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"YOU'RE NOT THE INDIAN I HAD IN MIND": STORYTELLING AND ORALITY IN THOMAS KING'S NATIVE NARRATIVE

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Esta Dissertação foi julgada adequada para obtenção do Título de “Mestre”, e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

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To my family, who has always been fond of a good story.

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“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”
(*The Truth About Stories – A Native Narrative* Thomas King 2)

ABSTRACT

Bearing in mind the 'myth' of the discovery of the Americas and the difficulties to create new policies to embrace and enlarge the participation of minorities in legal and political issues as well as to understand and respect their cultural diversity, this study examines how Native Canadians writers, in particular the writer Thomas King, attempt to resist assimilation through the ancient practice of storytelling. The analysis will be based on post-colonial studies, identity theories, and on the study of narrative devices such as storytelling, humor and irony. This research analyses three essays from the book *The Truth About Stories – A Native Narrative* (2003) in regards the concepts presented in the theoretical chapter. From the analysis of the book, it's possible to see that those devices are effective in the construction of a literature of resistance and by making use of them the author is able to raise awareness about Indigenous' assimilation.

Keywords: Indigenous writing; storytelling; Thomas King; identity; humor.

RESUMO

Partindo do "mito" da descoberta das Américas e das dificuldades em se criar novas políticas para envolver e aumentar a participação de minorias étnicas em questões legais e políticas, além de entender e respeitar sua diversidade cultural, este estudo examina como autores de povos nativos do Canadá, em especial Thomas King, tentam resistir à assimilação por meio da prática milenar da contação de história. A análise aqui apresentada está baseada em estudos pós-coloniais, teorias de identidade, estudos sobre oralidade e sobre o uso do humor e ironia. Esta pesquisa analisa três ensaios do livro *The Truth About Stories – A Native Narrative* (2003), considerando os conceitos apresentados no capítulo teórico. A partir da análise do livro, descobriu-se que esses tropos narrativos são eficazes na construção de uma literatura de resistência, sendo assim, King é capaz de conscientizar os leitores a respeito da assimilação dos povos nativos.

Palvavras-chave: Literatura indígena; oralidade; Thomas King; identidade; humor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Encounters between Indigenous[1] and white people date from centuries ago: the 'discovery' of America and the forced dissemination of many tribes along the continent are the beginning of a dispute for land that still remains. In North America, since the first written treaty, "The Treaty of Fort Pitt" (also known as "Treaty With the Delawares"), signed in 1778 in the United States, many other treaties (in the USA) and Indian Acts (in Canada) were signed under the pretense of paying the debts society had with Indigenous peoples. However, most of these treaties never intended to provide Indigenous Peoples with any compensation. In many of them, entire Indigenous bands were relocated, sometimes to long distances, which was another important factor that contributed to the vanishing of many tribes. Along with the land problems, the cultural disappearance is also an important issue related to Indigenous people and it is mainly linked with this territory relocation, as mentioned in the *International Summer Institute*[2]*:* "[…] to eradicate the severe and widespread poverty afflicting Indigenous peoples around the earth that has deprived us of our human rights and fundamental freedoms resulting

[1] Being aware of the political and historical implications the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, Indian, and Native have to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, the choice for the development of this research was to use Indigenous Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, and First Nation(s) interchangeably. The decision was based on the e-book *Indigenous Peoples: A Guide to Terminology* edited by Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. (ITC). The book brings a historical background on the terminologies as well as preferable and cautions for the usage of the terms, based on Indigenous preferences. The choice on the terminology was based on the more acceptable usage by most Indigenous peoples as addressed in the book. It can be accessed at https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-terminology-guidelines-for-usage. I also use the term Indian and Native when making direct referent to quotes from the texts being analyzed or used as theory.

[2] Saskatoon Declaration of Indigenous Cultural Restoration and Policy Recommendation on Cultural Restoration Developed at the Saskatoon Summer Institute; the Research Council was held in the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. The Declaration is in the Appendix 2 of Marie Battiste's book *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (2000), listed in the bibliography.

from colonization and dispossession of our lands" (285). The dispossession of land is a problem directly connected to identity issues and is not a naïve political maneuver; once politicians understood that depriving Indigenous Peoples of their original lands would weaken their connection with their cultures and habits, confining them to small spaces (reserves) was another strategy in the erasing process of Indigenous populations in North America. Nowadays, one of the main concerns for Indigenous Peoples is to preserve the various identities and cultural backgrounds of the remaining tribes; however, such endeavors are even more complex because of complicated laws and decrees that both the United States' and Canada's governments have to categorize Indianness, thus making it more difficult to protect the rights of Indigenous populations and to fight the stereotypical image white people have of Indigenous people.

When talking about Indigenous cultures, there are important aspects to consider, such as language and tradition. Storytelling, an oral practice that is reminiscent from the past and is connected to the present, has been part of Indigenous culture much before Columbus's arrival in 1492, and has been kept alive despite all the conflicts and historical problems mentioned above. In addition, it is important to see that, although storytelling is an oral tradition, many contemporary Native authors, such as Thomas King, Jeannette Armstrong, Harry Robinson, among many others, use it in their writing as a fingerprint of their works. Even though there is a range of Indigenous authors discussing the most various topics, such as women's writings and cultural and geopolitical issues, or who are working in different genres like short stories, novels and poems, my interest in this research is on those writers who use storytelling and orality as narrative devices; this is mainly because such cultural trait is not only an important aspect in the construction of Indigenous identities and habits but also it can branch off to discussions on politics, cultural, and land problems. One of the writers whose works embrace the issues above is Thomas King.

King was born in Sacramento (California) in 1943. He is a Cherokee descendent by his father's side and German and Greek by his mother's. King completed his studies in the United States, holds a Master's degree from Chico State University and a PhD from Utah

University[3]; it was during his PhD that he started to develop his theories on storytelling and orality, which resulted in one of the first works to address the matter. In 1980, he moved to Canada, where he has been an important voice for Indigenous rights, even running for the New Democratic Party for the district of Guelph in the Canadian Federal Election. He is one of the most acknowledged and praised Native authors in North America; his *oeuvre* ranges from novels as *Medicine River* (1989), *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), and *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), to short story collections as *One Good Story, That One* (1993), and *A Short History of Indians in Canada* (2005) and even a thriller book, *Dreadful Water Shows Up (2002)*. He has exceled not only in the literary field but also as a scholar (he has been teaching in universities in the United States and in Canada since the 1980's), as a photographer, as a filmmaker, and as a radio performer.

As it is possible to note from the range of his production, genre borders as well as the borders between oral and written literature are crossed in King's *oeuvre.* He has been known for using storytelling and orality, which is a trademark of his writing, to negotiate the discussion on important issues, as identity and authenticity[4]. According to Blanca Schorcht, King "evokes the fluidity and dynamism of oral storytelling tradition" (199); this being even more evident in the book being analyzed

[3] King's PhD Dissertation is named *Inventing the Indian: White Images, Native Oral Literature, and Contemporary Native Writers* and was submitted to the faculty of the University of Utah in 1986. In his research, King explores literary images of the Indian, departing from letters from the first explorers and going further until the twentieth century. He also examines how these two images – the Indian as an inferior being and the dying Indian – were portrayed in non-Native writing and he also discusses how Native writers as N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Silko resisted those images at the same time they were constructing their own, mainly by exploring Native features such as orality.

[4] The term in itself is quite controversial; its frequent usage and the necessity to address it come from King himself, once he as a writer and activist has a general concern with identity borders that have been defining Indigenous people and their communities, especially in relation to what common sense considers an "authentic" Indian. This discussion will be developed with more depth in Chapter II, in particular in the analysis of the essay "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind".

once, as it is going to be discussed later, "the Massey Lectures are written to be spoken and then disseminated to readers in a book form" (Schorcht 199). Furthermore, Schorcht argues that "[t]hroughout his works, King uses colloquial style, dialogue, wordplay, repetitions, and circular narrative structures to transform the oral into written forms that are 'heard' by the ear" (205); which, as it is going to be discussed, is something we can see happening in *The Truth About Stories*.

The importance of addressing King's works resides in understanding the vast ground he has been covering as a writer. His works are extensive, not only in terms of his fictional writing but also criticism and theory, which is a key point for this study once the book *The Truth About Stories* is not what we would consider a fictional piece since it is composed of six essays in which King brings personal and communal stories and even historical pieces. This is the main reason I have decided to work with this book in this research, as *The Truth About Stories* is a very unique piece of writing. In this collection of essays, King explores fiction, biography, and historical accounts making use of storytelling and orality to construct the narratives; together with that he explores important discussion related to Indigenous concerns, such as authenticity and identity, aside from the fact that there are passages in which it is possible to see the author discussing and theorizing about storytelling and identity.

As mentioned before, the book is a collection of essays taken from the Massey Lectures, a collaborative effort of CBC[5] Radio[6], House of Anansi Press and Massey College (University of Toronto); the event is held yearly in November in the format of a five-part series of lectures. The event's purpose is to invite either scholars from different fields, such as politics, cultural studies, literature, and philosophy, where they can discuss their research results, or public figures who will deliver a talk about a contemporary matter. The Massey Lectures have been happening since 1961, as means to honor the former Governor-General of Canada and College's Founder, Vincent Massey; the lectures are broadcasted by CBC in various cities in Canada, and later published by Anansi Press. It is important to note that even though the lectures are being held since 1961 and that many important names as Northrop Frye, Margaret

[5] Canadian Broadcast Corporation

[6] The lectures were delivered in the radio segment called *Ideas*.

Atwood, Noam Chomsky, and Martin Luther King have been invited to talk, it was only in 2003 – 42 years after its creation – that the first speaker of Aboriginal descent was invited: Thomas King. However, this relevant fact is never mentioned by the presenter who introduces him in the CBC broadcast; he is introduced as a notorious writer known for *Green Grass, Running Water*, for *Medicine River*, for his CBC show *The Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour*, and for his accomplished career as a professor at the University of Guelph. It is worth mentioning that when King was invited to speak at the Massey Lectures, he had already been twice nominated to the Governor General's Award[7] – for his books *A Coyote Columbus Story* (1992) and *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) – and he had been writing and teaching at university level since the 1980's. Also, not only him, but other important Native writers had been publishing and actively participating in Canadian political discussions, such as Jeannette Armstrong, Tomson Highway, and Lee Maracle; however, they have not been nominated to engage in the lectures after King – neither has any other Indigenous writer (or activist, artist, etc.) since him. These invitations show the real face of the process of recognition, as it took a long time for an Indigenous author to be invited and as it is something that still has not happened again.

In relation to criticism on the book specifically, it is possible to find some academic reviews in which the authors[8] bring a panoramic view on the essays and pinpoint some aspects with a brief discussion. Shari Fitzgerald claims that she "immediately felt connected to King, despite [her] roots in White, middle-class culture. He skillfully builds upon his own personal experiences and family history in a manner that helps construct a sense of trust and understanding with his audience" (B1). Her comment, even though in a more personal tone, addresses the issue of King being able to permeate both Native and non-Native society due to

[7] Governor General's Awards is an annual prize-giving ceremony that acknowledges distinctive works in different fields: academic, artistic, and social. It is given by the General Governor of Canada and has been happening since 1937.

[8]The book reviews found are from Shari Fitzgerald published in *Intersectionalities: A Global Journal of Social Work Analysis, Research, Polity, and Practices*, Lindsay M. Christopher in *The American Indian Quarterly*, and Betsy Hearne in *On the Horizon*.

his mixed blood heritage and also dual citizenship. Further, Lindsay M. Christopher says that "[t]he stories King tells encompass his own search for a Native identity in a continent that relishes the idea of its imperial creation, 'the Indian,' and does not easily make room for living, breathing, present Native Americans" (236). Christopher's argument encompasses the main argument that King makes use of his narratives to discuss important issues related to Indigenous culture and concerns. Also, there are many website reviews on the book made by readers; one of them, made by an Indigenous (Cree) writer called Susanne Methot[9], describes that "King writes with a dry wit and delicious sarcasm throughout." Both, humor and irony, are elements that can be found in King's writings and are important narrative tropes used as means of discussing relevant issue, as identity. However, even though she qualifies the text as "a wonderful book", she makes some counter arguments in relation to identity issues raised by King in the book; she argues that he brings important factors when discussing Indigenous identities, but she feels there are contradictions in his points when he argues on status Indians (a point that will be further discussed in the analytical chapter) to which she raises the question "[i]s he implying that you need a status card to know the songs and dances?". Finally, as mentioned previously, once King brings theorization and criticism inside the narratives he constructs, it is possible to find the book also being used in articles and theses that discuss Indigenous writings. It is exactly King's storytelling strategies combined with his critical discussion on Indigenous identity that has sparkled my curiosity to read more about him and it is what interests me in this study.

On King's Writing and *The Truth About Stories*

There are, of course, much scholarship and many academic projects dedicated to studying King's works. The criticism on King's works is mainly found in articles from journals according to Gruber[10]; only two books are completely dedicated to the analysis and discussion of his works: one written by Arnold E. Davidson, Priscilla L. Walton, and

[9] The review was made in Quill and Quire and can be accessed here: https://quillandquire.com/review/the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative/

[10] This information comes in the back cover of Gruber's book *Thomas King: Works and Impact.*

Jennifer Andrews[11] named *Border Crossings: Thomas King's Cultural Inversions* (2003) and *Thomas King: Works and Impact*, a book edited by Eva Gruber[12] in 2012. Both books have vital and substantial discussions that are pertinent for the purpose of this thesis, hence my choice of focusing on them to discuss King's works; also, in Gruber's book, every chapter is an essay from a different author, which provides different voices in this discussion.

In Part 2 of *Thomas King: Works and Impact*, there are two chapters (7 and 8) dedicated to examining critically King's productions. The authors of chapter 7, Renée Hulan and Linda Warley, present a panoramic view of King's career beginning with his PhD dissertation and continuing with a discussion of his work until his most recent political engagements. They discuss the elements that led King to become such a renowned writer; such as the timing in which he appeared in the North American scenario as a fiction writer and public figure was also pertinent since in the early 1990's the voices of Aboriginal people were gaining more recognition and reaching the media to discuss politics of representation and appropriation (115). King's collaboration with CBC, which consisted in the production of the radio show *The Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour* from 1997 to 2000 as well as having his novel *Medicine River* turned into a television movie, made King one of the most well-known Native writers in the end of 1990. The authors highlight that from his PhD dissertation (1986) the discussion about oral and written forms is already present as well as the concern about identity and authenticity. The authors' detailed discussion analyzes the main *oeuvre* of King and pinpoints the most recurrent themes in his arguments, either in his fiction or critical works: boundaries and displacement of his characters, Indigenous identity and authenticity, oral and written patterns, Native

[11] The late Davidson was a research professor of Canadian Studies at Duke University; Walton is a professor in the Department of English at Carleton University; and Andrews is an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of New Brunswick. All the information was taken from the inside cover of their book.

[12] Eva Gruber is an Assistant Professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of Constance, Germany. She has also published another book on Native Studies called *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature* (2008).

versus White societies and cultures, postcolonialism to Natives, and sovereignty.

King's recognition as an important author goes further than being celebrated by readers, as it is discussed by Jesse Rae Archibald-Barber (chapter 8 of *Thomas King: Works and Impact*). In this chapter, the author discusses how King's texts are used in education. Through a survey of the curriculum[13] of Germany, United States, New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, and Canada, he found out that at least one production by King was used in courses related to Canadian Studies, Indigenous, Native North American, Aboriginal, First Nations, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies. He argues that the insertion of King in education is not only related to his fictional writings but also to his critical pieces. For Archibald-Barber, the range of his works favors the discussion of various "controversial issues that both reflect and critique North American society and Aboriginal communities" (142). He concludes by saying that what makes King so prone to success in the academic field is his "honest self-reflection" which also reveals "the depth and creativity of Indigenous writers and their art" (143), the ways in which King can transform and express the "Native identity and literature therefore implicitly promotes his presence in education in a diverse, international context" (143).

In the introduction of *Border Crossing: Thomas King's Cultural Inversions*, Davidson et al. analyze the reasons behind King's success and popularity. They discuss the reason for choosing to examine his works in a book (when there have been many other Indigenous authors who have been successful) and make a particular distinction between Native American and Native Canadian authors, arguing that the first group, perhaps "as a result of the larger market in which they are situated" (11), has achieved international recognition, whereas the latter tended to "generate local notice, but their works never received the same transnational attention that has greeted Thomas King's" (11). The authors propose two main answers for the questions: firstly, they

> […] suspect that King's popularity on both sides of the border is at least partially predicated on his U.S.-Canadian affiliations, and on the cross-national themes that pervade his fiction. And these themes, in turn,

[13] His research covered high school, college, and universities curriculum.

draw attention to the Canadian-U.S. borders that separate Native peoples from themselves (11).

Their discussion also corroborates the idea of this constant duality (Native/White – Canadian/American) that allows him to cross borders which permeate both sides and be effective in delivering the message his texts conveys, successfully using the border as his ally. Secondly, they see that "King's popularity arises from his ability to found his politics in comic platform" (14). This proposition also justifies the importance of discussing humor in his works, once "[c]omedy is the foundation of his insightful commentary on life within Native communities and the complexities of Native-White relations" (15). Once again, King makes use of these fragile points (such as representation, identity, authenticity, storytelling and orality as means of resistance) to disclose his messages and raise awareness to important political discussions.

Objectives and Thesis Breakdown

One of the purposes of this study is to identify how storytelling and orality are used as writing devices that resist assimilation and enable the reinvention of identities in Native Canadian writing, specifically in relation to Thomas King's work. With that intent, this thesis also examines how the use of irony and humor in King's *The Truth About Stories – A Native Narrative* is connected to what could be called literature of resistance in which the narratives are built on resisting dominant power and excluding discourses. This kind of literature relies on strategies that resist assimilation by the mainstream culture creating a counter-discourse that disturbs established values and notions of society. Considering this, with this research I aim to investigate how those devices – storytelling, orality, humor and irony – permeate contemporary Indigenous Canadian literature, specifically in King's book. In order to achieve that, I established three specific objectives to guide me throughout my thesis:

1. Analyze how the oral tradition of storytelling is used in King's book as a possible means of re-elaborating Indigenous identity in contemporaneity and, at the same time, of maintaining important aspects of Indigenous culture, thereby resisting assimilation;

2. Examine the use of humor and irony in King's text as devices for creating resistance to common beliefs non-Natives have towards Natives;

3. Investigate how those devices are a powerful type of counter-discourse, thus providing different versions of the history of colonization.

In order to achieve these objectives and ground my discussions, this thesis will be divided in four chapters: Introduction, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Final Remarks. Chapter 2 brings a theoretical framework which comprises theories on: Colonialism and Postcolonialism, mainly in the light of works by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, as well as by Robert Young; Indigenous Postcolonial Theory, as it is discussed by Indigenous scholars as Battiste and King, Identity, based on works by Hall, Said, and Chamberlin; Storytelling and Orality, mainly through Cunha's and Venne's discussions; and, finally, Humor and Irony, with discussions from Larkin-Galiñanes, Ermida, Bowens and Hutcheon. Also, it is interesting to point out that, in most of the topics discussed in the theoretical chapter, King's voice is present through his critical pieces, such as "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" and his PhD dissertation. Chapter 3 is the analysis of the book which will present a thorough reading of King's book as well as a detailed discussion on how Identity, Storytelling and Orality, and Humor and Irony are important for the construction of his narrative as a whole. Finally, the thesis presents the concluding chapter with the final remarks and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 1 – "Who will tell our stories?" Postcolonial Theory, Postcolonial Indigenous Thinking, and its Literary Ramifications

Departing from an understanding that Thomas King's works have been commonly approached as postcolonial literature, the discussion of this chapter will bring a broad panoramic view of colonialism and its marks on Indigenous peoples as well as a deeper analysis of the ways in which postcoloniality has been changing and adapting throughout the years; also, a discussion on how postcolonial studies are seen by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors will be presented – the main purpose being to understand the branching and the differences when working with Indigenous authors. Furthermore, this chapter will tackle discussions on identity, orality and storytelling, humor and irony in order to contextualize and show the theoretical basis that will be used later in the analysis of the book.

1.1 Postcolonial Theory and Indigenous Writing

Throughout the years, many theoreticians have discussed colonization as a concept and as a practice as well as the impacts of such practice in the cultures and peoples affected by it (not only to the so-called colonized but also to the colonizer). In this sense, colonialism, as a practice, is understood by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin as the exchanges (economic, cultural, etc.) between the colonizer and the colonized, usually not based on a fair trade but on hierarchical values (*The Key Concepts* 40). Even though, at first glance, we tend to connect colonization directly with the exploitation of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, the practice of conquering and exploring different sites has been happening even before the Roman Empire in the second century. Accordingly, Robert C. Young, in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, states that "[b]oth colonialism and imperialism involved forms of subjugation of one people by another. The world has a long history of such kinds of domination. Traditionally, forms of empire tended to concentrate on expansion within a single land mass" (15).

Considering a more recent historical moment (from the sixteenth century on), Ashcroft et al discuss that colonization is seen "as the specific form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion

of Europe over the last 400 years" (*The Key Concepts* 40); such colonial practices had aggravating factors on women and people of color, generating a patriarchal and racist society for years to come, an argument that is corroborated by Robert Yazzie when he argues that "[c]olonialism among Indigenous people in the Americas begun with Columbus in 1492, but it did not reach its height until the close of the nineteenth century" (39). Accordantly, Young argues this exploitation and imperialistic expansion had also a geographical dimension especially in the case of Aboriginal Peoples who "if not exterminated, were moved out of the land which they had previously occupied […] The appropriation of land and space meant that colonialism was, therefore, as Said has emphasized, fundamentally an act of geographical violence, a geographical violence against indigenous peoples and their land rights" (20). Corroborating the previous discussion and going deeper in the representational aspect of colonialism, Stephen Slemon states that "[t]he problem, rather, is with the concept of colonialism as an ideological or discursive formation: that is, with the ways in which colonialism is viewed as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation" (47); Slemon's discussion not only considers the economic and political impositions, as already mentioned in Young and Ashcroft et al., but also the ideological values imposed by the colonizers, which "was also a crucial part of the construction and naturalization of an unequal form of intercultural relations" (Ashcroft et al. *The Key Concepts* 41). Such ideological values helped in the process of erasing Indigenous thinking at the same time the colonizing representations, in books, paintings, diaries, and travel logs, helped justifying the colonial practices.

The problems related to the first colonial encounters in the Americas impacted the cultures and lives of Aboriginal Peoples, not only in an economic sense but also in relation to cultural differences. Mary Louise Pratt, in the introduction of her book *Imperial Eyes*, argues about the idea of the 'contact zone' which, according to her, is the place of co-presence and interaction of different subjects and the relationship between them; contact zone, thus, is "the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (8). Pratt continues, adding that this "'contact zone' shifts the center of gravity

and the point of geography and history are co-present, [...] The term 'contact' foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquests and domination told from the invader's perspective" (8). This moment of co-presence during colonial times generated a series of misconceptions that have been influencing the identities of Indigenous communities until today, either in relation to their own struggle of belonging or to the categorizations mainstream society creates for them.

Regarding Indigenous peoples specifically as an ethnic group and their view on colonization, this concept is seen as "as a system of oppression rather than as personal or local prejudice. We [Indigenous people] came to understand that it is the systemic nature of colonization that creates cognitive imperialism, our cognitive prisons" (Battiste xvii); the delegitimization of Indigenous cultural practices and land appropriation is a problem that influences Indigenous people's lives until today. As mentioned by Nicholas Birns, some colonizing practices are still in the imaginary of people (223), helping in the perpetuations of colonial values, thus reinforcing prejudice and oppression.

Considering the actual struggles for independence as well as the intellectual debates different groups have faced in order to acknowledge the distress of colonialism, a new ideological movement surfaces. As Birns argues, postcolonialism as a historical moment arises "in the aftermath of the political independence of many non-Western states, sought to diagnose and remedy the effects of this colonialist mentality" (223). At the same time, postcolonialism as a field of study begins to create a disruption in normalizing oppressing speeches, such as imperialistic, colonial, and hegemonic discourses as "[i]t constitutes a directed intellectual production that seeks to articulate itself with different forms of emancipatory politics, to synthesize different kinds of work towards the realization of common goals that include the creation of equal access to material, natural, social and technological resources" (Young 11). Moreover, for Birns, it deals "with the liberation of the culturally subordinated in the wake of colonialism" (223). Also, it tries to negotiate the subjectivity, identity, and representation of groups marginalized by colonizing forces, opening a space in which those groups can speak for themselves and have agency in their cultural and political practices.

Even though postcolonialism is a process of acknowledging emancipation and negotiation of the liberation of colonized people, as previously discussed by Birns, there are still many unaddressed issues related do Indigenous peoples' concerns and a lack of unaccountability towards many marginalizing practices that are still current. As Tuhiwai Linda Smith states, "[m]any indigenous intellectuals actively resist participating in any discussion within the discourses of post-coloniality. This is because post-colonialism is viewed as the convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world" (14). In a similar view, Ian Hinley suggests the term "implies that colonialism is a phenomenon that has been relegated to the history books" (101). Both authors, in their discussions, are concerned with how much the idea of colonialism is internalized in our society thus making it difficult to develop new practices that are not based on established Eurocentric values.

One should be attentive to the fact that, even though literary authors such as Thomas King and many other Indigenous writers are usually studied through a postcolonial perspective once their writings have been creating this disruption in hegemonic discourses, it is important to contextualize what the postcolonial is in terms of Indigenous studies. According to Battiste,

> Indigenous thinkers use the 'postcolonial' to describe a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality. The term is an aspirational practice, goal, or idea […] Yet we recognize that postcolonial societies do not exist. Rather, we acknowledge the colonial mentality and structures that still exist in all societies and nations and the neocolonial tendencies that resist decolonization in the contemporary world (xix).

The above quotation was taken from a collection of essays that was the product of an International Summer Institute held in Saskatchewan (1996) for and to Indigenous peoples and it compiles the voices of the first generation of Aboriginal scholars from around the

world; Battiste's words not only meet the current discussion on how the structures of our society still struggle to fight colonial thinking but also pair with King's argument in the essay "Godzilla vs Post-Colonial": "[i]ronically, while the term itself – post-colonial – strives to escape to find new centers, it remains, in the end, a hostage to nationalism" ("Godzilla" 243); King's text refutes the idea that postcolonialism can cope with all the nuances Indigenous cultures have and, at the same time, King's essay corroborates Battiste's argument since the idea is that center and periphery remain the same once colonialism is still a reality, especially if we consider the context of Indigenous peoples. It is not possible to acknowledge that cultures and mentalities are being built outside hegemonic discourses once many contemporary practices reminisce from colonial thinking, as for example the land controversy among Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian and the United States governments.

It is important to highlight that, as Marta Dvorak discusses, certain assumptions are made when dealing with Indigenous writings in the sense that

> [t]here has been a tendency in certain academic circles to associate Native literature with post-colonial literary production on account of their common concerns regarding history and, more particularly, marginalization or the process of othering. These concerns are manifest in both their thematic interests and discursive strategies (1).

This idea also matches with King's concern about the fact that, if Indigenous writing is understood only as post-colonial, such approach might interfere in the imaginary of their literature once "the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization" ("Godzilla" 243). In relation to this matter, Battiste also makes an important distinction between postcolonial Indigenous thought and postcolonial theory in literature; she says: "[a]lthough they are related

endeavors, postcolonial Indigenous thought also emerges from the inability of Eurocentric theory to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions. […] It rejects the use of any Eurocentric theory or its categories" (xix). For her, the distinction is important once colonialism is a one-way path that goes from colonizer to colonized and departing from Eurocentric standards, as she mentions. It is difficult to cope with the different aspects related to Natives culture and customs and such task becomes more arduous when dealing with stablished modes of thinking and perceiving the world, as it happens with Eurocentric values; thus, the importance of creating a unique mode of thought that departs from Natives to Natives.

Much of the reservations made in regards of postcolonial theory lies especially in the fact that those theorizations were and are generally produced by Eurocentric scholars, as previously discussed by Battiste, who did not face the same struggles Indigenous people have been facing – for instance, the problem of relocation of lands within the same territory. Also, postcolonial theories many times fail to balance their ideas between different groups aside from lacking efficiency in dealing with more contemporary issues; as J. Edward Chamberlin argues,

> [...] I would note that postcolonial theory is notoriously nervous about some of the extremes of colonial brutality – slavery, the Jewish Holocaust, and the long-running war against the Indians (and the termination and extermination policies that accompanied it). Postcolonialism is often unsure whether these are different in kind or merely in degree from, say, the colonial organization of Africa or India. Questions of race are a complicated and contentious part of its analysis too (132).

His argument indicates that postcolonial theory tries to compile all the oppression suffered from colonized and brutalized countries, ethnical and religious groups; however, it fails to do so since, as already mentioned, postcolonial theory tended to not take into consideration the distinction between cultures or the proportion of the damage done. Also, it does not question how much of the political implications are considered

to recognize the extent colonialism has affected and still affects those countries and groups.

Regarding Indigenous writings and its relationship with postcolonial theory, King says

> [p]ost-colonial literature, then, must be the literature produced by Native people sometime after colonization, a literature that arises in large part out of the experience that is colonization. [...] I rather like the idea of post-colonial literature, because it promises to set me apart from the masses and suggests that what I have to offer is new and exciting. [...] But I am concerned with what the term says about Natives and Native literature and the initial assumptions it makes about us and our cultures ("Godzilla" 242).

The author's concern here is with the implication of 'post' for Indigenous writings, as if it implies that every work has, as its main subject, colonialism. He also argues in the essay that pre-colonial literature then would be every work – 'oral in nature' – produced before the contact with Europeans, which would again put the first contact as a landmark to determine the development of Indigenous literature. However, "[p]re-colonial literature, as we use the term in North America, has no relationship whatsoever to colonial literature" (King "Godzilla" 242). In both cases, the concern is that the growth of Indigenous writings has happened only because of colonization. King's concern relates to Tuhiwai Smith's apprehension that maybe "post-colonialism has become a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing the privileges of non-indigenous academics because the field of 'post-colonial' discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns" (26). Their argument, as well as Battiste's, relies on the importance of having Indigenous voices to advocate in favor of their agenda and stress what is important for Indigenous people.

One of the aspects in postcolonial writing and in Indigenous thinking that has been strongly debated is the issue of identity, and such

concept is also interconnected with storytelling, orality and humor. By bringing these concepts together, the present chapter builds the theoretical base for the analysis of King's book, which, in turn, combines all the elements mentioned.

1.2 Identity

The concepts of identity, identification, and ethnicity have been discussed for a long time in the academic field; however, the precise definition of a term such as identity still seems distant, for throughout history the understanding of identity has usually converged with the theory in vogue at a given time. Stuart Hall, in his introductory piece for the book *Question of Cultural Identity* (1996), which he co-authored with Paul Du Gay, problematizes the idea of identity and identification as concepts that have been deconstructed in many fields of study, "all of them, in one way or another critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity" (1). It is important, then, to understand identity as a fluid concept instead of a static one, considering that several different aspects construct one's identity and that the modern human being is directly or indirectly influenced by the different contexts they are inserted in. Another important aspect to be considered when discussing identity issues is identity being constructed or converging with the idea of nation, in the sense that the first cultural identification we have is with our country. We understand ourselves as part of a group that shares the same language, history, and symbols that constitute a nation, such as a flag or the national anthem. Thus, origin and tradition become important because, even though our identities are always changing, the first 'concrete' vision we have of ourselves is from this first cultural sharing.

Considering this, much of the tradition and many myths of origin help to build a nation's identity. In order to understand their own existence, both colonizer and colonized rely on stories to connect people with their ancestors' conquests and struggles. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Edward Said says that "stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (xii). The letters and journals colonial explorers brought back to their countries showed the vision they had of strange lands, peoples, and their appearance. These texts also reported on

how the interactions between travelers and native inhabitants happened and even how European explorers felt authorized to take possession of certain places. At the same time, the telling of stories helped colonized peoples to maintain their cultural backgrounds and to show their perspective of certain historical events, a perspective which most of the time is neglected by official history. Specifically, regarding Indigenous people, "these stories didn't establish possession of the place. On the contrary, they showed how the people were possessed *by* it – owned and occupied, as it were, and answerable to it by means of their stories and songs" (Chamberlin 127). Indigenous people have been sharing stories and creating new ones for many years; the movement within the limits of the tribes' lands as well as the spiritual meaning of their sacred lands is an important form of attachment with their personal and communal values. Once again, the connection between land and Indigenous identities is powerful; it shows that, for Indigenous communities, remembering their stories is remembering their past and by consequence claiming something that was long taken from them.

As mentioned earlier, the preconceptions towards Aboriginal Peoples began with the first contact of European and Indigenous peoples in the arrival of the former in the so-called "new world". As King discusses in the initial chapter of his PhD dissertation, during the first contacts, assumptions were made and spread across Europe through diaries and logs that the captains and crew kept about their journeys, thus creating, in the imaginary of people, preconceptions of the inhabitants of those lands, "other expeditions described the Indian in much the same way, commenting at length on their innocence, intelligence, and friendliness, some of these reports were not always pleasant nor were the descriptions always favorable" (King *Inventing the Indian* 11). He goes further in the discussion of representation, arguing that much of the portrayal made of Indigenous peoples was carved in the colonial period – the inferior and savage Indian – but also restated by many literary works; the author states that the image of the savage Indian would still be reproduced until and after the Romantic period; however, a new category would emerge in the nineteenth century: the dying Indian (King *Inventing the Indian* 27). This contemplation of the Indian as a dying subject adds in the discussion in the sense of how hegemonic (or colonizing) society,

here, in the specific case being discussed by King, the growing American nation, can control the representation of the other. According to King,

> [t]o be sure, many of the tribes that lived on the east coast and in the interior of Connecticut and Ohio valleys had been injured and disoriented by the years of almost continuous warfare, by European diseases, and by the destructive effect of liquor. But the vast majority of tribes were a comfortable distance away from the grave. This was the Indian of fact (*Inventing the Indian* 28).

The importance of this discussion lies on the fact that such representation has its construction of the Indian as a symbol, which by consequence disregards the number of different Indigenous Peoples and communities; when a miscellanea of different peoples is seen, and limited to one image that describes them all, the risk of categorization and 'realness' becomes a problem that can last for generations with direct impact on the construction of the identities of those peoples, by them and by others.

According to Bonita Lawrence, the concept of identity for Indigenous people is not an impartial matter once the definitions of Indiannes are directly related to the colonial system: "Native identity is inevitably highly political, with ramifications for how contemporary and historical collective experience is understood. For Native People, individual identity is always being negotiated in relation to collective identity, and in the face of an external, colonizing society" (1). In a contemporary society in which there are laws and decrees of categorization of Indians – a fact which only helps create more distance between Indigenous Peoples and their cultures – and with the fragmentation caused by colonization in many Indigenous societies, it is often more difficult to relate or to maintain a collective identity, as Leroy Little Bear discusses: "[m]any collective views of the world competed for control of their [Indigenous peoples] behavior, and since none was dominant modern Aboriginal people had to make guesses or choices about everything. Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values" (85); once

Indigenous Peoples did not have a completed puzzle, as Little Bear mentions, their worldview was shattered in different pieces by colonization, thus creating a disruption in what belonged to their culture and what was left as heritage from colonialism.

"Indigenous identity is a truly complex and somewhat controversial topic" (Weaver 240) not only because identity is an intricate term in itself, but also because, when dealing with Indigenous identity, external (mainstream society's[14]) and internal (Native community's) factors heavily influence Indigenous identity construction, making the process more difficult once many times, factors from both sides have opposing views of the world. Some features, – as storytelling and orality – that will be discussed later in this chapter, alongside with land, ceremonies, and language constitute, to a great deal, the notion of nativeness for Indigenous Peoples; as stressed by Mareike Neuhaus, "[t]he interarticulation of language, history, ceremony, and land is complex but fragile; maintaining the balance requires constant care and nurturing" (4). In addition, the ongoing process of construction of one's identity can become harder when not only external elements are brought in the equation – such as the words chosen to categorize Indigenous peoples (Indigenous, Native, First Nation, Indian, Aboriginal)[15], "the translation of Indigenous words", and "stereotypes and distorted meanings" as mentioned by Hilary Weaver (243) – but also considering the intricacies of what being part of a community can signify, once it "is misleading to assume that all indigenous people experience a Native cultural identity in the same way just because they were born into a Native

[14] I chose to use this term, as well as Western society, to be able to differentiate and name the society that is not related to Indigenous communities.

[15] King argues in *The Inconvenient Indian – A Curious Account of Native people in North America* that "North America for a very long time now, insisted on a collective noun for Live Indians – Indians, Aboriginals, First Nations, Natives, First Peoples – even though there are over 600 recognized nations in Canada and over 550 recognize nations in the United States" (65). While examining King's essay in the next chapter, I will present a deeper discussion on the matter.

community" (Weaver 243). As discussed earlier, Indigenous individual identity is a constant process of negotiation with their particular and collective identity alongside with the mainstream society.

Such features as storytelling and orality can be seen as important aspects of (and on) the construction of Indigenous identities; they mark Indigenous experience and are constantly 'reclaimed' by authors, such as King – as it is going to be discussed later. By claiming and arguing for the importance of the following concepts – storytelling, orality, humor, and irony – to Indigenous communities, the purpose of this present work is not to reduce Indigenous cultural identity to those elements but to understand the importance of such features in the process of resisting assimilation and Eurocentric assumptions towards Indigenous peoples and how such elements can help to maintain the balance mentioned between past and present. A more specific purpose of such an approach is to see how these features are important tools in the construction of resistance in King's narratives.

1.3 Storytelling and Orality

The importance of voice for Indigenous Peoples and in Indigenous studies lies in the encompassing value of it, "standing for a range of concepts: from empowerment to appropriation, from individual style to collective identity" (McCall 2), and, as mentioned in the section before, it is one of the key elements in the construction of Indigenous values and traditions, thus becoming an important link to their identity:

> First peoples preserve and share their rich worldview through oral traditions – accounts and legends that have been passed down through generations. Stories are an eloquent form of cultural memory, linked to family, landscape and cosmology. They describe key people and events, clarify cultural status and

> affiliation, and recount tales of powerful, mythological creatures (McCord Museum[16]).

As discussed by Neuhaus, "[c]ontemporary Indigenous literatures continue literary traditions whose origins are in oral performance, composed in ancestral languages" (1). Although ancestral languages are present in the work of many authors, such as in the use of holophrases[17], and might represent a strong effort to create a disturbance in the reader (especially the Western reader) once he/she has to look at the footnotes or search for its meaning elsewhere; at the same time this usage raises awareness to Indigenous' mother tongues. Thus, the use of the colonizer's language is not less of a resistance tool. As Neuhaus reminds us, despite the fact writers have been "moving from ancestral languages" and using the colonizers' language, this does not happen "blindly" (2) once "[f]or if the English used by Indigenous poets, storytellers, biographers, novelists, and essayists is substantially influenced by ancestral language structures, then reading Indigenous literature in English amounts to nothing less than an exercise in reading the English language by thinking outside that very language" (2).

In this regard, orality and storytelling come as converging points to language; Rubelise da Cunha argues that, differently from Western culture, in which stories are part of literature, in "indigenous viewpoint, there is no separation between imagination and reality, and traditional oral performances are events in which indigenous knowledge is constructed and practical lessons for life are learned. Hence, storytelling is sacred and philosophical as well as literary" (*Decolonizing* 14). Furthermore, the author considers that, "[w]hile written literature privileges an individual

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[16] The citation was taken from a permanent exhibit in the McCord Museum in Montreal, Quebec (CA), 2016. The exhibit, titled *Wearing Our Identity. The First Peoples Collection*, was produced in collaboration with an Aboriginal Advisory Committee and has pieces from First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. For more information on this exhibit see: http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/exhibitions/wearing-our-identity-the-first-peoples-collection/

[17] "Holophrases are holistic expressions. More specifically, a holophrase is a one-word sentence or clause, such as the Plains Cree word *ki-nohte-h-âcimostâ-tinâwâw*, which translates as 'I want to tell you folks a story'" (Neuhaus 1).

reading experience, oral storytelling is dynamic, since it changes and incorporates the present and the individual as well as the collective historical experience into the tale" (*Rewriting* 56). In this sense, the collective experience is the premise of storytelling and, in the case of Indigenous communities, storytelling brings individuals close to each other unifying the tribe. Attempting to incorporate, in writing, habits, cultures and stories of the past used in storytelling gives writers the opportunity to subvert values and hegemonic discourses using their own tools as a powerful weapon.

In his essay, on the second part of *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, Richard Delgado theorizes about narratives, storytelling and counterstorytelling. Regarding the telling of stories, he states:

> Many, but by no means all, who have been telling legal [authorized] stories are members of what could be loosely described as outgroups, groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized (60).

Many resistance movements started to understand that recollecting stories from the past as well as rescuing ways of telling a story was a way to move out of the shadows to which hegemonic groups had relegated other ethnic minorities. In addition, as important as valuing their roots, telling the story from their perspective empowers oppressed communities to have a voice and question the supreme truth established by dominant cultures. The understanding of counterstorytelling as the account of the groups who were marginalized and muted over the past five centuries is an important step to recognize minority writers and minority groups as active agents in history.

Although counterstorytelling has been critically approached by contemporary scholars as a postcolonial strategy of resistance, to see it as a mere answer to colonialism is to reduce traditions (orality and storytelling) as simply a reaction to oppression. Even if counterstorytelling is a way of retelling a deep-rooted story or reckoning with an untold story, it does not exist only because of colonialism. To

understand counterstorytelling only as a response to colonialism is to deny "traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question" ("Godzilla" 243), as Thomas King himself points out, and, more importantly, such approach insists that there is a marginalized culture that exists merely as a reaction against a dominant culture. Even if counterstorytelling anticipates a discourse that is counter acting hegemonic discourses, here specifically derived from colonial practices, it also creates a place to balance already rooted discourse in our society; King's argument is essential once the term counterstorytelling might be at risk of having the same connotation as postcolonial – suggesting that colonialism is the only reason for oppressed peoples' responses. In this sense, King's writings are not only a counterstory but a powerful tool to affirm Indigenous identity and culture.

As already mentioned, orality is a distinctive mark in contemporary Indigenous narratives, once many important Indigenous authors have been using it with different approaches towards this device. King has his own point of view on how some distinctions in nomenclature and theory could contemplate the diverse uses as well as the miscellanea that constitutes Indigenous writings. He argues that four different concepts could begin to address those distinctive features: tribal (which refers to literature created by the tribe for the tribe, usually written in a Native language), polemical (which can be written in a Native language or in English/French and discuss the clashes between Natives and non-Natives), associational (mostly descriptive of Native communities and avoids focusing on the problems and conflicts between Natives and non-Natives communities), and interfusional (the literature that is a fusion between oral and written patterns, mostly uses oral syntax but is written in English) ("Godzilla" 244). King describes interfusional literature as "that part of Native literature which is a blending of oral literature and written literature" ("Godzilla" 244). The stories usually have structures, patterns, and even characters that belong to oral tradition ("Godzilla" 244) mingled with the written pattern and most of the times the device of orality is found in the voice of the storyteller.

However, even though the storyteller is the 'creator' of these stories, this voice by no means is singularized. Sharon Venne, in her article discussing the importance of the oral basis for understanding

Indigenous treaty negotiations[18], describes how important orality and storytelling is for the Native community, saying that "[i]n an oral culture, the means of passing on information is via story telling. That is not to say someone makes up a story, but a story is the manner in which the information is told" (174). Furthermore, the author highlights the importance of the storyteller, the communion between listeners and storytellers and the power of collective memory, "[w]hen the Elders come together, the stories begin to flow. One Elder alone has many stories, but when a number of Elders are placed in the same room the stories multiply. [...] Together, the Elders tell the story of the nation. Narrative is a powerful method for teaching many things, including the history of an oral people" (174). Using this same example, Sophie McCall also discusses the importance of the audience for those narratives arguing that "[t]he listener's participation is thus key in shaping the story; different audiences create different inflections, nuances, and references in the narrative" (40). Thus, it is possible to assert that storytelling brings a sense of sharing and togetherness, the rhythm and pacing of narrative not only depends on the will of the storyteller but also on the reaction of the audience; also, the sharing of the stories grants a link between past and present and a sense of passing on of heritage.

Departing from this discussion, King takes on the different possibilities of narrative constructions from a Native perspective and relies on the interfusional concept of literature to structure much of his work, in particular the essays that compose *The Truth About Stories*, which will be further analyzed in the following chapter. Further, keeping in mind that the essays were first produced to be delivered publicly, King, as the storyteller, uses his texts to address conflicting issues related to Indigenous and Western society and also as an opportunity to 'educate' the audience about valuable aspects of Indigenous cultures.

[18] In her article, she discussed the Treaty 6 (1876) between a Cree community and the Crown of Great Britain and the authority structures in that Cree society.

1.4 Humor and Irony

Historically, humor and laughter have had a stigma of being part of less prestigious literary genres – for the ancient Greeks, especially according to Plato and Aristotle and their discussions on the comic theater – comedy was connected to "vice, offense, vulgarity, and foolishness, so that they declared it unworthy of virtuous, free people" (Larkin-Galiñanes 5). Going further in History, especially in the long periods of time that were ruled by the Church, such as the Middle Ages and Protestant reformation, humor and comedy "[were] seen as immoral, filthy, and sinful in itself, but it was also considered to provide occasion for sin and immorality" (Larkin-Galiñanes 7). Important authors, like Hobbes and Descartes, have been discussing humor as a concept and its impact on society or the relation of laughter with social factors once "it [humor] has a social function, responds to certain exigencies of social life, and has a social meaning" (Larkin-Galiñanes 8); retrospectively, humor and comedy used to be seen not only as a lower form of expression but also the devices used in comedy were seen as having the purpose to only mock and emphasize negative aspects of other people. According to Cristina Larkin-Galiñares, it was not until the 1960's that the idea of humor as only a form of mockery started shifting, especially when psychologists and sociologists started to revise early theories of philosophers and writers of the past (9).

Much as identity, humor is not a simple term to be described. According to Isabel Ermida in the first chapter of her book *The Language of Comic Narratives – Humor Construction in Short Stories,* "[h]umor has many facets and many academic constructions, as well as many terminological shades. […] This may explain why researchers tend to disagree when struggling to answer a seemingly simple question: what is humor?" (1). Also, the variety of instances and forms in which humor or humorous occurrences can appear makes it even harder to draw a line to delimitate the concept; as Ermida points out "[h]umor can be either verbal or non-verbal; it can be a subjective experience or serve communicative purposes; it can draw upon common everyday reality or consist of fiction and imagination;" (2). Furthermore, not only the many vehicles and circumstances open the possibilities for the creation of humor, but also the fact that it can be useful to deal with most various subjects, thus "[t]he

truth is there does not seem to be a specific 'humorous theme': everything, in principle, can become an object for humorous use" (Ermida 2).

Moreover, Ermida elaborates on what would be the subversive side of humor. According to the author, there are two types for humor transgressions: "the linguistic strategies and pragmatic ones" (141), the first based on morphology, syntax, lexical ambiguities, and so on and the latter, playing "on the relationships that texts establish with contexts, by mixing contradictory elements in the same discursive universe, by infringing the principles of shared world knowledge, by denying access to essential information, by giving fallacious data, by triggering erroneous inferences, and so on" (141). For the purpose of this research, the pragmatically constructed humor is the one being used to analyze the narratives as subversive as well as a narrative trope, in the sense it incorporates irony as one of its traits. The choice relies on the discussion Kristina Fagan brings in her PhD dissertation when she argues that "[n]ative humor has the power to challenge norms and assumptions by presenting an alternative point of view on familiar things. Thus, Native satires teach us both Native and non-Native people" (31). In Fagan's study, humor is analyzed bearing in mind identity, authenticity, and community and how it helps in dealing with such intricate matters at the same time it "allows to both engage with and resist the dominant society" (ii). Her point is very significant to understanding the use of humor in King's text since this idea of defying established values and truths is a key point when examining King's works.

Drawing from King's works, there is an understanding that humor is also featured in Native culture which, according to Fagan, was something non-Native societies (including researchers) thought "to be incompatible" with Native culture (1). For non-Native society, it seems to be conflicting the association of Indigenous peoples and humor; according to Maggie Ann Bowens, "[t]here is little recognition of this [humor] outside Native America where the stereotypical image of the inscrutable, stern-faced 'injun' full of wisdom and proverbs remains" (248). Thus, it comes as a surprise to see that many authors rely on humor to develop their narratives. However, humor can be easily found in Indigenous writings, especially in the figure of the trickster. According to Cunha, the trickster is "the amoral and ambiguous figure who plays tricks

and can be both human and animal, creator and destroyer, hero and antihero, but can also end up as a victim of his own tricks" (*Rewriting* 9); he is very important in the tribal culture and Cunha argues that Indigenous culture allows him to surpass the dichotomy of good and evil and hero and anti-hero (*Rewriting* 9). The trope of humor, then, can be found in "the joyful and triumphant tales of trickster figures that gain revenge for the wrongs of colonialism" (Bowens 247) or in the jokes and subversion of preconceived images the white culture has of Native peoples, as mentioned earlier.

Considering the subversive quality of humor as well as the importance of humor in Indigenous writings, it is essential to go deeper on the importance of the trickster. The trickster is an emblematic figure in Native culture, his subversiveness relies not only on his slippery and jokingly character but also on the linguistic strategies previously mentioned, "[t]his means that trickster tales are often filled with jokes which release the language from the strictures of closed meanings" (Bowens 249). The trickster appears not only to highlight the wrongs of colonialism but also as an important character in the creation stories; his disruption of balance "may cause trouble to the community, [but] he/she always teaches lessons and points to the inevitability of transformation in any cultural environment" ("The Trickster Wink" Cunha 12). Again, humor, even though in the figure of the trickster, is bound to communal needs and interactions. Cunha also points out that "Tricksters are storytelling figures. They inhabit a logic in which oral is no opposite of written, imagination is not contrary to reality, good depends on evil, and pain does not prevent laughter" ("The Trickster Wink" 14). Furthermore, much as orality and humor in itself, "these storytelling figures, through their roots in Native knowledge and their subversive nature, work as elements of resistance to colonial discourses" ("The Trickster Wink" Cunha 14). Accordantly, Bowens points out that Indigenous writings make "use of humour in order to defend themselves and their cultures, and to survive the attack on their communities by dominant colonial society" (248). Thus, humor in Indigenous writings, making use of the trickster or not, also serves the purpose of resisting established discourses rooted in colonial thinking; by using humor as a discursive tool, Indigenous people have been able to fight assimilation and at the same time tighten their communal bond.

Overall, in an encompassing way, humor "promotes a healing experience" ("The Trickster Wink" Cunha 94) and it is an important part of Native culture; by using this trope, many Indigenous authors have helped to bring to light important political aspects into the dominant society. In this process of healing, an important factor of humor raises, according to Bowens, humor can be a way of emphasizing an idea of togetherness once it "demands shared cultural knowledge, it is a means of reaffirming a sense of experience and community" (248). By addressing issues related to Indigenous communities, humor helps people to connect and reaffirm their sense of sovereignty. In addition, humor has also a relation to identity issues and communal values, once its understanding depends on the relational process of people and their insight in the matter.

The usage of humor in Native writing can be seen as a revision of established values and as a useful strategy to denounce problems and ask for political changes, thus constructing a tool of resistance but more importantly building a sense of sovereignty. In accordance to Bowens' discussion above, Larkin-Galiñanes argues that

> humor and its appreciation are very largely judged to be a question of social allegiance and identification, because it is nowadays generally recognized that the scope and degree of mutual understanding in humor varies directly with the degree to which the participants share their social backgrounds. This is why laughter is often limited by national frontiers and the passage of time (9).

In this view, the sense of community and sovereignty is reinforced by Alison Ross's argument, which suggests that "[h]umour is influential – from political satire to joking as a way of establishing friendship and excluding other" (ix); the social insertion of the participants immediately creates a barrier that will allow those who share the same understanding to cross that barrier while blocking the other who either do not share the same background or do not empathize with what is being delivered. Also, Larkin-Galiñanes raises an interesting point to be revisited from the discussion on Identity: the idea of construction of

nation and our identification with it. The boundary aspect she mentions in the end not only adds to the argument of how humor is influenced by those borders but also on how King himself makes use of these national identifications in his writings – for being understood or not in the different contexts he is inserted in. King is a dual citizen – from the United States and Canada – and he also belongs to both communities – Natives and non-Natives. What could be seen at first as a problematic situation actually enables him to move and permeate in all the possible scenarios, thus creating a vast ground for him to gather material and in a certain way it could be the main reason for his success in those different communities.

According to Davidson et al., King's "comic strategies comprise a series of cultural reversals that throw into question traditional discursive constructions" (3). King describes himself "as a serious writer. Tragedy is my topic. Comedy my strategy" (qtd. in Davidson et al., 3), which is a precise characterization of his writings once much of his discussions relates to colonial practices, assimilation, and ongoing dubious laws persistently applied in Canada, but all topics are presented with a humorous twist, averting "the polemics that often mark cultural critiques, and his writings, consequently, preserve the ability to engage, entertain – and educate" (Davidson et al 3); King proves humor in his writings is not only there to entertain but "can also be a subversive weapon" (Atwood 244).

Despite the fact humor and irony are independent narrative devices, irony is pointed out by Ermida, alongside 'wit' and 'laughter', as "conceptual satellites of humor" (5), which can be understood as underlying tools in the construction of humor. In Native writings, they tend to become an even more intricate element that is used to denounce colonial practices and affirm Indigenous identity. According to Bowens, even though usually humor in Indigenous writings is used as a way of resistance and communion, much of this humor is used directly to the Native community, she argues that "[t]he self-mocking humour of Native American fiction often concerns the negative treatment by whites, alcoholism, and gambling." (249). Further, Bowens argues that "this form of humour [self-mocking] is subtle and complex as the heavy ironic tone indicates a recognition that such aspects are at least in part also imposed on them by the circumstance of living under colonialism." (249)

In relation to irony, besides being an important factor in the development of humor, as mentioned above, it is also a key factor to the construction of King's narrative as a whole; much like humor, irony is a broad and variable concept, not only depending on the intention of the writer but also on the reception of the reader, which means that

> [t]he major players in the ironic game are indeed the interpreter and the ironist. The interpreter may—or may not—be the intended addressee of the ironist's utterance, but s/he (by definition) is the one who attributes irony and then interprets it: in other words, the one who decides whether the utterance is ironic (or not), and then what *particular* ironic meaning it might have (*Irony's Edge* Hutcheon 11).

Hutcheon's discussion addresses the 'two-way street' that ironical texts are. Differently from humor that can be quite obvious, irony can be subtler relying more on the understanding of the receiver. Thus, what is possible to see is that in many Indigenous writings that make use of these tropes, the subtlety of irony can strengthen even more the power of humor in those texts. In accordance, Bowens argues that, "self-mocking humour is heavy with irony and alerts the reader to the difficult living situations of many Native Americans, particularly on reserve lands. It acts as a form of ethnic glue in that it elicits empathy from those who recognize or share such difficulties" (249), once again strengthening the sense of shared experience and community. However, there is certain precaution writers should have when dealing with irony: it can be prone to lose its intensity and effect when used to discuss complicated matters, once it could allow the reader to infer that such matters are not supposed to be taken seriously. However, by taking irony as a 'satellite' of humor and intertwining patterns of both narrative tropes, King enhances the ironic tone while addressing Indigenous important matters. Altogether, it is not possible to dissociate humor from irony in this context.

Considering this discussion, the following chapter will bring an analysis on King's book, *The Truth About Stories – A Native Narrative*, examining how the concepts previously presented are inserted in the

essays; the following chapter also discusses how King uses his narratives as means for building his own theorization on storytelling and identity.

CHAPTER II – "There is a story I know"
Analysis on *The Truth About Stories*

Departing from the previous discussion and considering the concepts presented earlier, King is one of the contemporary Indigenous writers that has the ability to encompass many of those features in his narratives. The author addresses issues of identity and Indigenous postcolonial thinking at the same time as he makes use of storytelling and orality to build his texts. The way he uses humor and irony in his narratives can also be seen as a strategy to address important Indigenous concerns, such as authenticity, assimilation, and colonial discourses and practices.

Differently from King's previous publications, *The Truth About Stories* cannot be categorized in a particular genre, once the book, as much as its author, does not fit in a fixed label: although it is a collection of essays that could be read as non-fictional pieces, it also tells fictional stories, which could be read as short-stories, and it is also permeated by the author's memories, which could characterize the book as a memoir, although the essays interweave historical accounts as well. *The Truth About Stories* is a collection of five essays and one afterword; each essay corresponds to a chapter of the book and has exactly thirty pages. They are titled, in the order in which they appear in the book: "'You'll Never Believe What Happened' Is Always a Great Way to Start", 'You're Not The Indian I Had in Mind', 'Let Me Entertain You', 'A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark', and finally 'What Is About Us That You Don't Like'; the afterword is titled "Private Stories." As mentioned in the introduction, the compilation of essays was brought together as a result of the Massey Lectures, an effort of the Massey College in Toronto, which took place in different universities across Canada in 2003.

In *The Truth About Stories*, King presents the reader with a global insight about storytelling throughout the whole book. Also, by relying on the suggestive subtitle, *A Native Narrative*, King shares not only Indigenous tales and stories but also personal accounts; together, all these narratives create a unified piece having as a common feature the voice of this narrator, or better yet, storyteller: Thomas King. The construction of each essay, despite bringing different issues for discussion, relies on the features of oral narration for the construction of the essays; by doing so,

King can link different stories in one piece as if they were part of one single tale.

In addition, the book provides the reader with a pattern that brings a similar beginning and ending in all essays, which gives it a circular movement in which all the stories told, despite their independence, complement each other. This connection between each story is enforced by the way King begins each essay in chapters I to V, which he does with the following quote:

> There is a story I know. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I've heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes the change is simply in the details. Sometimes in the order of events. Other times it's the dialogue or the response of the audience. But in all the telling of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away (*The Truth About Stories* 1).[19]

In every chapter, after this excerpt, King mentions that someone was telling this story in a certain city (each of the chapters brings a different city from Canada) and when this person was talking about the turtle, someone from the particular audience reacted to it asking the following question "So how many turtles are there?" to which the storyteller answers "No one knows for sure, […] but it's turtles all the way down" (*The Truth About Stories* 2)[20]. Right after this dialogue, there is a break in this sort of anecdote with a double space on the page and a new paragraph is introduced, once more in the same manner in the following four chapters and as the beginning of the afterword; it begins with the phrase "The truth about stories is that that's all we are"[21]; this sentence is followed by a quote by an Indigenous artist (from chapter I to V) and one by a Nigerian storyteller in the afterword; the quote is a kind

[19] This excerpt also appears in pages 31, 61, 91, and 121.
[20] This dialogue also appears in pages 32, 62, 92, and 122.
[21] This sentence also appears in pages 32, 62, 92, 122, and 153.

of prologue to the stories that will follow in the chapter, in the sense that they will prepare the reader to what is coming and will also dialogue with the main theme of the essay presented.

This pattern will also be seen in the ending of the chapters, with King reiterating in the final paragraphs the primary story of the essay and telling the reader that this story now belongs to them: "[i]t's yours. Do it what you will" (*The Truth About Stories* 29)[22]. After saying that, he presents ideas related to what the reader could do with this story – the examples change in all the chapter – and he finishes the essays by saying "[f]orget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (*The Truth About Stories* 29)[23]. Such structure is repeated in the beginning and at the end of each chapter and it brings attention to the significance of stories; there is a cyclical tone to the texts, with its similar beginning and ending, which corroborates the idea that stories are never finished and once they keep being retold they will always have an impact on people's lives. Also, as discussed by Blanca Schorcht, such stories bring "an infinite regress of meaning where there can never be one original, authentic story. Through multiplicity and syncretism, oral storytelling retains the power to transform the (real) world into and through the written world" (199). In King's book, this is what we see, since he makes use of storytelling to address and challenge established values in our modern society; King also goes further and fuses the oral patterns with written ones, making orality an important feature in his writings.

Moreover, King uses storytelling not only as a trope for writing but also as a theoretical background to discuss its importance for Native culture. According to Cunha, such "development of a theory of storytelling can be perceived as a very important step for the construction of a Native theory of resistance, which is able to make use of the colonizer's language in order to negotiate a mode of knowledge production that recovers Native culture" (*Decolonizing* 33). As it is going to be discussed further in this chapter, the significance of storytelling surpasses the initial premise of telling a story for mere entertainment and involvement of the listener/reader; it evokes a cultural sharing, a

[22] This excerpt also appears in pages 60, 89, 119, 151, and 167.
[23] This excerpt also appears in pages 60, 89, 119, 151, and 167.

collective and personal possession once these stories are out in the world. The book brings a full embodiment of what stories are and how they are intrinsically mixed in the construction of our personal and collective identity. In addition, the humorous and ironic tone he brings in his writing helps King to strengthen his arguments at the same time it makes the readers reflect on the issues he is addressing, such as identity, residential schools, land relocations, and so on.

In this analytical chapter, the discussion will focus on three chapters from *The Truth About Stories* – I, II, and III, respectively – and they will be analyzed separately following the same arrangement of the theoretical discussion on the previous chapter. The reasoning for that lies on the amount of textual evidence gathered on the chosen chapters, thus they can be seen as solid examples of the strategies used by King throughout the book to discuss issues such as identity, storytelling, and humor.

2.1 Starting from the Beginning

In the first chapter of *The Truth About Stories*, titled "'You'll Never Believe What Happened' Is Always a Great Way to Start", King begins to develop the concept of storytelling and the importance of such practice for Indigenous communities and for the continuity of their stories – in this case specifically, the creational stories. He also emphasizes how stories are crucial and relevant for cultures in general; thus, these two aspects – storytelling and stories – can be considered the primary focus of his first discussion; it is important to note that narrative devices as humor and irony are also present in the text, much as the discussion on identity; however, those aspects are helping in the creation of the narrative as a whole but are not the core of the essay. Another significant aspect to consider in King's essay is that, even if storytelling and stories are the main focus of the first chapter, they are also the backbone in the construction of all the essays in the sense that the structure of the narratives depends on the figure of the storyteller – with his insights, pace, and rhythm – and on the oral elements that characterize Native storytelling which creates a specific movement in the written text.

In this first chapter, King uses personal accounts of his childhood perceptions about his mother's endeavors in pursuing a career, and his

lack of relationship with his father as well as a communal story of The Woman Who Fell from the Sky in order to begin developing the importance of storytelling and guide the reader through this first discussion. By joining personal and communal stories, King brings also the fusion of written and oral narratives once, according to him, "I think of oral stories as public stories and written stories as private stories" (*The Truth About Stories* 154); such positioning will be reflected in the book creating a theorization inside the narratives which, in turn, gives us a perspective of how King, as a writer, makes use of oral and written elements to build the essays.

As mentioned before, he starts the narrative with an excerpt from an Aboriginal writer and, for this chapter, the quote is by Jeannette Armstrong, an "Okanagan storyteller" (*The Truth About Stories* 2), as King describes her; the excerpt is from Armstrong's book *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing*, which reads: "[t]hrough my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanogan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns" (Armstrong qtd. in King 2). This excerpt prepares the reader to acknowledge how and why this movement of retelling a story is important, in the sense of passing along cultural practices to future generations in a way of perpetuating the knowledge and practice of storytelling in itself. Also, the stories are a decisive part of their culture, as Armstrong suggests in the quote above by creating different patterns in the same stories she (and other storytellers) incorporate nuances that can connect old practices to a more contemporary society, thus creating a bridge from past to present. Further, the act of storytelling "emphasize[s] the continuity of old traditions while simultaneously highlighting the differences of Indigenous experiences" (Schorcht 200) and at the same time it sets the tone for the accounts of King's life that are yet to come.

In the two paragraphs that follow Armstrong's quotation, King mentions how much he wanted, at the age of fifteen, to escape his town and his reality, showing the reader the causes to his wishes: "I'm sure part of it was teenage angst, and part of it was being poor in a rich country, and part of it was knowing that white was more than just a colour. And part of it was seeing the world through my mother's eyes" (*The Truth*

About Stories 2). We will know right after that King's mother had to raise him and his brother by herself because his father had left them when they were kids. In the following pages, King describes his mother's struggle to provide for him and his brother, narrating how she was always steps behind her male colleagues even if she was doing the same job; King does not mention if she was Indigenous or not, his claims are related to the differences and sort of privileges her co-workers had just for being male. He will also show how much of what others see of us can influence what we will tell them about us: "[f]or a long time I told my friends my father had died, which was easier than explaining that he had left us" (*The Truth About Stories* 5). From this early moment in the narrative, it is possible to see King building his narratives towards identity issues and social construct: first by mentioning the female struggle to find space in a very masculine and patriarchal environment through the figure of his mother, and secondly, by commenting on how much the fact of not having his father around influenced his family's lives.

Alongside that, he also brings the story of his father – or of how his brother found him, actually – and, through the telling of this event, King starts theorizing about storytelling; King does not dwell much on how and why his father left; rather, he focuses on the moment Christopher (King's brother) discovered he was alive and on the efforts their aunts had made to find him. It is important to mention that the theorization on storytelling does not take place outside the stories he is telling, breaking the flow of the narrative – much on the contrary, they also serve the purpose of building up the narrative, creating a sense of expectation in the reader. While telling the story of his father, King provides the reader with suggestions and hints on what constitutes a good story and how storytelling should be approached. Although his narration might give the impression he is just "making conversation", the choices of stories he tells are not made randomly, and they are not there only as a means of entertainment; they entertain but they also serve the purpose of helping him develop more intricate topics – in a way they are a pretext to his arguments.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, King argues that post-colonial, as a term used to describe a range of literary production, does not comprise the variety of nuances and diversity Indigenous writings have. Thus he argues that four concepts (interfusional, tribal,

associational, and polemical) would work better in describing the array Indigenous narratives have; it is possible to see, based on his argumentation, that he makes use of what he describes as interfusional: "that part of Native literature which is a blending of oral literature and written literature" ("Godzilla" 244); departing from this perspective, it is possible to see that not only in this chapter, but throughout the book, this is the pattern he follows in the construction of his narratives. Also, as mentioned earlier, the theorization on storytelling happens inside the text itself, as in the following passage where King describes how his brother Christopher told him he had found their father:

> And then when I was fifty-six or fifty-seven, my brother called me. Sit down, Christopher said, I've got some news. I was living in Ontario, and I figured if my brother was calling me all the way from California, telling me to sit down, it had to be bad news, something to do with my mother.
> But it wasn't.
> You'll never believe what happened, my brother said.
> That's always a good way to start a story you know: you'll never believe what happened.
> And he was right (*The Truth About Stories* 5).

By suggesting that the sentence "you'll never believe what happened" is always a good way to start, King demonstrates that the use of language is highly important in storytelling. The setting of the tone and the building of the climax has to happen in the right moment to deliver the unexpected.

Furthermore, still retelling his brother's story, King hints at how he thinks a good story should be told, "[m]y brother took a long time in telling this story, drawing on the details, repeating the good parts, making me wait. […] One of the tricks to storytelling is, never to tell everything at once, to make your audience wait, to keep everyone in suspense" (*The Truth About Stories* 7); this building of the expectation keeps the reader (or the listener, in the case of oral stories) focused on the storyteller and eager to see the unfolding of the story. In accordance with King's view,

Venne argues that the importance of the details is because they add "life to the historical event. The description of people, speeches, and clothing puts breath into the story. It is also a way of verifying the story" (175). King's statements foreshadow the story he will tell in the following pages in which King describes how the world was created, in great detail, building up the mood all the way to the end.

To ground even more his theorization and his perspective on the importance of stories, the author addresses the issue of knowing/encountering a new culture for the first time. He starts wondering about what he would like to do if he were to arrive in a different planet, and he says that he would choose to hear a creation story because "contained within creation stories are relationships that help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist" (*The Truth About Stories* 10). The importance of creation stories relies on the fact that they are connected to peoples, languages, and cultures and to individuals' mind, body, and soul, thus helping connect the individual to the group he/she feels belonging to. In relation to that, Tomson Highway discusses the importance of mythology saying that "[e]very race, every language, even every city, every town, every village has its own. Many hold immense similarity one to the other, many differ quite drastically, but the fact remains that each and every one of these mythologies defines the collective dream world, the collective subconscious of people" (27). Both authors present the impact and importance of those stories – or mythologies – for the societies collectiveness once they are the communal point of sharing of the cultures and peoples. In this sense, creational stories could be seen as a kind of mythology once they are inserted in the cultural background of society – much as the myth of the nation mentioned in the first chapter. In a way, they aid those cultures to understand from where they came at the same time they help shaping their present and future.

For the next part of the essay, King dwells on two creational stories: one Indigenous and one from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it is possible to infer that, by bringing together both creational stories, King addresses not only the importance of mythologies in society but also how such myths can help shape "the collective subconscious of people", as Highway points out. Also, one can draw a parallel between the creational stories and King's personal account in the sense that both are related to

beginnings: King's childhood and how the happenings in the initial part of his life helped shaping his view of the world; the creational stories narrating how the world was formed have influenced the societies in which they are inserted in, affecting the lives and views of people about their world.

In the Indigenous story, there is this very curious woman who is craving something delicious to eat and, in the way of digging something, she ends falling from the sky; she befriends many animals in this new place where she falls, and they discover she is pregnant; in a collective effort, they build a comfortable place for her to have her twins and, by the end of the story, her children represent opposing forces (light/dark, man/woman, winter/summer, and so on) and they create the world as we know it, with its imperfections and wonders. The Christian story is the Bible's Genesis, in which there is God creating the universe in seven days, with Adam and Eve. King actually tells both stories in the text; however, he approaches them very differently; he proceeds by telling us – very thoroughly - the creation story of the Woman Who Fell from the Sky, a narrative much known in Indigenous cultures. On the way of telling the story, even though his audience cannot take part on the choices being made, King addresses the reader by saying:

> Don't you love cryptic stories? I certainly do.
> Now before we go any further, we should give this woman a name so we don't have to keep calling her 'the woman'. How about Blanche? Catherine? Thelma? Okay, I know expressing an opinion can be embarrassing. So let's do it the way we always do it and let someone else make the decision for us. Someone we trust. Someone who will promise to lower taxes. Someone like me.
> I say we call her Charm. Don't worry. We can change it later on if we want to (*The Truth About Stories* 11-12).

By calling the attention of the reader/listener, King transforms the narrative in "a powerful method to teach many things, including the history of an oral people" (Venne, 174). Also, the author uses the oral

voice to pace the narrative, evoke details, and more importantly to create the figure of the storyteller in a written form, such figure, according to Venne, "is a master of the language and of the peoples" (174); by using the strategy to invite the reader to engage in the narrative, he constructs the setting of a conversation and once he mentions the possibility of changing the character's name he also builds an expectation on likelihood of this happening. In the same view, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Cunha argues that storytelling favors the communal aspect with its dynamism while bringing personal, past, and present (*Rewriting* 56), which is what is possible to see King doing in the text. He actually transforms the individual practice of reading into a more complex experience of sharing by bringing the figure of the storyteller and the marks of orality into the text.

In addition, in this passage, the importance is not only the play on creating the details and the oral voice of the storyteller, as mentioned before, but also on the ironical tone of the description of who is making this choice in the name of everyone. The incorporation of the image of the government is subtle in the sense it is a brief hint in the end of the 'dialogue' he is creating with the reader. However, it is surprising to see this topic surface amidst such casual exchange once the course of the 'conversation' or the story did not give any hints on the subject government; the narrative devices – humor and irony – in this passage work as an underlying hook to catch the reader's attention, which once again, as storytelling, it is used to address a more complex discussion. In accordance, Davidson et al argue that "[t]his comic perspective is especially helpful to Native North Americans given the legacy of colonization and racial destruction that has shaped the history of various tribes over the past several centuries" (*The Truth About Stories* 30). This kind of disruption created by King catches the attention of the reader and creates a moment of humorous awareness which can lead to "acknowledge[ing] the complex status of specific tribal communities and the pain in their histories" (Davidson et al. 30).

Following the subtlety used to insert the government in the text, and after retelling the story of the Woman Who Fell from the Sky, King makes use of the same grace to address the exotification of cultures and how their cultural items can be treated as a commodity:

> It's a neat story, isn't it? A little long, but different. Maybe even a little exotic. Sort of like the manure-fired pots or hand-painted plates or the woven palm hats or the coconuts carved to look like monkey faces or the colourful T-shirts that we buy on vacation.
> Souvenirs. Snapshots of a moment. […] Eventually everything is shipped off to a garage sale of slipped into the trash.
> As for stories such as the Woman Who Fell from the Sky, well, we listen to them and then we forget them, for amidst the thunder of Christian monologues, they have neither purchase nor place. After all, within the North American paradigm we have a perfect serviceable creation story (*The Truth About Stories* 20-21).

The excerpt deals with the myth as a sort of vacation: people have fun with it for a while, treasure the memories and the souvenirs but not long after they go back to their normal life. Stories that are not grounded on Western culture become a sort of entertainment only and most of the time have no power to change conceptions or be remembered as more than a glimpse. Thus, stories such as the Woman Who Fell from the Sky lose power in the reality of Western society, where they tend to be forgotten and not be taken seriously. However, for Indigenous people they still are a powerful symbol containing a magnitude of meanings.

Considering this discussion on how Indigenous stories and also their mythologies are understood and seen, it is important to highlight that not only its content can be taken as dubious in the eyes of Western society but also the way in which such stories are delivered. Cunha argues that

> [t]he first concept that shows this distance between Western and indigenous knowledge is storytelling. From a Western perspective, stories are considered literature. However, from an indigenous viewpoint, there is no separation between imagination and reality,

> and traditional oral performances are events in which indigenous knowledge is constructed and practical lessons for life are learned. Hence, storytelling is sacred and philosophical as well as literary (*Decolonizing* 14).

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that both creational stories are "narratives", it is only the Indigenous story that is denied some sort of authority over its content – the Biblical version of creation is seen by many as philosophical whereas the Indigenous is mostly seen as literary. Also, in most cases, the Biblical story is seen as holder of truth, a secret narrative that cannot change and does not allow (or have room) for improvisations; the narrative in the Bible holds a sober and controlled tone and the nature of its content is usually not questioned as normally happens in the Indigenous story.

Furthermore, the distinction between the stories lays not only in their content but also in the way they are delivered: oral *versus* written, a primordial difference that also marks the controversial view between both cultures. In the case of the creational stories, the Indigenous story is marked by orality and a conversational tone – in the way the story is told and in relation to how the characters talk to each other. On the other hand, the Judeo-Christian story is better known for its written version, securing a powerful tone with its grammatical choices – which King deliberately maintains when retelling it:

> [i]n the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light.
> […]
> Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (*The Truth About Stories* 21).

Thus, by positioning both creational stories, side by side, King brings to surface important difference (in content and tone) and dichotomies (that will be further discussed in the text) between both societies.

The different tones in both stories create a first impression on the reader/listener,

> Okay. Two creation stories. One Native, one Christian. […] I also used different strategies in the telling of these stories. In the Native story, I tried to recreate an oral storytelling voice and craft the story in terms of a performance for a general audience. In the Christian story, I tried to maintain a sense of rhetorical distance and decorum while organizing the story for knowledgeable gathering. […] In the Native story, the conversational voice tends to highlight the exuberance of the story but diminishes its authority, while the sober voice in the Christian story makes for a formal recitation but creates a sense of veracity (*The Truth About Stories* 22-23).

The choices can be motivated by how oral and written texts are seen in Western and Indigenous cultures, also the usage of a formal language in Western culture is understood as symbol of value at the same time it validates our society as whole. However, even though such distancing between the stories can be seen mainly in the manner they are delivered – written and oral – their differences can be enlarged when looking in terms of authority and how much space they allow for creation; in a sense, both stories appear to mirror their content for how people chose to deliver them. In the Native story, it seems that not only the way in which the world is created is communal but also the way the story is shared; as Venne points out, the storyteller is not the holder of the

knowledge, the Elder[24] many times does not know the complete story (176), the sharing and adding in the tale is something done by the community in a collective manner. In the Bible version of creation, the authoritarian presence of God seems to be mirrored by the preacher, with an imposing figure that tells the story in that one single version, not leaving space for recreation once the main concern is with the truth. Also, it does not leave much space for communal sharing once it does not allow much space for loose interpretation and understanding.

In a similar manner, Schorcht argues that "[b]y drawing in these sort of genres conventions from oral storytelling and creating written texts in a variety of genres, King's writing deconstructs the often expressed dichotomy between oral and literate cultures" (200). By proposing this approach towards writing, King begins destabilizing the dichotomic pattern much grounded in western society; the voice of the storyteller is a strong asset in the text, as emphasized previously, but also by bringing a creational Native story that is mainly passed by oral tradition and shifting to a written text, he breaks the stiff barrier between written and oral. King completes the discussion on the matter by ironically pointing out that

> Of course, none of you would make the mistake of confusing storytelling strategies with the value or sophistication of a story. And we know enough about the complexities of cultures to avoid the error of imagining animism and polytheism to be more than primitive versions of monotheism. Don't we? (*The Truth About Stories* 23)

This argument goes along with the relevance and influence of dichotomies in our society, which King describes as "the elemental structure of Western society" (*The Truth About Stories* 25). In a choice between two different items, it is common to choose one and assume that, if one is good, then the other is automatically bad. We do not cope, most of the time, with the incongruencies of things. Following the same reasoning, in Western society, if written texts are the way in which

[24] That is how she addresses the storytellers in the Cree community, which is the band she is referring in her article.

complex and important subjects are discussed, then automatically oral texts are for lower or less important issues. Our society "trust[s] easy oppositions. We are suspicious of complexities, distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas" (*The Truth About Stories* King 25). However, according to Schorcht, "[k]nowledge that comes to us in storied forms is often ambiguous, multifaceted, and personal; it tends to resist categorization and compartmentalization" (201). Such definition does not seem to have much place, not only in western society as a whole but also in the Genesis story which, as pointed out by Highway, tends to follow a linear time line (*Comparing Mythologies* 33) which leads to a strict pattern, thus not giving room for the imaginative and ambiguous tone Indigenous stories tend to have.

As much discussed by Indigenous communities, the implications of the stories being told and heard is that they can shape the character and life of one individual, as King says about himself "but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live" (*The Truth About Stories* 9), or in the bigger picture how they can construct and mold a nation's identity and history, as pointed out by Chamberlin: "the world of imagination, is not a world in which we escape from reality but one by means of which we engage reality on terms that reflect our own meanings and values" (127). We have to be aware of the nuances and shifts in history to decide on our own what accounts to trust and "be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told" (*The Truth About Stories* King 10). In this sense, the communal importance of the stories is also relevant, in the sense of the moment of sharing but also in the plot of the story in itself. As discussed by King, "[i]n the Earth Diver story, and in many other Native creation stories for that matter, deities are generally figures of limited power and persuasion, and the acts of creation and decisions that affect the world are shared with other characters in the drama" (*The Truth About Stories* 24). By sharing the Indigenous mythology and presenting the Judeo-Christian version, King builds a duality of characters and vision of worlds: in one of the stories, a simple woman creates a universe together with the animals and the twins; in the other story, an almighty God is solely responsible for creating the world as we know it.

The purposeful creation of duality in the text – presenting two versions of the creation of humanity as we know it – plays on the naturalized and established religious values which are so important in Western culture. As King points out, "[i]f we see the world through Adam's eyes, we are necessarily blind to the world that Charm and the Twins and the animals help to create. If we believe one story to be sacred, we must see the other as secular" (*The Truth About Stories* 25). By showing this other perspective, King not only disturbs the *status quo* but also brings another concept of creation and social sharing; this strategy together with the "incorporation of Native oral tradition demonstrate[s] a desire to expand the scope of history" (Davidson et al. 26). King summarizes by saying, "[s]o here are our choices: a world in which creation is a solitary, individual act or a world in which creation is a shared activity; […] a world marked by competition or a world determined by co-operation" (*The Truth About Stories* 24-25). From that we can see that the contrasts in the stories mirror much of the behaviors of the individuals in each culture and also have a direct impact in the cultural aspects of both societies.

Further, as pointed out by Davidson et al., King's works "undercut authoritative accounts of the past and present by including stories from marginalized groups and individuals that highlight the precariousness of Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian ideologies" (26), which can be seen clearly in this particular chapter; by providing the reader with similar accounts of the creation of the world – one Native and one Judeo-Christian – King opens the spectrum of established 'truths' and questions the extent they are reflected in the way we see and understand our world and others. To conclude, storytelling, as Cunha discusses, gives the possibility to create "alternative stories" and "the possibility of advancing critical views" (*Rewriting* 65), and that is what we see King doing when he makes use of storytelling not only as a narrative device to deliver stories but also as means to discuss important issues, as is going to be examined in the following subsections.

2.2 "How the Past Continues to Inform the Present"

The second chapter, "You're Not the Indian I had in Mind", focuses on the construction of Indigenous identities – through identity

markers such as image, race, and authenticity – and on how inferences regarding the Indigenous images of the past foreground the understandings of contemporary Indigenous identities. King elaborates on a few stories, which are related to some of the following issues: the school he attended, the city, and neighborhood he lived in as a teenager, focusing on the relations between the different ethnicities that shared those spaces. One of the stories he tells describes the issues he faced in inviting a white girl he liked to the prom once her father did not want her dating Mexicans. As they lived in California and as King had a darker skin color, the girl's father assumed King was Mexican; King even addresses his own 'prejudices' towards the Mexicans and how he later understood that "while I was looking at Mexicans, other people, as it turned out, were looking at me" (*The Truth About Stories* 39). With this initial statement, King begins the development of the essay in which the focal point is the expectations and stereotypes regarding different ethnicities.

He also narrates stories about the photography trip he decided to take (in 1994) alongside his brother to capture, in black-and-white, Indigenous artists – his idea was to create a book out of portraits he would take, capturing "the North American Indian" by travelling around the reserves and producing "a Millennium project", as he calls it. He mentions that he had not invented the idea or the concept and he brings Edward Sheriff Curtis[25]' endeavor that happened in the 1900's to illustrate that people have been travelling and photographing Indigenous peoples for a while; however, King addresses the fact that Curtis was interested in the image of the Indian as something set in time, a sort of romanticized image[26], a fixed image of the Indian with headbands and

[25] Curtis was an American ethnographer and photographer born in 1868. His main interests were Indigenous people from North America as well as the American West. He published the book *The North American Indian* which has 20 volumes which compiles photographs and narratives.

[26] It is important to highlight that even though King points out some incongruences and debatable approaches in Curtis's work (as mentioned above, King argues that Curtis' work focused more on race than on representing different aspects of Indigenous life), King also praises the endeavor and admires the passion Curtis had in doing the photographs and delivering such an enormous work.

costumes that was understood as marks of authenticity, while King, himself, wanted to travel North America's cities, towns, and reserves and take "black-and-white portraits of Native artists" (*The Truth About Stories* 32), King's endeavor in the end will be a distant vision. What can be seen as the major difference between the two endeavors is that Curtis, even though not in an intentional way, was portraying race in the way that was already solidified in the mentality of people, whereas King was interested in showcasing Indigenous identity, in a simple manner from people as himself. However, as King argues further in the essay, both projects could not cope with the deep impact of representation and the questioning of what a true portrayal of an Indigenous identity is.

And, finally, the third story that intertwines with the other two in the second chapter is related to his young adult journey to New Zealand and Australia as a worker; here, King mentions he was boarded in a German ship, the jobs he had to maintain himself in those countries (journalist being one of them), and the similarities he found between Australian white society and the way they treated Aboriginal peoples and the way the North American society treated Indigenous peoples. When telling these stories, as he does in the previous ones, King raises issues of identity since while narrating his experiences, on the boat and in Australia, he analyses and discusses the reasoning for the behavior and discourse of the people he has met along the way, especially regarding stereotype and representation.

Similarly to the first chapter of his book, in this second chapter, King does not follow a linear pattern, finishing one story and beginning the other; the narratives intertwine during the entire chapter in passages about the theme they all share as common ground: identity, its construction and constant negotiation – as an individual aspect but also as a collective process. By changing the focus of the story being told, and by maintaining the descriptive details of each one, King still builds the narrative with the same idea of a good story: the one drawn on nuances and on the sagacity of the storyteller. Departing from a quote by the Anishinabe writer Gerald Vizenor, which says: "[y]ou can't understand the world without telling a story. There isn't any center to the world but a story" (Vizenor qtd. in King 32), King starts the chapter. Vizenor's quote, similarly to Armstrong's passage previously cited, helps King bring back this idea from the first essay – the importance of telling stories

and how they shape our knowledge of ourselves and the world we are inserted in. King focuses on the importance of stories more clearly in the final paragraphs of this chapter by saying, "[w]hat's important are the stories I've heard along the way. And the stories I've told. Stories we make up to try to set the world straight" (*The Truth About Stories* 60). King goes back to Vizenor's idea that we do understand and have the opportunity to change the world based on the stories we tell and hear along our way.

It is worth noting that all the stories he tells in this chapter are not only connected to the issues of identity but also to how King tries to resist a kind of fixed image of the North American Indian. In the stories he shares with the reader, he seems to make use of his own experiences and his understandings of endeavors, such as Curtis's, to address and fight this image of the Dead Indian and by consequence he focuses on the discussion of what it is or what it means to be an "authentic" Indian. Thus, it is important to highlight from the beginning what this image of the Dead Indian is, as well as the notion of authenticity, once both will permeate the entire discussion of the chapter.

The image of the dying Indian, as mentioned earlier, appears in King's PhD dissertation of 1986 when he discusses the romantic vision of the Indian (especially appearing in literary versions of the nineteenth century) in which they were seen as dying creatures and usually their deaths were connected to a noble act mostly motivated by emotion instead of reason (*Inventing the Indian* 29); in a more recent publication, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2012), King argues that "Indians come in all sort of social and historical configurations. North American popular culture is littered with savage, noble, and dying Indians, while in real life we have Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians" (*The Inconvenient Indian* 53); the first three refers mainly to the ones found in literary texts, but the others are the ones struggling in everyday life. He describes the other three as: the Dead Indians, the ones found everywhere, from rodeos to television commercials, they are the set or fixed image, "the stereotypes and clichés that North America has conjured up out of experience and out of its collective imaginings and fears" (*The Inconvenient Indian* 53), and this is the image that King refers to when describing the fixed imaged Curtis was trying to portray; the Legal Indians or "Status Indian", the ones

recognized as such by the U.S and Canadian governments usually regulated more in relation to the tribes than individuals; and the Live Indians, the ones invisible in the everyday society, as they do not fit in the particular image of the Dead Indians nor are computed as Legal Indians by the government; for King "North Americans certainly *see* contemporary Native people. They just don't *see* us as Indians" (*The Inconvenient Indian* 62).

Drawing from this last quote and King's reasoning behind it, the concept of authenticity emerges. The concept in itself has been discussed by different authors and is generally understood as something that is inherent to a people or to a culture. In James Clifford's *The Predicaments of Culture*, a book mainly connected to ethnographic research in a postcolonial view where the author discusses elements and boundaries of culture as well as travel and encounters between cultures, he argues that "[i]ntervening in an interconnected world, one is always, to varying degrees 'inauthentic': caught between cultures, implicated in others" (11); the reasoning, thus, is that being authentic means being an untouched version of culture, in its pure and simple form. Such understanding can create a sort of expectation in people in relation to what they conceive as being authentic to a certain culture, thus neglecting and condemning practices that do not fulfill such expectations, and in the case of Indigenous people, according to Ashcroft et al., "fixed practices become iconized as authentically indigenous and others are excluded as hybridized or contaminated. This has as its corollary the danger of ignoring the possibility that cultures may develop and change as their conditions change" (*The Key Concepts* 17).

A discussion about what an "authentic" Indian is permeates King's text. Also, by relying on stories that have been told and how they can shape the understanding of a culture, King, in the first moment of the text, right after the quotation, goes back to Curtis's voyage in North America to photograph the Indians; he describes the drives and expectations Curtis had in portraying those Indians and the amount of material he was able to gather in thirty years of project (almost forty thousand negatives from which more than five per cent were published). By addressing Curtis's travels, King starts a deep discussion on the relationship between identity and authenticity because, in King's interpretation, Curtis was interested in finding the "authentic" Indian,

according to a specific view he had at the time of his expedition. Such image, which was (and perhaps still is) found in the collective imaginary of people, understands Indigenous people as the ones that inhabited the lands when colonizers arrived.

By focusing on a discussion about Curtis's journey, and consequently addressing issues of authenticity and identity, King examines the image of the Indian as a creation; what that image represented or how this image was understood by Curtis, who in a sense represented the society of the time. For King, Curtis's project was permeated by a specific idea of what the Indian was or how he was supposed to look like, a romanticized idea. According to King,

> Curtis was fascinated by the idea of the North American Indian, obsessed with it. And he was determined to capture that idea, that image, before it vanished. This was a concern among intellectuals and artists and social scientists at the turn of the nineteenth century, who believed that, while Europeans in the New World were poised on the brink of a new adventure, the Indian was poised on the brink of extinction (*The Truth About Stories* 33).

By addressing this image of the dying Indian, King revisits the point he raised in his PhD Dissertation, as previously mentioned, in which he argues that the 'the Indian' became a static figure let to live in the imagination of people. In this sense, this social representation strips Indigenous people not only of their identity and their cultures but it also creates an imaginary ideal of what would be conceived as real and truthful, "[d]ead Indians are Garden of Eden – variety Indians. Pure, Noble, Innocent. Perfectly authentic. Jean-Jacques Rousseau Indians. Not a feather out of place. Live Indians are fallen Indians, modern, contemporary copies, not authentic at all, Indians by biological association only" (*The Inconvenient Indian* 65). Following the idea of the real and true Indian idealized in books, King argues that "Curtis was looking for the literary Indian, the dying Indian, the imaginative construct. And to make sure that he would find what he wanted to find, he took along boxes of 'Indian' paraphernalia – wigs, blankets, painted

backdrops, clothing – in case he ran into Indians who did not look as the Indian was supposed to look" (*The Truth About Stories* 34). It is interesting to see how this also relates to the souvenirs King mentions in the first chapter – much of the things he describes in here in this passage would be easily identified as belonging to an Indigenous band, again indicating the expectation and construction of what Indigenous artifacts should look like.

However controversial the means by which Curtis produced his materials, King says, "[…] I am grateful we have his images at all, for the faces of the mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers who look at out from the depths of these photographs are not romantic illusions, they are real people" (*The Truth About Stories* 36-37). For a culture that has lost (and still has been losing) so much due to colonial practices, to have this recollection of the past is somehow a link to their heritage, even though Curtis would manipulate the set to acquire the result he wanted, the photographs are a reminder that those people existed and that they were there with their stories. This fixed image of the Dead Indian, in the end, was not, by all means, created by Curtis and his enterprise, "Native culture, as with any culture, is a vibrant, changing thing, and when Curtis happened upon it, it was changing from what it had been to what it would become next. But the idea of 'the Indian' was already fixed in time and space. Even before Curtis built his first camera, that image had been set" (*The Truth About Stories* 37). Such image has been so profoundly set that in 1998, almost one hundred years after Curtis's journey, Vine Deloria Jr[27]., in a book review, would make a similar claim about the settled image of the Indian and how the contemporary Indian would not satisfy the expectation society had of them. For Deloria, the authors from the essays he analyzed "for the most part, seem to be very disappointed that modern Indians do not act like the Indians of their undergraduate textbooks or the movies they enjoyed as children and they seem determined to attack contemporary expressions of Indian-ness as fraudulent and invalid because modern Indians fall short

[27] Deloria reviewed the book *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* (1990), a collection of essays edited by James Clifton. The book discusses how fictions and their cultural inferences could create a division and how that would interfere in policy.

of their expectations" (399). The relevance of Deloria's point is not only in reaffirming King's view, but to show that even some scholars were also creating and perpetuating the expected image and behavior of the Indian.

In both arguments, those expectations can be associated with the idea of race, as Ian F. Haney López argues, "[r]ace must be viewed as a social construction. That is, human interaction rather than natural differentiation must be seen as the source and continued basis for racial categorization" (168). Similarly, King points out that in Curtis's photographs "[w]e see race. Never mind that race is a construction and an illusion. Never mind that it does not exist in either biology or theology, though both have, from time to time, been enlisted in the cause of racism. Never mind that we can't hear it or smell it or taste it or feel it. The important thing is that we believe we can see it" (*The Truth About Stories* 44). The creation and maintenance of what it meant to be Indian bounds with the idea of racial categorization, once "the races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation" (López 168).

This relational process of race and ethnicity and social expectations is going to be King's main discussion until the end of the chapter. To illustrate his struggles with authenticity, mainly on how the image of the Dead Indian seemed to appear in most of his life experiences, he shares with the reader stories about his travels to New Zealand and Australia. He mentions that, at the time he embarked on a boat trip to New Zealand, he was hoping to do something different with his life and when the opportunity to work aboard a ship in order to earn the ticket to Oceania arrived, he decided it was the chance he was longing for. King narrates an encounter with the cook of the ship and how complicated it was the negotiation of his own ethnicity in relation to what the cook was expecting:

> The ship was a German vessel out of Hamburg, the *SS Cap Colorado*. The captain was German. The crew was German. The cook was German. I wasn't German. As a matter of fact, none of the crew was sure what I was. When I told them I was Cherokee, or to keep matters simple, North American Indian, they were intrigued.

> And suspicious.
> The cook, who could speak passable English, told me that he had read all of Karl May's novels and had a fair idea of what Indians were supposed to look like and that I wasn't what he had imagined.
> 'You're not the Indian I had in mind,' he told me (*The Truth About Stories* 48).

Once more, the construction of the image of the Indian, as previously discussed, is determining. The cook could not fit King into his constructed image of an Indian, a pre-determined idea of how Indigenous people should look like, thus reassuring López's argument that "[r]ace is socially constructed" (171). Elaborating further on the encounter with the cook, King affirms that

> I knew that Indians came in all shapes and sizes and colours, but I hadn't read Karl May, had no idea who he was. The cook read May but had never actually seen an Indian. So we compromised. I confessed that I was a mixed-blood, and he allowed that this was possible, since May had described full-blood Apaches and not mixed-blood Cherokee (*The Truth About Stories* 48).

The commitment King abided to is mainly created in the light of his mixed heritage. By using the word 'confessed' it seems as the author is acknowledging some sort of crime or secret, as if being mixed blood granted the cook a reason to have doubts towards King's ethnicity. However, the reader must be attentive to the fine irony in the last two lines of the excerpt: using the word 'allowed' King reassures that the cook – which only 'knew' Indians by his readings – had all the reason to be confused when they first met because he was knowledgeable on full-blood Apaches. Once more, the image of the Dead Indian reappears. This literary figure is usually found in romanticized books is what the cook has as base to "analyze" and contest King's heritage and ethnicity, which shows that the image of the Dead Indian was fixed in the cook's imaginary

as the real image and was his starting point for a definition of what an Indian was supposed be. Also, by admitting the cook to be the expert on Indigenous tribes, in a way, brings the idea of the government, in the sense that they have an authorizing knowledge or an authorization to speak in behalf of the other; the idea that they are the beholder of knowledge which gives them power to categorize and recognize who is an Indian and who is not, thus creating the third category King mentions, the Legal Indian.

On a similar case, King describes the conversation he had over the phone with an immigration agent about his expired visa in Australia. He mentioned the officer assigned to talk to him had recently arrived from England, and was not sure about the proceedings of a foreigner staying in Australia longer that his visa expiration; in order to be able to analyze King's conditions for staying, the officer would need some further information about King,

> It was the usual stuff. Name. Colour of hair. Colour of eyes. Height. Weight. Race.
> Black, brown, six feet six inches, 230 pounds. Indian.
> Dear me, he said. I don't believe we take applications from Indians.
> I have to admit I was stunned. Why not? I wanted to know.
> Policy, said the immigration man.
> Do you get many? I asked.
> Oh, yes, he said. Thousands.
> I hadn't heard of any mass exodus of Native peoples from Canada or the States. These Indians, I asked him, where are they from? Alberta? Saskatchewan? Arizona? South Dakota? Oklahoma?
> Dear me, no, said my British voice. They're from, you know, New Delhi, Bombay…
> When Karen told me her father wouldn't let me take her to the prom because he didn't want her dating Mexicans, I told her I wasn't Mexican. I was Indian.

> When the immigration officer told me I couldn't apply for a visa because I was Indian, I told him I wasn't East Indian, I was North American Indian.
> As if that was going to settle anything.
> Without missing a beat, and at the same time injecting a note of enthusiasm into his otherwise precise voice, the immigration man said, What? Do you mean like cowboys and Indians? (*The Truth About Stories* 49-50).

Not only this excerpt shows the mixing of cultures, but once more, the perception is negotiated in relation to a constructed image of the Indians. King seems to go further in the problematization of the Dead Indian highlighting its recurrence. It is interesting to note that even though the countries he mentions – United States, Australia, and Germany – have different cultures and understanding of the world, the fixed image of the Dead Indian appears to "travel" to those places and maintain its shape; this comes to show, once more, that this image is so strong and has been spread for so long to the point of influencing how cultures from the other side of the globe understand and see Indigenous identity. Following much on the same image Curtis portrayed, the immigration officer has associated Indigenous people – or the image of the Dead Indian – to the products sold with their image, as merchandising per se (*The Inconvenient Indian* King 56) or the popular image of Hollywood movies. By exemplifying with "cowboys and Indians", the officer, in a sense, reaffirms the dichotomy discussed in the previous section – one representing the modern society and the other the savage or the good and the bad. Also, in the 60's, which was the time King was in New Zealand, a multitude of films portraying cowboys and Indians had been made[28],

[28] According to King, "[b]etween 1894 and 1930, Hollywood made well over 100 films that featured Hollywood's notion of 'real' Indian people and 'authentic' Native culture". After the advent of sound "Hollywood knocked another 300 films, which means that in the 116 years between 1894 and 2010, Tinseltown conjured up over 3.5 films a year. Films with Indians somewhere in the frames" ('Inconvenient' 34).

thus the obvious assumption was that King was an Indian like the ones portrayed in the movies.

Towards the end of the chapter, King revisits the mixed-blood discussion and brings the issue of authenticity and realness. He also brings an argument on how the imaginary vision of the past can have such an impact in the present, "[…] how can something that has never existed – the Indians – have form and power while something that is alive and kicking – Indians – are invisible?" (*The Truth About Stories* 53). In this movement, of leaving the reserve and going to the city – a process connected with the advent of colonization – many traits that were seen and understood as inherent to Indigenous peoples got mixed (or lost) in the process, which in turn became a sort of loss of heritage in the eyes of Western society; this lack of authenticity or complete emulation of Indigenous ways that is expected by Western society has transformed Indigenous people into an invisible part of the population. King's argument seems to refer to how colonial power continues to exert dominance in our society and still influences the life of minorities such as Indigenous people, especially when it comes to delimitate those people's identities. However, as King discusses, the image of the Dead Indian is something our society has already settled on – because there were certain expectations on looks and behavior that had to be fulfilled – and for this image to be real, the Live Indian not only has to remain invisible but also must remain not genuine (*The Inconvenient Indian* 64). The issue is not only with how their identity is seen but especially on how these identities are respected (or, in most cases, not respected); in this sense, King has brought important stories in this essay to highlight his point that contemporary society does not see or does not want to see and understand Indigenous identity as multiple: Curtis's voyage and the fixed image, the cook and his 'knowledge' of Indigenous tribes, and the officer mistaken him for an East Indian followed by the image of the Hollywood Indian. All the stories illustrate not only the lack of understanding of the other but also highlight, especially in the case of Curtis and the cook, how Indigenous identities are many times not respected or understood.

In relation to the concept identity and how King tries to resist the idea of identity as a fixed concept, Hall argues that identities

> [t]hough they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (4).

Hall tackles the issue on how our personal identities are in constant development, and how such development brings our understanding of our past together with our aspirations to the future. It is possible to see the similarities between his view and King's conflicting experiences; in the sense that King understands his identity as a process but at the same time other people see Indigenous identity as fixed. It reflects also the intricacies of representation, discussed by King, in the sense it concerns how we understand and represent ourselves and the respect others show towards such representation.

However, as important as it is to draw away from this essentialist view that Indigenous people have a fixed identity, there is a counterpoint to that: to address authenticity and identity, as an ongoing social construct in constant negotiation, is to admit, for those responsible for the politics and policies, that the customs and traditions have changed, and the contemporary Indigenous bands and peoples are not exactly the same as their ancestors even though they still share the same ways as their predecessors. Thus, in a manner, recognizing change and difference can be used against Indigenous sovereignty, something that according to Lawrence could become a dangerous ground for Indigenous rights, "[i]n the context of ongoing colonization, to theorize Native identity not as an authentic essence but as something negotiated and continuously evolving can have dangerous repercussions for Native people in terms of asserting Aboriginal rights" (3). It appears to be a paradox for Indigenous people: acknowledging their identity to be fixed pulls them back to the idea of that image fixed in time and by consequence the expectation of a perfect emulation of their ancestors' ways not giving them space to develop their

own identity in a contemporary society; at the same time, affirming that they negotiate their identities and it is a continuous process opens precedent for loss of rights and social policies.

Acknowledging the struggle of such negotiation, King says that

> In the end, there is no reason for the Indian to be real. The Indian simply has to exist in our imagination.
> But for those of us who are Indians, this disjunction between reality and imagination is akin to life and death. For to be seen as 'real', for people to 'imagine' us as Indians, we must be 'authentic' (*The Truth About Stories* 54).

Such matter is decisive in Indigenous daily life once it directly implicates in the policies made – in relation to the rights of lands, education, and jobs – but also for the understanding and construction of the self "[f]or us Live Indians, being invisible is annoying enough, but being inauthentic is crushing" (*The Inconvenient Indian* King 64). King's discussion addresses impositions non-Native society has been dictating in Indigenous living and by consequence in their construction of identity. In practical terms it would be as if there were a (supposedly mandatory) questionnaire on Indigenous behavior and practices and in order to be considered an authentic Indian you have to tic all the boxes.

However, even though this negotiation is harder between Whites and Indigenous, there is also tension in the relationship between mixed-bloods and full-bloods – these issues again relating to the matter of authenticity and to the expected image of the Indian. King addresses the fact that in the past the looks were the simple way to declare authenticity because it was "in the eye of the beholder. Indians who looked Indian were authentic" (*The Truth About Stories* 54); the matter became more intricate when it came to acknowledge that many Indigenous peoples were now living in the city with barely no contact with the reserves or "no longer speak[ing] their Native language, a gift of colonialism, and the question of identity has become as much a personal matter as it is a matter of blood" (*The Truth About Stories* 55). The reconnection with the community and the process of constructing a personal Indigenous identity becomes also a matter of "reviving and inventing ways to live as an

Indian" (Clifford 9) in the twentieth-first century[29]. Yet, King, understands that having an Indigenous identity goes beyond "language and narrow definitions of culture" (*The Truth About Stories* 55), especially when considering that such identities have to be constantly negotiated with the influence on non-native society; in this sense there is more in this construction than these "touchstones", as he calls it; it is about the representation of oneself and its place in that culture and how this representation is understood and seen inside and outside that culture.

Nevertheless, he is aware he has directed the discussion in order to prove his point:

> If you've been paying attention, you will have noticed that I've defined identity politics in a rather narrow and self-serving fashion.
> Appearance.
> I want to look Indian so that you will see me as Indian because I want to be an Indian, even though being Indian and looking Indian is more a disadvantage than it is a luxury.
> Just not for me.
> Middle-class Indians, such as myself, can, after all, afford the burden of looking Indian. There's little danger that *we'll* be stuffed in the trunk of a police cruiser and dropped off on the outskirts of Saskatoon. Not much chance that *we'll* come before the courts and incarcerated for a longer period of time than our non-Indian brethren. Hardly any risk that *our* children will be taken from us because we are unable to cope with the potentials of poverty.
> That sort of things happens to those other Indians.
> My relatives. My friends.

[29] Clifford was talking about the Mashpee in New England and how they have been copping and finding ways to live as themselves in the twentieth century.

Just not me (*The Truth About Stories* 59-60).

King is very aware that he does hold some "privilege" once his background gives him the opportunity to be an Indian without having to deal with heavier problems Indians that came from less privileged environments have. Even though this self-awareness is important, the fact that Indigenous people have to question their "privileges" relates to how much of their Indianness has been defined and fixed in colonial power systemics, interfering in the Native identity, which is something "inevitably highly political, with ramifications for how contemporary and historical collective experience is understood" (Lawrence 1). Furthermore, the Indian Acts in Canada, where laws were created to regulate Indigenous identity, helped shape the complex and vibrating cultures into a compact but disjointed race; such policies neglected the intricate relationship between land, stories, and customs and seem to represent an ongoing colonial process that deprives Indigenous people, of their rights and historical background, suggesting that Indians descendants are not enough.

In producing these narratives, King helps open a space to address these issues – identity, authenticity, and representation – highlighting the relevance and importance in re-reading such concepts and in understanding how they (the concepts) affect Native and non-Native society. His writings are a channel to demonstrate that, in our current scenario, Indigenous people that "are revealed as transgressing the boundaries of so-called authenticity through their modernity can be dismissed as fakes, or severely restricted in their abilities to develop their communities in contemporary ways" (Lawrence 5). But, by choosing to make use of storytelling to discuss such problems, King makes a political point in the sense he brings to surface an important feature in Indigenous culture as a way to demonstrate that his identity is shaped by his ancestors' culture – even though he does not fulfill the Dead Image expectation – and also as a way to resist colonial discourses.

2.3 Entertaining for Whom?

The third essay chosen to be analyzed here, and coincidently the third chapter from King's book, is named "Let Me Entertain You". As with the other texts, it brings a few different narratives that interweave

with each other in their thematic at the same time as they construct a cohesive text. As mentioned before, the theoretical concepts discussed in chapter II of this research permeate King's text in its entirety, but for this final part of the analysis the choice is to focus on the humorous and ironic elements that construct the essay. However, it is still important for this thesis and for the development of the analysis on humor and irony, to contextualize King's reasoning; thus, the necessity to mention once more some aspects already discussed in the previous sections.

As in the previous essays, King narrates different stories that are intertwined between each other in relation to content; however, in this essay, the stories become more intricate, in the sense that there are not only three main stories being told but also small narratives inside them. For example, King begins telling how he started to be invited to deliver lectures, explaining what was the main content of his talk and to exemplify he brings the story of Ishi, an Indigenous man that was brought to live in the city of Oroville after he was found roaming near a slaughterhouse. King also brings a more historical background presenting Columbus and other voyagers that were 'discovering' new places and ended up slaving the Indians which is followed close by the coming of the Puritans to North America and how the negotiation between them and Indigenous people happened; linked to that, he shares the story of Charles Eastman and E. Pauline Johnson to explore Indigenous movement from reserve to city and vice versa and how the construction of their identity became a sort of entertainment; and for the final part, he goes back to a discussion also present in the second chapter, on what it means to be an authentic Indian. All of these stories interconnect in the sense that they explore the image of the Indian and they complement each other in the construction of the discussion. One of the significant characteristics of this chapter is that humor and irony are used to highlight important passages and draw the attention of the reader. The use of these tropes help King build the discussion and inform the reader to the points he is trying to raise at the same time they engage the reader in the reading, creating what Davidson et al. call "his own subversively comic vision" (29).

King brings a song by the Metis singer, Andrea Menard, to initiate his discussion in this essay; he quotes from her song "The Halfbreed Blues":

> I was born the privileged skin
> And my eyes are bright, bright brown
> You'd never know there is Metis blood
> Raging underground
> Let me tell you a story about revelation
> It's not the colour of a nation that holds a nation's pride
> It's imagination
> It's imagination inside (Menard qtd. in King 62).

Her lines align with the final discussion in his previous chapter (regarding privileges and controversies of being half-blood) as well as enlighten us to the subject of this new chapter, which will also explore a little more the issues of authenticity, image, and cultural exploitation by bringing three main narratives: one about how King started delivering lectures on stories "about broken treaties, residential schools, culturally offensive movies, the appropriation of Native names, symbols and motifs" (*The Truth About Stories* 63); another one about Columbus and his contemporary explorers' narratives; and the last one about the integration of Indigenous peoples and the settlers in the new formed communities.

In the initial part, when King is narrating a story about the first time he gave a lecture, he begins by telling the story of Ishi, an Indigenous man that was found near a slaughterhouse and was brought to live in the city and given a job in the museum; he also narrates how he became a lecturer or, as he puts it, "God help me, a Spokesperson" (*The Truth About Stories* 67), and he dwells on how, with time, he started losing the fury in his speeches becoming "a rather polished and potent presentation" (*The Truth About Stories* 67) instead. The humoristic trait, despite being present in all the other chapters from this collection, seems to be more straightforward in this essay. Also, marks of irony, such as choices of words, are visible since the first pages, as it can be seen in the following excerpt:

> When I was much younger and more prone to be incensed by injustice than I am now, I was invited by a small college in Northern

> California to be a panel as part of their 'Indian Awareness Week'. There was a 'Black Awareness Week' and a 'Chicano Awareness Week', which left, if I've done the math correctly, forty-nine 'White Awareness Weeks'. Still, it was a chance to say something meaningful, and being politically naive and eager, I accepted (*The Truth About Stories* 62).

King does not hold anything back when addressing the privilege White people have. In fact, he is very vocal in pointing out flawed attempts of making amends with the creation of such events. His construction of irony relates to Hutcheon's discussion in which she argues that "[i]rony has become one way of working within prevailing discourses, while still finding a way to articulate doubts, insecurities, questionings, and perhaps even alternatives" (Splitting Images 15). Thus, what King does in this essay is to point out his doubts on how those lectures in Awareness Week events could indeed help the communities they were referring to. King mentions there were four people in the panel he was invited to talk: "a Mohawk artist, two guys from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and me" (*The Truth About Stories* 62), and he also talks about how they had a different approach in their talks – the Mohawk artist was more vivid and outspoken about traditional art and spirituality, the men in suit relied on "pragmatic speeches completed with charts" to show their knowledge on Indigenous matters (*The Truth About Stories* 62), while King confided his stories.

For this first narrative, as a way to exemplify the kind of stories he told in his lectures – and also as a way to present the problems explorers initiated by 'finding' this new land and all the intricacies it generated for Indigenous communities – King introduces the story of Ishi – a true story of his life. He was an Indigenous man (Yahi people) found near a slaughterhouse in Oroville (California) in 1911 and according to King people were amused to see an Indian, not because he was an actual surprise since Indians had been living there before for years but because

> [g]old miners, landowners, and your average God-fearing gun loving enthusiasts such as the

> group of White men who massacred the Wiyotts off the coast of Northern California in 1890, had forced Native peoples out of their homes, and in many instances, simply hunted them down and shot them on sight. More than likely, the people of Oroville didn't know there were any Indians left in the area (*The Truth About Stories* 63).

King goes even deeper into Ishi's story, telling us that nobody knew exactly which tribe he belonged to nor exactly what to do with him; the sheriff then decided to put him in jail, "in the cell reserved for the insane" (*The Truth About Stories* 63). Two anthropologists from the University of California in San Francisco rescued[30] him with the permission of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the bureau which, according to King, "believed that they owned all Native people in U.S." (*The Truth About Stories* 64), took him to San Francisco. We get to know also that his name was not Ishi but once confronted by reporters and not wanting to call him the Wild Man of Oroville anymore, one of the anthropologists responsible for him named him Ishi – which simply means 'man' in Yahi. The irony and humor in Ishi's story comes from two perspectives: in the story itself, in the sense that the same society that has caused the vanishing of his people is the one who is concerned with his well-being and in the way King conducts the narrative, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

> The people at the museum were inordinately fond of pointing out that Ishi was, in fact, free to return to the mountains and lava fields of Northern California if he chose to do so.
> You can go home any time you wish, they told him.

[30] King uses the word rescued to describe the action of the anthropologists; however, according to him, he uses the word "guardedly" (64). For King's description, he was found in a bad shape, not well nourished and the treatment he could possibly receive in the town was not going to help him, thus in a sense he was rescued by the anthropologists. However, in my reading the caution in using the word is in not seeing the society, that in a way caused him to be alone, as his savior.

> Which must have made him laugh and cry at the same time.
> For there was no home. No family. Not anymore. Ishi hadn't come out the mountains because he had seen an advertisement in the employment section of a newspaper.
> 'Help wanted. Museum curiosity. Apply in person'.
> He had come to the slaughterhouse to escape the killings and the loneliness, and he would stay at the museum until his own death because he had nowhere else to go (*The Truth About Stories* 65).

The creation of humor in this passage is built from the initial line, which says the employers of the museum were "inordinately fond", indicating they insisted that he was free and had the choice of coming and going as he pleased. However, as it can be seen, it was not the case. Also, by arguing that Ishi had not come because he saw a sign of employment, King ironically points out that, again, choice was something Ishi did not have at the same time. Further, the passage "museum curiosity" draws attention to the fact that, even if Ishi was there to be the janitor, the aura of exoticism was still very present. Ishi stayed there, in the museum, until 1916 when he passed from tuberculosis.

After telling Ishi's story in the conference – which King did with enthusiasm, getting applauses and even making some women in the audience cry, – King went to meet the organizers, who were paying the men from the Bureau of Indians Affairs an amount of money for their talk. However, the organizers showed no intention of doing the same for King nor for the Mohawk artist; when confronted, the woman in charge of the organization was surprised to see King expecting any monetary compensation for his talk – the other men had been paid because they were experts. King, in turn, was merely seen as a sort of entertainment, as shown by the following excerpt:

> Special, tonight only.
> Return of the Complaining Native.
> Hear It From a Real Indian.

> White Depredations. Indian Deprivations.
> You'll laugh. You'll cry.
> Wine and cheese reception to follow.
> Entertainment. Probably not as much fun as being tossed around, say, on a mechanical bull or watching a good hockey fight on Friday night, but several steps up from bowling (*The Truth About Stories* 67).

The problem in being seen as entertainment is not being taken seriously by people who are not your peers in Indigenous communities; King shared stories, dressed like an Indian, but did not have any charts and numbers to show the audience and help validate his knowledge. As a consequence, he was not considered an expert on Indigenous affairs, thus only entertainment – as Ishi. In this excerpt as a whole, especially in the tone and choices of words, it is possible to note a subversive aspect in the narrative, which, according to Hutcheon, is a tactic that some marginalized groups have been using in order to combat the prevailing racism and ethnocentrism in social discourses (*Splitting Images* 65). In addressing the matter in such a humorous tone, King draws the attention of the reader and creates an absurd scenario with the propaganda of his presentation; he dives into the concept of being considered entertainment and produces a merchandizing version of talks as if he was actually announcing a show or a spectacle. The ironic final lines, supported by the common sense of what entertainment is in the North American daily lives (hockey being more exciting than bowling) also helps create the humor, once King puts his lecture as something that would stand between both.

In order to address the problems he wanted and to be taken seriously by the white audience, in other lectures King had to emulate the attitude of the man in suits, "I toned down my indignation, did some historical research so I could throw out the occasional date, turned my ribbon shirt, my four-strand bone choker, and my beaded belt buckle for a cheap but serviceable suit" (*The Truth About Stories* 67). However, in the moment King renounced and changed his ways and clothes to deliver

his lectures, in the eyes of other Indigenous people in the audience, he became, what is called by them, an "apple"[31]:

> Needless to say, I was hurt.
> But worse, there was that rhetorical question again. As long as I dressed like an Indian and complained like an Indian, I was entertainment. But if I dressed like a non-Indian and reasoned like a non-Indian, then not only was I not entertainment, I wasn't an Indian (*The Truth About Stories* 68).

The irony, much as in Ishi's story, is that there is no escape. If he behaved and told stories as an Indian, he was mere entertainment, instead if he behaved as a non-Indian he was sort of deauthorized of presenting issues related to Indigenous thinking, by both audiences, non-Native and Native. However, the interesting fact is that the guys in suits did not have their knowledge questioned in Indigenous affairs in any moment.

King continues the discussion, arguing that Indigenous peoples were other things before becoming solely entertainment in the White North America; King follows a historical thinking, bringing Columbus and the Puritans. For the Columbus part, King is quite straightforward in relation to the historical events and how we know them; he names a few explorers, such as Pero Vaz de Caminha, Pedro Álvares Cabral, Corte Real, and Jacques Cartier, and cites, from their own travel log[32], their descriptions of Indigenous peoples who inhabited the regions where they arrived (South and North America). However, King opposes Columbus's

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[31] "For those of you who do not know what an 'apple' is, it's a derogatory term for an Indian who is red on the outside and white on the inside" (King 67-68).

[32] "They all go quite naked as their mothers bore them…They bear no arms, no know thereof; for I showed them swords and they grasped them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance…They are generally fairly tall and good-looking, well built…They ought to be good servants and of good skill, for I see that they repeat very quickly whatever was said to them. I believe that they would easily be made Christians, because it seemed to me that they belonged to no religion" (Morrison qtd. in King 70).

descriptions in the travel logs and brings his own voice in describing Columbus reasoning behind the writings by saying:

> 'These people are very poor in everything,' Columbus is supposed to have written in his journal.
> […]
> Nothing wrong with this. Columbus didn't know where he was. He didn't know who these people were. So he guessed. Since he was looking for India, these must be Indians. Not his fault he was lost. And for all the erroneous assumptions that this first description contains, it's a reasonably honest report of what the good admiral saw. Tall, good-looking, naked people who were unfamiliar with steel weapons.
> We can forgive and forget the nonsense about being 'good servants' and the 'easily made into Christians' part, can't we? That was just wishful thinking (*The Truth About Stories* 70).

Thus, here, King uses irony as an opposing strategy which, according to Hutcheon, "can work to problematize authority, including those modern assumptions about museums' structures and forms of historical authority" (*Irony's Edge* 177). This problematization can be seen as a counter-narrative which "servers a political purpose quite different from the movement of the originary discourse, for it comprises a 'talking back' gesture that redirects the trajectory of the initial formulation" (Davidson et al. 50). In addition, in the final paragraph, when King makes the movement to address the audience, it is interesting to notice that he does it in a way that invokes a rhetorical question, which draws the attention for the issue he is raising on Christianizing Indigenous people. Also, according to Schorcht "[i]n an oral storytelling situation, storyteller and listeners generally shared a common matrix of cultural understanding" (206), thus by evoking an oral voice, addressing the reader with the question, King invites the reader not only to understand

his reasoning for the "wishful thinking" but also to sympathize with his argument.

As much as in addressing Columbus's mistake, King does the same thing with Cartier and his 'habit' of taking Indians as souvenirs and then trying to use them as slaves,

> […] If Africans were good slaves – and here we have to ignore the pernicious assumptions to which that statement is based – why not give Indians a try? You can see the logic. Unfortunately Indians who were sent to the slave markets had the annoying habit of dying before they could be auctioned off, and the enterprise was soon abandoned.
>
> Besides, Indians were a much more valuable resource to explores. Particularly when it came to question of what was there, and as long as Europeans were strangers in a strange land, Indians, innocent, deceitful, and naked though they may have been, were the only guides to this new world that explorers had.
>
> Can't find the Seven Cities of Gold? Ask an Indian.
>
> Looking for the Fountain of Youth? Ask an Indian.
>
> Need to find a water route to the Orient? Ask an Indian (*The Truth About Stories* 73).

The play on the role of the Indian as a tourist guide can relate to the idea of Indigenous knowledge as a commodity, being used to help the explorers to profit from the goods the land had to offer; according to Graham Hingangaroa Smith, "[k]knowledge is commodified to the extent that is considered a 'good' that can be traded or purchased. It's as though the world is to be considered a huge supermarket in which knowledge can be packaged up to be bought and sold" (218). However, once this knowledge was acquired and adapted into Western knowledge, Indigenous people were no longer considered useful, becoming disposable goods for this new society that was settling in North America.

Once more, it is interesting to note the irony in King's voice by naming "annoying" how Indians died in the process of being sold as slaves; his choice of words works as a humorous trap in the sense he inverts the expectation, as Davidson et al. argue "the focus of the original discourse is thrown into relief through the inversion, which highlights the terms of the 'normative' constructions and then employs those terms to assert an oppositional statement" (49). It is possible to see that the stories he narrates help recuperate the idea of what ways Indians have been defined along history. Addressing how the first explorers saw and made use of Indigenous knowledge for their own benefit shows Indigenous culture has been suffering external interference since their arrival; furthermore, such narratives are the historical starting point for the discussions that will follow.

Finally, in the narrative about the process of Indigenous communities and European settlers coexisting, King chooses to deal with the exchanges between Puritans of New England and Indigenous peoples; he reasons about the fact he chose to look at American history instead of Canadian not because he "prefer[ed] to put the Americans on the spot and pretend[ed] Canadians treated Indians better" (*The Truth About Stories* 74) but it is "because I know the American example better, and because Americans started the process of eliminating Indians sooner and were more diligent about the project than were Canadians" (*The Truth About Stories* 74). Thus, King brings the complexities of Puritans dealing, especially in relation to religion, with the Indigenous cultures.

King continues in his historical movement and proceeds the discussion towards the moment of stablishing communities in this new and recent discovered world. When settlement came in, Puritans started changing the way Indigenous peoples were seen, the cordial and innocent aspect became savage and bestial creatures that had no obedience towards them and "Thanksgiving and corn-planting techniques aside, Indians were, most often, seen as impediments to progress and affronts to faith" (*The Truth About Stories* 74). Indigenous ways of thinking and believing had no space in the Puritans agenda, once that, according to King, "Puritans saw the world at war, a holy war, a war that was both philosophical and physical" (*The Truth About Stories* 74). Everything that differed from the Puritan ways was seen as vile, demoniac even, especially when considering the battle between good and evil (God vs

Devil) in which the humans "fought a physical battle that pitted God's troops, in this case the Puritans, against the Devil's mercenaries" (*The Truth About Stories* 74). This vision of the devil being represented by the Native people is something that can be attributed to many settlers in many different colonies, since everything that diverged from the European 'normality' would be considered lower, and especially in the case of religion, devilish. King mentions that many of the Indigenous appalling description made their way into literature (into a vast number of historical fictions), including John Richardson's novel from 1892; after quoting a short bur rather horrid passage of the book, King says about the two final lines[33]

> Yummy.
> All that in two sentences.
> Indians, it seemed, could offer little inspiration or example of civilized humans, and colonists saw little need to examine either the Indian or the Indian culture. Indian government was a labyrinth, confused and indecipherable. Indian religion was absurd and ridiculous. Jonas Johanis Michaluis, in a letter to the Reverend Adrianus Smoutuis, summed up the feelings that most colonists had for Indians when he described them as 'savage and wild, strangers to all decency, yea, uncivil and stupid as garden poles'[34].
> 'Stupid as garden poles.' It's funny isn't it? And a little annoying, too. But there's no point in being angry" (*The Truth About Stories* 77).

[33] "[…]and what gave additional disgust was the hideous aspect of the inflamed eye of Chippewa, from which the bandage had fallen off, and from which the heat of the sun's rays was fast drawing a briny, ropy, and copious discharge, resembling rather the grey and slimy mucus of the toad than the tears of a human being" (Richardson apud King 77)

[34] J. Franklin Jameson, ed., Narratives of New Netherlands (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), 126.

Once again, King makes use of the question to bring attention to the reader but also to invert the common discourse "'talking back' to a dominant discourse that has demeaned, trivialized, and even demonized Natives" (Davidson et al. 50). Also, by confirming the term used is funny indeed, in a way, King makes use of what Bowens calls "self-mocking humor"; as discussed earlier, this type of humor connects to imposed colonialism at the same time it is understood as means of sharing or as "ethnic glue" (Bowens 249) and is usually accompanied by a substantial use of irony, as in the excerpt above.

The historical context of the Puritans serves as starting point for King to dwell on the fixed image of the Indian following the discussion of the second essay; in this chapter though, this image serves the purpose of analyzing how the Dead Indian can corroborate on the issue of Indigenous people and their identity being merely understood and seen as entertainment. King focuses on Eastman story – who not only had a successful academic life but also alongside his wife wrote many books about Indigenous traditional life and his experience in non-Native society – and Johnson, a poet and performer who "was making her way from Mohawk reserve at Six Nations (near Brantford, Ontario) to the stage and the lectern" (*The Truth About Stories* 85). King explains their movement, from the reserve to city and vice-versa: Eastman had been forced by his father to go to the city and believe to be as Indians as he was American – even though he did not believe it was possible for Indians to maintain their way of living without being assimilated or dying (*The Truth About Stories* King 85)[35]. While Johnson was a performer who delivered poems in Canada and England dressed in "semi-traditional Native-inspired outfit complete with fur pelts, wampum belts, her father's hunting knife, and a scalp she was given by a Blackfoot chief" (*The Truth About Stories* 85). Johnson would usually change for the second half of the performance, dressing a gown full of sophistication, in the only occasion she changed the sequence, the audience was not very fond of the innovation once that is not the order of how progress goes; for the set to make sense Johnson should always start dressed with proper Indigenous garments and then change to sophisticated clothes, which shows that this is the way society

[35] King mentions this while discussing excerpts from Eastman's book *From the Deep Woods to Civilization from* 1921.

expects Indigenous people to progress, moving from the 'savage' to a higher way of presenting itself. According to King, both were performers: Eastman was trying to "explain the dichotomy between Christian theory and Christian practice, while Johnson was looking for a way to make a living" (*The Truth About Stories* 86). Their success with the white audience was provided in parts by their ancestry (Eastman as the 'wild' Indian who came to the city and Johnson being the daughter and granddaughter of important men in the Six Nations). Regardless of their journey and accomplishments, by fascination or curiosity, they both became entertainment, in a similar manner as King did while narrating his stories in the panel he participated.

Johnson's example is a good way to start dealing with the matter King brings in the end of the essay which follows the reasoning behind authentic and inauthentic identities (as in the previous chapter). King comments on the published interview[36] John Stackhouse of the *Globe and Mail* produced after visiting and interviewing King and his colleagues (Floyd and Edna) of the *Dead Dog Café* while they were in Winnipeg to make a special on the show. In the piece, Stackhouse is prone to make assumptions and, according to King, the writing "turned out to be a curious piece that was much about the different categories of Indians – authentic and inauthentic – as it was about the show itself" (*The Truth About Stories* 88). In Stackhouse piece, Edna was the truest of all three once she was always on the reserve "to skin, smoke and tan animals […] She once showed up for rehearsal with a dead moose in her trunk" (Stackhouse). Such behaviors, for Stackhouse, made Edna the authentic Indian. Floyd, was the "transitional figure" (*The Truth About Stories* King 88) making his way through the reservation in which he was raised and the cultural scene of Winnipeg. Finally, there is King, "a bundle of contradictions" and "equal parts first class and first nations" according to Stackhouse; in his view King is the urban Indian or the inauthentic, who does not live on reserve and has a big house in the city. King, which according to Davidson et al. is "particularly skilled at manipulating and

[36] In the book King cites the text as "Comic Heroes or 'Red Niggers'?" but in The Globe and Mail the title comes as "Comic Genius or 'niggers in red face'?" It can be accessed here:
http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/series/apartheid/stories/20011109-1.html

revisiting the boundaries between Natives and non-Natives" (40), makes use of his sarcastic and ironic tone, addressing Stackhouse's assumptions by saying:

> Remember the four-strand bone choker and beaded bulk belt buckle that I so foolishly gave up?
> Actually, Steakhouse was wrong about me. I have two cats, not three. Oh, and it wasn't a dead moose in Edna's trunk, it was a tanned moose hide. Any self-indulgent urban Indian who golfs with Graham Greene knows that not even the Mercedes S 500 could hold an animal that large (*The Truth About Stories* 88-89).

As in the discussion he presents on Columbus, in his addressing of the interview, King makes use of Stackhouse's assumptions to subvert them. He mentions the clothing he had to give up in order to be taken seriously in his speeches, which at the same time has an impact on how Stackhouse understood him – lack of Indigenous identity. By not emulating the same behaviors as Edna, both King and Floyd are pigeonholed as not truthful to their heritage as she is. What is possible to see Stackhouse doing, as many others have done it in other stories King has narrated, is creating categories to determine the level of Indianess of those people. Commenting on the title chosen by Stackhouse – "Comic Heroes or 'Red Niggers'", King questions "who is being entertainment and for whom […] And is it possible for us to move past this limiting dichotomy?" (*The Truth About Stories* 89).

To conclude the chapter, King says: "[s]trange world. But maybe being entertainment isn't so bad. Maybe it's what you're left with when the only defense you have is a good story. Maybe entertainment is the story of survival" (*The Truth About Stories* 89). His thoughts summarize his discussion in the book, in the sense of how stories are important, not for entertainment but for survival; being able to tell their stories is not only Indigenous people's way of defending themselves from assimilation but also as a way of maintaining their identities and protecting their culture. Also, by claiming that "entertainment is the story of survival", King draws attention to the fact that even if Western society sees

Indigenous people and their stories as entertainment, it means that they have been fighting and resisting colonial power. By sharing these stories with the reader and by making use of strategies of narration from his Indigenous background, King constructs a narrative of resistance that praises Indigenous heritage and can resonate in the process of constructing their identities.

FINAL REMARKS

Even though the other three essays were not included in the analysis, I believe it is important to mention them briefly and show how that they not only connected to the other essays in the book but also to the concepts addressed in this research. In "A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark" and "What Is It About Us That You Don't Like", chapters IV and V respectively, King brings political accounts related to legislation, historical data, a Coyote story, and more of his personal journey. These two essays follow the same pattern as the others: same number of pages, same beginning, same ending, and a quote from an Aboriginal writer/artist; as the others, storytelling and orality are features that come as means to address serious topics as elevated number of suicide in Indigenous communities, at the same time humor comes as a bridge between the Coyote story and legislation issues.

The last essay, named *Afterwords: Private Stories*, comes separated from the others in the content page, not tagged as one of the chapters. This essay has a few particularities: it does not begin as the others and it does not have the same number of pages, it has only fourteen pages instead of the standardized thirty-three; the only two things it has in common with the other five essays is the initial quote from an Aboriginal writer/artist and the ending. In this final essay, King mentions the difference of private and public stories, oral and written, stories meant to be in a book and the ones meant to be told out loud; what is interesting to see is that at the same time he is letting us know there are some stories that are supposed to be private (as the ones he categorizes as tribal, the one which are supposed to stay within the Indigenous communities only), he is telling a private story from a family he knows that has shared the story with him. This final compilation of stories walks the fine line between what are private and public stories; what can leave the community and what cannot, and how to make this distinction.

To summarize, the main objective of this research was to address storytelling and orality in King's writings, to understand how those devices help resist assimilation and their importance in reinventing Indigenous identity in a contemporary society, as well as to see how humor and irony are important in the construction of literature of

resistance. In order to do that, I have presented a critical reading of post-colonial theoreticians that have been discussing postcoloniality in itself as well as concepts that underlay it as identity, identification and authenticity; together with that I have tried to incorporate the view of Indigenous thinkers and scholars so that those issues could be better grounded in order to address them in regard to King's texts. This discussion on postcoloniality served also as a base to the development of my arguments regarding storytelling, orality, humor, and irony especially on how they are important to build a counter-discourse. As Tiffin argues, "[p]ost-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'" (98). Her argument corroborates the examination of King's essays, in the sense that it is possible to see him pointing the problems of the colonial discourses he has been dealing with in his stories, examining them and then subverting them, especially by making use of narrative devices as humor and irony.

Following Tiffin's thinking and addressing how King's subversiveness can be miscomprehended, Davidson et al. mention that

> King's comic strategy and pan-Indian status may be seen as an easy way to win non-Native readers over and to avoid some of the more serious and pressing issues facing specific tribal communities in Canada and the United States. Yet, to dismiss King's brand of comedy as simply means of reaching a broader audience is to miss the complexities of his work, which continually walks a tightrope between inclusion and exclusion (41).

In this sense, his cultural inversions and use of ironic humor focusing on pre-established values are made with such finesse that instead of having non-Natives unease about being made fun, he actually makes them aware of still ongoing colonial practices and prejudices regarding

Indigenous people and culture which transforms his writings in a counter-discourse, resisting assimilation.

The book, as mentioned before, is a collection of essays, each one of them composed of different stories that follow a circular pattern; according to Paula Gunn Allen, this circularity, in King's case, with beginnings and endings similarly structured, is an important aspect of Indigenous narrative once "[t]raditional tribal narratives possess a circular structure, incorporating event within event, pilling meaning upon meaning, until the accretion finally results in a story" (qtd. in Bowens 252). King takes the reader on a journey that is composed by historical and personal accounts; going from the moment the first explorers arrived, their assumptions regarding Indigenous people and their culture to the contemporary society with their government's laws and decrees – many still based on assumptions from the explorers' time. He narrates stories from his childhood and adolescence, besides sharing with the reader the moments he has faced prejudice and his feelings towards the situation. According to Schorcht, "[t]he significance of a narrative event in storytelling is not the authentication of the event itself, but the meaning lying behind the event – and of events of one's life are ultimately connected" (202). It is possible to see, then, that the book is the final story; *The Truth About Stories* is constructed by all the essays – and the stories within it – all of them adding meaning to the discussions they bring regarding identity, storytelling, Indigenous culture, and authenticity.

Furthermore, Schorcht discusses that "[h]ow the story is told, of course, is ultimately as significant as what is told" (205). This is particularly true with King, especially when he claims in the final lines of his book that "[a]fterall, I'm a storyteller" (*The Truth About Stories* 167); he summarizes the journey through which he has taken the reader with his writings. He is indeed a storyteller, very aware of the choices he makes, in terms of lexicon, tone, and content selection and none of them were made in a naïve manner. King knows his audience and plays with both ends – Native and non-Native societies – so his voice is heard, and his concerns are addressed. Bowens argues that "[p]art of the joy of

storytelling for Vizenor[37] and King is their awareness of the power afforded to them by their stories and storytelling process" (250). Thus, King uses storytelling not only as his means to deliver the stories but also as way to take control of narrative, especially in relation to important colonial discourses regarding Indigenous culture and identity.

Altogether, storytelling, as presented in the analysis, functions not only as a cultural trait but also as a means for King to tell his stories and even theorize about it. Also, storytelling in King's narrative becomes more than just entertainment and as a way of delivering the stories. As the stories he tells in the essays, storytelling helps to enhance and tie together the other narrative devices he makes use – humor and irony – and is also crucial in the discussion of identity, especially when using it to present an Indigenous viewpoint on the matter.

Therefore, once colonial practices are not relegated to the past, as they have actually been dictating Indigenous living until today, King's narrative serves the purpose of resisting assimilation once it relies on important Indigenous features – as storytelling and orality – to construct its pattern of writing. Also, making use of humor to address discussions on identity and authenticity King opens a channel of communication with non-Native society so they can understand the importance of these matters for Indigenous people and how their lack of knowledge and interference can help maintain stereotypes and undermine their ways of living and culture.

Considering the importance of writers such as King, my motivation to write this dissertation came from my interest in literature of resistance and in minority writing, once it is a relatively new field of study if compared with canonical texts; even though there are authors being awarded and recognized in our contemporary literary scenario when it comes to anthologies, collections and research per se, the number of Indigenous writers being published is negligible if compared to white authors. With this research, I intended to raise interest in colleagues and in undergraduate students to explore those topics and bring the discussion about Indigenous rights closer to our academic field, thus helping to

[37] Bowens brings a comparative analysis between a few Indigenous authors, as Sherman Alexia, Gerald Vizenor, and Thomas King in relation to the use of humor in their writings.

develop a more substantial corpus for future research. In this sense, one of my suggestions for other research in this topic would be in the field of Comparative Literature to see differences and similarities between King's narratives and a Brazilian Indigenous writer mainly regarding how the different Indigenous cultures – as well as the different types of colonization – impacted the writings of the authors. The other suggestions would be a translation of the book itself, to see how the nuances of humor and irony would work in Portuguese and also present a valid study of ways to maintain the marks of orality in the target language. In both cases, as well as in this research, the goal is to expand not only the corpus for research on Indigenous writing but also to make a more present topic in university courses, especially in our Brazilian context.

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