of the early uses of the word Indian have also been helpful.

Harry Robinson, as Jeanette Armstrong has indicated to me in conversation, was often a Trickster in his storytelling. His sense of humour and smiling trickery both chastise and ring with goodheartedness. This is an element that King adopts well in his writing, and King has both written and spoken of Robinson's effect on his later writing. It should be noted that King had contact with Robinson only after writing Medicine River. Nonetheless, King seems to have experienced previously the playfulness and pointedness that is often characteristic of many elders in their manner of storytelling. Thus, Robinson reflects many of the qualities of the Elder and storyteller, Lionel James, who appears in Chapter Twelve though he came later into King's life.

I would be remiss if did not address Robert M. Pirsig's two works and the effect they have had on my interest in Native literature and my culture. In 1974, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance offered what no other texts in my first experience at University did. In recognizing the importance and influence of the Sophists and Native ways, it brought me closer to my culture. Both in Pirsig's first book and in his last,

Lila, the power of the Amerindian vision is as strong an undercurrent as it is an overlord in this work. This degree of importance comes out clearly in the second book as Pirsig describes numerous aboriginal influences. Particularly, the last story of the dog he encounters with others on the reserve shows that twist of meaning and understanding that often characterizes Indian storytelling. We see this when the elder they are walking with is asked what kind of dog is accompanying them; and, instead of responding as to the dog's breed name he simply says it is a good dog.

Further to my first contact with university, it should be noted that there were no Amerindian texts written by our people listed in the course outlines of my University at that time. This was unfortunate, as both House Made of Dawn and Halfbreed were available. It is likely there were few guidelines with which this new literature could be taught. Fortunately, this is not so today as authors such as Robinson, Means, Highway, Cuthand, Kenny, Culleton and Armstrong contribute more and more to the beauty of the Indian way and the opportunity to learn more about it.

Today, an even greater audience now crackles with the power and desire to read the literature of not only King and Slipperjack but all Native writers. The World Wide Web covers literature with a breadth unknown before; both King and Slipperjack can be found in this electronic sphere. Slipperjack's two novels and a brief biography are discussed in

literature reviews in more than one web site. And there is no doubt that the appeal of her work will garner more interest in this way. The panoramic cover of Slipperjack's Silent Words also appears effectively in one of these. Once again ancient views and ways seem to come together in modern meeting places.

Slipperjack has also appeared in the northern newspaper Wawatay News on more than one occasion and other Native journals also. In the November 7th, 1994 issue of Windspeaker Slipperjack was one of other Native writers who joined together to tell a serialized story organized by Thomas King.

King also has a presence in the computer arena pertinent to this thesis. It shows how we can sustain, as we always have, our presence in areas important to our survival and yet contribute to the world. A brief World Wide Web biography indicates his teaching this year in the University of Guelph's Department of English. As well, recent work by King can be found under a www.bookwire.com address. In this electronic magazine, within a Hungry Mind Review piece titled "Shooting The Lone Ranger," King injects his humour into Indianness, Tonto, radio heroes and a photography foray in which friends wear Lone Ranger masks. Wry humour is not a short point for King. It is likely that King's writing talents will appear more frequently in this medium with his joining Guelph's faculty and having access to the latest internet tools. There is a very observable science fiction interest, which may grow, reflected in his short story "How Corporal Colin Sterling Saved Blossom, Alberta, and Most of the

Rest of the World as Well" (from One Good Story, That One). His latest book, Green Grass, Running Water, has elements of fantasy that are an intrinsic part of science fiction.

Slipperjack and King have also been interviewed on CBC radio and the popularity of Peter Gzowski's Morningside program has given their works greater exposure to the reading public. King's infectious laugh and the depth of his creative approach to his compositions dominated his talk with Gzowski. In discussing Green Grass, Running Water, King clearly outlined the power of the quaternary in his four trickster-like characters who appear at vital moments of the story. King also pointed out the importance of the Native language in his use of the Cherokee dialect as a visual entry guide to key sections of the text. CBC television has also given King another avenue of contact to the public in a recent production of his half hour tale, "Borders," in the series Four Directions. In all these efforts, in the manner of Lakota Joni Mitchell's "The Circle Game," both Slipperjack and King show their links to their first works and starting points. Whether it is mountain settings, or characters dealing with challenges, the closeness of community contacts and individual desires often confront one another.

Family relationships and the Medicine Wheel are predominate interpretive guidelines for both these writers; and they can be a constantly flowing undercurrent to the larger interpretation of Native Literature. In an article in the Publisher's Weekly, March 8th, 1993 issue, Jace Weaver's biographic look at King

shows the interplay between family and individual desires. Weaver describes King's choosing the need to write a novel when that urge arises rather than continuing a short story. And he sticks with it "monomanically." Similarly, Slipperjack has her own "monomaniacal" method in writing late at night, alone, in the dark. They are no doubt close to their family physically at these moments of creation, and yet miles away metaphorically in the intensity of their real and imaginative lands.

Afterword:
Completing the Circle

He believed in an all powerful Great Spirit,
in the immortality of the soul, in a life everlasting
and in the fraternity of all life.
With an Iroquois, a thankful heart was prayer.
He did not seek to instruct the Great Creator
what to do on earth or in the Sky World.
For he had faith in the Creator's wisdom.
The Creator knows what is right and best.
He believed it is natural to be honorable and truthful,
And cowardly to lie.
His promise was absolutely binding.
He hated and despised a liar and
held all falsehood to be a weakness.
He believed in reverence for his parents,
and in their old age he supported them,
just as he expected his children to support him.
He honored his Father and his Mother and
their Fathers before them.

From the Iroquois Creed by Tehanetorens 1

The contemporary Native stories that we read today pose a unique dilemma. In her book Soujourner's Truth, Lee Maracle describes this dilemma as a central characteristic of Native

storytelling. We are given very little or no introduction to the story and the reader draws his or her own conclusions. These conclusions are valid unto themselves. The stories may not be told in the ancient fashion of firelight and a circle but the elemental remains. Within the European format of printed page, linearity and languages other than Turtle Island tribal ones there is still a simulacrum of a storyteller interacting with an audience.

This audience affects the story and the teller. Thomas King strives more for the effect of Native naturalness in Green Grass, Running Water and achieves it. The mingling of reader and writer is there in Medicine River as it is for Slipperjack in her first novel. Slipperjack and King continue to work towards the moment of contact with themselves and their readers, as only the loneliness of the long distance writer can feel. Television and photography are logical progressions for King in achieving the contact of firelight and circle. The classroom has become much the same for Slipperjack. She presents the same simulacrum of fireside dilemmas. As I have said, Slipperjack has revealed that she composes in the dark, at night, without looking at the page upon which she tells her stories. No doubt she is striving, consciously and subconsciously, for an elemental contact.

King begins his first novel *in media res* with the dilemma and tensions of what Will's mother and father will do next. He moves from past to present and back again, sometimes abruptly, and each reader can decide if this is appropriate or effective.

In his last novel he moves the reader from characters that are real to coyote/tricksters and we can once again create our own assumptions. All along the way the parallels for the European reader are also present. The touchstones and reference points of family relationships, the coming of age from youth to adult and the friends one meets in life are sufficient to make the story readable for both Native and non-Native readerships.

I have quoted Tehanetorens at the beginning of this last section as it shows the respect for parents, family and the Creator that I have attempted to incorporate into my reading, writing and understanding of Ruby Slipperjack and Thomas King. The leading characters in both their works show the innate sense of honour for parents of which Tehanetorens' creed speaks. This credo and Tehanetorens' two books of Onkwehonwe tales have been faithful companions in giving me a better vision of myself and Native literature. Selected tales combine many pictographic elements in the manner that King does with his Cherokee language symbolism in Green Grass, Running Water.

The power of the Law has, I feel, been demonstrated, as well as the transcritical five elements that opened this work. These two novels have reached a greater audience then just in Canada and the U.S. as their presence in the WWW will assure. The flexiblity of the English language is further demonstrated in the success of these two works although they spring from a culture other than English. And yet both retain their cultural penchant. Also, as I have said, this work would not have succeeded without

the nature of the Friendship Belt at its roots. Not only researching Slipperjack's work but speaking with her in the nature of the Belt--two nations joined by the path of peace--has given this study greater depth. Contact through the internet and speaking briefly with King in the fall of 1994 has also expanded my knowledge of his work.

Pan-Indianism is by necessity and choice a part of this thesis. It is though, only a small part of my interpretation of Slipperjack's works. I have attempted to understand and explain the first novels of Slipperjack and King in ways that show an openness to our shared Native cultures and yet respect individual vision.

We have historically originated needs, corresponding philosophical concepts, some similar emotional perspectives, and, for many of us, some coinciding and shared spiritual needs. If, at times, what you have read seems biased, I apologize. It has been my intent to create a greater awareness of the power of Indian thought and its effect on literature and North American society. Hopefully, you, gentle reader--Native or otherwise--can see more in what Slipperjack and King have written and in our literature and its future.

The Gayanashawgoa, or Great Law of Peace and Power, as I see it through my Kanienkehaka culture, is one natural root to understanding these two novels because the Law is embedded in today's North American society not only in the formation of the

American, Canadian and United Nations constitutions but also through the force of the union that has been and continues to be an intrinsic part of our daily lives. The efforts of many present laws to expand equality for women shows this element of unity. The ongoing efforts of today's lawmakers at all levels of government to show respect for the individual and the community reflects the power of the Law. The intent of the Law to foster unity, stop war and bring harmony to the community and the individual shows this. The Law supported: adoption, emigration, respect for foreign nations, people's rights, spiritual and religious ceremonies, ceremonies of leadership installation, protection of the home and funeral addresses to name but a few key areas. These views permeate Canada and the United States, and through the United Nations reach out to the world.

In this manner I see respect for how Will is adopted into his friend's circle on his return from the world outside the community from which he came. There is an aspect of respect for foreign nations in Slipperjack's writing for a non-Native readership. Spirituality is a good part of both novels; and, both authors generally show respect in quiet ways for beliefs outside their own. Great respect for the power of the home is shown in the two novels in the Owl's mother defending her cabin; and, in Will respecting Louise searching for a new house for her child, for example. Both novels deal with the death of friends and in ways corresponding to the Great Law's funeral orations. The loss of friends departed is felt; but, we can see that those

now gone from this life have possibly entered a better way in that they are literally back into the land from which they came.

The Circle and the Four Directions are very much a part of these two stories. King circles from the present to the past and back again to tell his story. The Owl travels from her home to the camping and fishing life in the north, to the city and to school and the circle always takes her back to her family. And both novels, as I have attempted to illustrate, employ the Four Direction elements of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual in their opening chapters. But their circle and direction does not end there.

I have attempted to show the quality of "all my relations" in not only referring to King's use of this phrase in his anthology of short stories but in looking fairly at both these authors who are not Mohawk but still my relations. My red root to this phrase came to me long before my reading the title to King's anthology. As I watched the iridescent glow of the Grandfather rocks in one of my first sweatlodge experiences, I heard the doorman say that we were there to pray for "all our relations." In unity there is strength.

There is unity and strength in my referring to Northrop Frye and Sidney. While both seem to show to me the influence of Native ways, they reflect the universality of the English language and its travels around the world and therefore the importance of our people telling our stories in a language that travels beyond Turtle Island. Since our survival is threatened

for many of us and lost for other Turtle Island tribes we must tell our story while we can.

Carl Jung is here too, in pointing to a similarity of vision for people of different nations. Likewise, Kimberly Blaeser's recognition of the intertextuality of Indian writing is also a source of unity and strength for the growth of Native literature. In having my Kanienkehaka roots noted in the Chapter One I have attempted to show the linkage to all nations as the Peacemaker intended in the Great Law's image of black, white, yellow and red roots sustaining the Great Tree of peace. And, while it may be said that there is a Eurocentric quality to my interpretation, you are asked to recognize my tribal root and starting point as individual yet connected to the world around all of us.

Where will Native writing go? The potential for the historical novel that King speaks of is one trail. Olive Dickason's historical research efforts are another area for our people to explore as a support to new directions in literature. In conversation with me, Slipperjack has explored the area of science fiction and may yet publish a work which points to the potential of this area for our people in the future, just as one of our Native people worked with Albert Einstein.

It may be slightly over five hundred years since Columbus made his fateful contact with my people and this land, but it has taken an immeasurable time in mental cognition for this land's "newcomers" to comprehend the nature, thought, feeling and spirit of Turtle Island. As Native literature "enters" the mainstream,

the method of storytelling will change but the dilemma of choices between the person and the group will be the same. The individual and the community, just as these authors and their readership have found, must make their own conclusions of where Native Literature will go.

Though there is at this moment before the new millennium begins the age old distance of self and other, there is a greater melding occurring. The light, the atmosphere, the land and the water--"that one great thing"--that the Native and North American share will bring us closer to what Turtle Island means in the manner in which these stories do.

This circle is complete, but there is really no beginning or end on an endless wheel.

"Hearken, that peace may continue unto future days!

"Always listen to the words of the Great Creator, for he has spoken.

"United people, let not evil find lodging in your minds.

"For the Great Creator has spoken and the cause of Peace shall not become old.

"The cause of peace shall not die if you remember the Great Creator."

Endnotes

Foreword:

1. King, Thomas. All My Relations, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1990. p. xi.

2. Ibid, p. xi.

3. The Harvard Classics--English Essays From Sir Philip Sidney to Macaulay, New York: P. F. Collier & Son Company, 1910. Volume xxvii, p. 10.

4. All My Relations, p. xii.

5. King was born in California. Moreover his greater alliance with his Cherokee ancestry adds a further dimension. The Cherokee once lived around the Great Lakes, as did and do the Six Nations now. The Cherokee language root is Iroquoian. King's success comes "naturally," if you will.

Cahokia was a mound city located in the central U.S. At one time many of the tribes that we know today lived quite unified in this one area. But due to many restrictive practices that placed the power of the many in the hands of a few, this rather large and organized community floundered and the tribes scattered.

Chapter One:

1. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Markham, Ontario: Thomas Allen & Son Limited, 1990.

2. Jung, Carl G., Man and his Symbols, Aldus Books Limited, London: 1964, p. 21.

3. Ibid. p. 67.

4. Tales of the Iroquois, Tehanetorens (Ray Fadden), Akwesasne Notes, Rooseveltown, New York: Circa 1948-1950. This is a Six Nations Museum Series Publication.

Chapter Two:

1. "Novel never misses a wilderness meal" Eve Drobot. Globe and Mail, November 14, 1994, p. C-15.

2. Updike, John. Odd Jobs--Essays and Criticism, Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1991. p. 502-3 and 506-7.

Chapter Three:

1. Native Journal. "An Interview With Thomas King", May/June 1993, p. 21.

2. Lee Maracle. Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories. Vancouver: Press Gang Publications, 1990. p. 12.

3. The Runner "Interview with Tom King" by Gary Farmer, Winter 93/94, p. 3.

Chapter Four:

Conclusion:

1. This opening is from a poster produced by the North American Indian Travelling College.

The Iroquois Creed

He believed in an all powerful Great Spirit,
in the immortality of the soul, in a life everlasting
and in the fraternity of all life.
With an Iroquois, a thankful heart was prayer.
He did not seek to instruct the Great Creator
what to do on earth or in the Sky World.
For he had faith in the Creator's wisdom.
The Creator knows what is right and best.
He believed it is natural to be honorable and truthful,
And cowardly to lie.
His promise was absolutely binding.
He hated and despised a liar and
held all falsehood to be a weakness.
He believed in reverence for his parents,
and in their old age he supported them,
just as he expected his children to support him.
He honored his Father and his Mother and
their Fathers before them.

He believed in a forgiving spirit,
preferring atonement to revenge,
in converting enemies in to friends.

He believed in peace.
The sentiment of universal brotherhood
was always his policy.
Hospitality was his prime virture.
No people were more generous.

He did not believe in tyranny,
and he treated his wards with justice,
tolerance and restraint.

He had no caste system believing in
democracy, equality , and brotherhood. [sic]
And he praticed it. [sic]
He coveted no titles,
but believed all men are equal.

He did not covet property either,
and theft among Iroquois was unknown.

He believed in cleanliness of body,
and purity of morals.
Chastity was an established principle with him.

He believed that a truly great man was
one who had done something for his people,
not one who had accumulated more wealth.

He believed the earth is the mother of all things,
and therefore no one owned the soil
and no one has more title that another.

His whole civil policy was averse to the concentration
of power, in the hands of an individual,
but inclined to the opposite principle
of division among a number of equals.

He believed in the equality of women, and Iroquois
women have rights European women never had.

Ray Fadden

The stanza structuring is as above and the third set of lines in the first section are as I have recorded. Ray Fadden's Indian name is Tehanetorens. No doubt this piece has been recorded by one whose first language was not English as certain expressions seem slightly awkward. Nonetheless, the eloquence is undeniable. The spacing is somewhat different typographically then what I have recorded but is very close to the above. Accompanying this "Creed" is artwork depicting what seems to be a sachem offering tobacco through a pipe. The smoke rises through what appears to be a symbol of the Great Tree of Peace, ascends further through a circle, past an eagle and cloud to the top framing line of the poster.

The sachem's hair is not braided but bound by two hair bands that are in the manner of the quaternary. He also wears what

seems to be a Bear Clan insignia. His headdress is of the Onkwehonwe style, as are his arm bands and deer skin shirt.

The lines of this piece, as I have carefully recorded, are spaced as they are here. In effect, this accentuates the meaning that Tehanetorens seems to intend; he strongly points to the Sacred Hoop surrounding the Four Directions. Thus we have the first group of five lines which seem to signify the 5 Nations, then four lines emphasizing the figure of four again, and lastly, six lines which seem to symbolize the present nationhood with the Tuscarora who are now part of us. By far the greatest strength and unity of the piece lies in its ending with an emphasis on the power of the Onkwehonwe woman.

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Niawe:en Shogwendeeso:on.
Niawe:en Rawenio.
Sago: Wanion Akweks
Oona yi wahi.
Niawe:en -- Niawe:en
Wah:hi!

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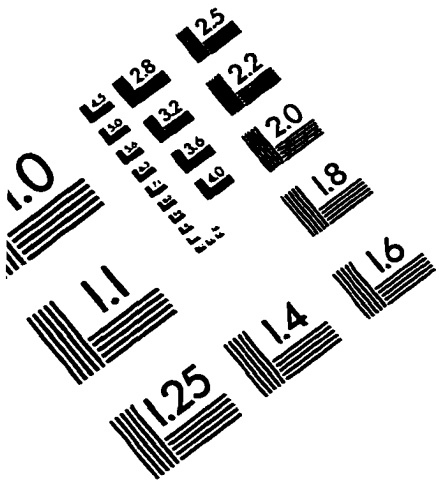

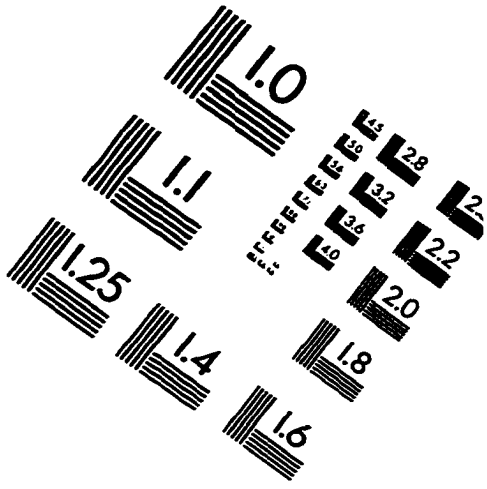

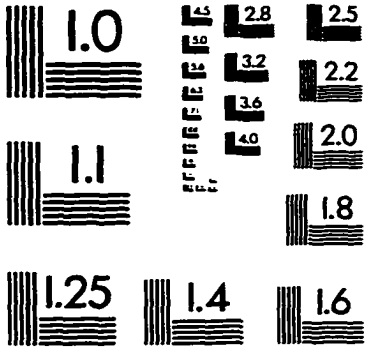

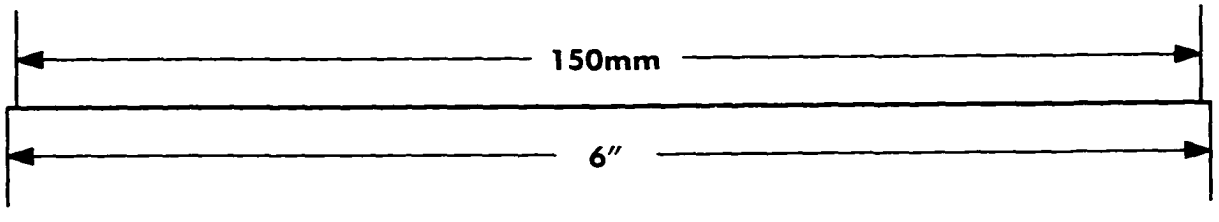

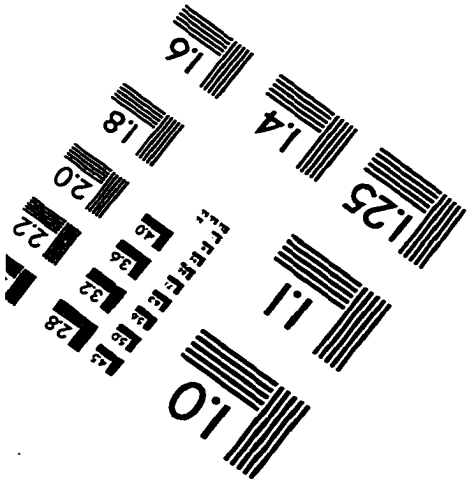

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