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Killing John Wayne: Intertextual Revision in *Green Grass, Running Water*

Western mythology relies on its presumed supremacy. This reliance is found in both biblical and contemporary cowboy mythology. The tension in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* derives from the idea that Western myths that glorify white heroes and vilify Native Americans provide no support for the modern Native characters in the text. In "Coyote Fixes the World: The Power of Myth in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," Thomas Matchie and Brett Larson argue that King attempts to ameliorate this tension not through denying Western myth's power, but rather by revising some of the major myths so that Native characters have a voice and are heroes: "Thomas King thinks we ought to challenge some of these, like the old cowboy myth which most western movies and TV series continue to perpetuate [...] the four mythic characters and Coyote enter into the realistic plot, [and] travel to the Alberta reserve to "fix up the world" (157). King acknowledges myth's power. However, he also realizes that if myth tells people that their destiny is to be subservient and/or die, the power becomes corrupt. King underscores this corruption with the Native Lionel wanting to be John Wayne, but ultimately still stuck at his job as a television salesman, spreading Western hero myths rather than being a hero himself. King chooses three major Western biblical myths—the creation myth, the garden myth, and the flood myth—and revises them with a Native woman as the focal character instead of a white man. Additionally, he takes the cowboy myth, one infamous for its mistreatment and stereotyping of Native Americans, and reinterprets it so that Portland Looking Bear and his men kill John Wayne and Richard Widmark. Through intertextuality, King revises these myths to create ground so that the modern characters can

become the heroes of their own narratives, making Lionel a Native John Wayne when he confronts George Morningstar. King revises major biblical and contemporary myths through intertextuality, creating a world where the Native characters of *Green Grass, Running Water* can become the heroes of their own narrative.

King plays with the concepts of intertextuality and myth being perceived as true in his narrative. In the book *Primal Myths*, Barbara Sproul explains myth's impact on people: "Who are we? Why are we here? [...] [Myths] organize the way we perceive facts and understand ourselves and the world" (1). Myths have power because they are seen as truth despite any outlandish feats on the characters' parts, thus providing instruction for people about how to act in society and defining identity. King also uses these concepts to his storytelling advantage in *Green Grass, Running Water*. When Lionel's boss, Bursum, decides to watch his favorite Western film, "he clutch[es] his hands in his lap as if he was praying" (211). Bursum believes in the story where white cowboys kill Native enemies so strongly that it becomes mythological. Unfortunately, many of the Native characters in *Green Grass, Running Water* also believe in this story, leading to a corrupted myth that offers no help to anyone aside from white men like Bursum. King seeks to revise these myths through intertextuality. In Laura E. Donaldson's article "Noah Meets old Coyote, or Singing in the Rain: Intertextuality in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," she defines intertextuality as a literary term: "Intertextuality—literally, 'between textness'—is one of the most important semiotic concepts to emerge in the last several decades. [...] it describes the transposition of one sign system into another to exchange or to alter it: a gesture implying the displacement of the earlier system by the later and the condensation of the later system onto the earlier" (28). King takes established Western texts and contrasts them with Native stories to create the overriding narrative found in *Green Grass,*

Running Water. Through intertextuality, King can compare and contrast myths to point out the major flaw in Western mythology in his narratives, namely how Western myth attempts to usurp all other mythologies and cultures. In the process, King critiques Western myth to also help restore balance in the modern narrative, having the various myths interact with each other to correct corrupt mythology. Intertextuality becomes both a storytelling and thematic tool in *Green Grass, Running Water* as King creates a cohesive mythology for the various narratives.

King's revisions begin with the creation myth, removing power from the presumed white male god to create a myth that is more aligned with nature. Matchie and Larson enumerate concepts often found in Native creation myths: "In Native thinking things usually start with water and earth, there is no radical difference between levels of being, and creation is an on-going act, both physical and spiritual, in which the purpose is to establish harmony among all natural forces" (158). Unlike Western myth, there is less focus on humans "dominat[ing] the earth" (Matchie and Larson 158) and more emphasis on balance. While King does draw on many Native aspects of creation myth, including water at the beginning and the trickster archetype Coyote, there is little balance to be found in his version of creation. King creates a disjointed creation myth with Western and Native ideas to reflect the disjointed state of his modern Native characters. In King's myth, creation begins with Coyote dreaming: "In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water. Coyote was there, but Coyote was asleep [...] So, that Coyote is dreaming, and pretty soon, one of those dreams gets loose and runs around. Makes a lot of noise" (1). King does not begin with people, but Coyote, an integral part of Native myth, and also a decided step away from the human-centric Western creation myth. Because creation starts with the trickster Coyote, however, there is little harmony found in this myth. Indeed, the first thing the Dream does is see the water, decide that "[t]his is all wrong," and promptly bursts into sobs

loud enough to awaken Coyote (1). By having the Dream/Christian god come from Coyote's psyche, King negates Western myth's dominance by removing it from its presumed seat of power. However, the Dream/Christian god still sees himself as supreme, declaring the world as his own, then weeping at the discovery that there is little in this world to possess. His relationship with Coyote is disruptive, as the Dream/Christian god becomes a dog in an attempt to become "almost as good as Coyote" (2), finally becoming the GOD later seen when King revises the garden myth. The Dream cannot become as powerful as Coyote, which causes imbalance. This scene weakens Western myth's hold by presenting the Christian god as a spoiled brat. However, Coyote also fails to bring harmony to the world as he appeases the god by turning him into GOD. He indulges GOD by giving him a semblance of authority with his canine appearance, but does not address GOD's superiority complex. Coyote's trickster nature prevents balance, evidenced by the storyteller scolding Coyote for indulging GOD: "Now you've done it" (3). Coyote's interactions with GOD on an intertextual level create the mishaps that will befall First Woman later on in the narrative, and on a larger scale, allow the dominance of Western mythology in the text. Because the failure is mythic and intertextual, evidenced by the dual bickering mythic figures, the four old mythic/intertextual Indians must escape to correct the world. Intertextual myth proves to be both the problem and the solution. King not only creates the world in his revised myth, but also the conflict between mythologies in *Green Grass, Running Water*.

King also revises the garden myth, used in Western society to vilify women and justify treating them as lesser, by infusing the myth with Native and even feminist elements. Carolyn Merchant chronicles the Western garden myth in the book *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, specifically concerning how Eve was framed as the myth's villain: "Had

[Eve] remained sweet and meek, Ludolphus asserted, paradise would never have been lost. In responding to Lucifer's temptation, Eve attempted to be like God. Adam, on the other hand, ate the fruit only out of love for Eve [...] Ludolphus warned his readers to be wary of wicked women and to admire the nobility of Adam" (53). Men are presented as compassionate, while women are perceived as selfish creatures who try to be more than they are meant to be. The Western garden myth teaches women to obey, or else they might wind up like Eve, cast out of paradise. King reverses this myth by introducing First Woman, who becomes both creator and Adam in King's version of the myth. Together with grandmother Turtle— stressing the unity found between humans and animals in Native myths— "[t]hey get some mud and put that mud on grandmother Turtle's back and pretty soon the mud starts to grow. [...] First Woman's garden. That good woman makes a garden and she lives there with Ahdamn" (39, 40). First Woman not only replaces Adam, but also the Christian god in that she creates her own garden, rather than being created as a companion for a male ruler. Unlike the Western garden myth, the woman has both power and agency, while the male, Ahdamn, does nothing much beyond providing her companionship. Through revision, King reverses the gender roles to recreate the garden myth.

King also revises the Fall aspect of the garden myth, placing power in the hands of the Native Woman, and away from the white GOD. Because GOD is not the creator in King's version of the garden myth, he must introduce himself to First Woman: "I'm GOD, says GOD. And I am almost as good as Coyote. Funny, says First Woman. You remind me of a dog" (72). GOD admits that he is not as powerful as Coyote, negating the Christian god's power in myth. Thus, King is free to reinterpret the myth where the Native First Woman is the hero. First Woman sees through GOD's bluster, equating him with the lesser dog, removing any power that

GOD arguably has in the creation myth. Nonetheless, God tries to assert his authority over First Woman, proclaiming that “this is my world and this is my garden. [...] There are rules, you know. [...] Christian rules” (72, 73). GOD references the idea that Christianity is a ubiquitous mythology that must be obeyed by all. First Woman is not a Christian, and she was not created by GOD, yet he still expects her obedience. Additionally, he assumes domain over the garden that First Woman built, reinforcing Western mythology’s need to be the default myth. In “The Arbitrary Nature of the Story: Poking Fun at Oral and Written Authority in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*,” Sharon M. Bailey elaborates upon this need: “the Bible is a religious work and an object of faith. Furthermore, inherent in Christianity is the belief that its precepts are true, not only for members of its own faith, but for all people” (46). Biblical narrative is mythical in nature, meaning that its events must be interpreted as true for the myth to have power. Therefore, Christian myth in *Green Grass, Running Water* requires that all people, white and Native, believe its authority. As King’s Native and Western myths clash, the struggle highlights Christianity’s need to possess all mythic power. First Woman, the true creator in King’s garden myth, sees through GOD immediately: “Your garden, says First Woman. You must be dreaming. And that one takes a big bite of one of those nice red apples” (72). First Woman rejects GOD’s supremacy, further weakening Western myth while also foreshadowing how the modern characters will stand up to whites’ attempts to control their own creations. Her eating the apple deliberately parallels and reverses Eve’s role in the garden myth. The biblical garden myth makes it clear that “Eve should have been submissive rather than willful” (Merchant 50). But in King’s revised myth, Eve’s and god’s roles are switched. When First Woman eats the apple, her rejecting GOD’s claims places her in the powerful creator role, while GOD, whose noisiness and claims of ownership frustrates First Woman to the point of leaving

the garden, becomes King's Eve in that he ruins the garden with his pride. GOD tries to revise the situation in a way that places him in control and owning the garden, like in the biblical myth: "You can't leave my garden, says that GOD to First Woman. You can't leave because I'm kicking you out. But First Woman doesn't hear him" (74). GOD places his faith in biblical dominance, unable to accept any myth in which he is not supreme. But because First Woman rejects his claims of power by ignoring him, his mythology is abandoned in favor of a "new home" (74), where balance can hopefully be found again. While GOD does get to keep the garden, the animals leave with First Woman, meaning that there is nothing for God to rule except for Old Coyote, who also debates leaving the garden (74). When King revises the Fall aspect of the garden narrative, he does so in a way that removes Christianity's power and even the power of ownership.

The garden myth bleeds into King's modern narrative in the form of the lakefront property Parliament Lake, but because all the myths are not corrected yet in the text, white dominance remains unchallenged. Influenced by their belief in biblical myth, many Western philosophers and explorers were determined to recreate Eden. Numerous explorers, Christopher Columbus included, would often describe the 'new' lands that they found as being like Eden (Merchant 57-8). The idea that Eden could be recreated is a major part of the Western garden myth, as Merchant explains: "The hope of creating the new earth through technology was suggested by John Scotus Erigena as early as the ninth century. Erigena called for the mechanical arts to assist humanity in its Recovery of the dominion lost by Adam in the Fall" (56-7). The idea that Eden can be recovered through technology plays a crucial role in *Green Grass, Running Water*. The dam built on Blackfoot land is meant to make beautiful lakefront property, creating a modern Eden. However, because white mythology is still dominant in the modern narrative, this

Eden is reserved only for those who can afford such a place. Bursum's Eden does not promote the needed balance found in Native mythology, as evidenced by his musings: "Parliament Lake. Bursum had been one of the first people to buy a lot at Parliament Lake. [...] A small, treed peninsula with lake frontage on three sides, southern exposure, with a dense stand of trees to the north to protect against the wind, and an unobstructed view of the mountains. Secluded. Exclusive. Valuable" (295). The lakefront property is described as beautiful and even comforting, not unlike when Columbus described South America as "a mild climate where the land and the trees are as green and lovely as the orchard of Valencia in April" (Merchant 57). The dam would be Western mythology's final triumph, using technology to control nature and create a new paradise. But as Bursum buying his own share of the land, and the property's "[e]xclusive" (295) nature prove, this Eden is not for all parties. The modern garden that would be created by technology, controlling the environment for greedy landowners' benefit, is a strictly Western invention with no room for Native presence. Indeed, when Bursum remarks on Eli's cabin, which was built by his Native mother, he does so in less than flattering terms: "It was too small. There were no utilities. But because of the cabin, because of the injunction, because of Eli, no one could build on the lake itself until the matter was settled" (295). Bursum rejects Eli's cabin because it does not possess modern technology, meaning that it does not fall neatly into the Western myth of rebuilding Eden through technology. The cabin is purely natural, and does not take up the amount of space that Bursum would prefer in his living quarters, stressing the tension between nature and technology in the text, and by proxy Native and Western myths. Because King is still in the process of revising myths at this point in *Green Grass, Running Water*, Eli cannot reject Bursum as easily as First Woman rejects GOD in her own garden myth. Instead, Eli must settle for living in his mother's cabin and using lawsuits to postpone the dam for as long as

he can. In the modern version of the garden myth, Native subversion comes not in leaving the garden, but in staying.

King both revises and incorporates the flood myth to create a narrative in which Native characters are the heroes and white-centric rules are subverted. Unlike First Woman, Changing Woman does not assume the heroic role in the flood myth. Instead, she visits the ‘ark,’ or as King refers to the vessel, the “canoe full of poop” (160). Her power in subverting the narrative comes in seeing qualities in the animals that Noah does not because of his strict adherence to authority, and also her ability to outrun the lecherous Noah. Matchie and Larson describe the lesson behind the Changing Woman narrative as such: “Noah is preoccupied with hierarchy, power, and rules, as well as his own pleasure. Hence, it becomes important for Changing Woman to expose the views of this “little man” in order to change the myth” (160). Because the myths are placed so closely together in *Green Grass, Running Water*, King can revise Noah so he has the failings connected with Western mythology— chiefly sexist elitism and selfishness. Changing Woman cannot immediately refuse, like First Woman with GOD. Instead, she must endure him in order to reveal his true faults. This revising lays down the groundwork for fixing the modern narrative as well. Like GOD and First Woman, Noah attempts to force Changing Woman into the role that he wants her to play: “My name’s Noah, and you must be my new wife. [...] Lemme see your breasts, says Noah. I like women with big breasts. I hope God remembered that” (160). While this passage is meant to be comedic, it also draws upon the recurring theme in biblical myth that women are meant to be passive and subservient to men. When Changing Woman appears, Noah automatically assumes that she is meant for him, like Eve is meant for Adam in the traditional biblical myth. Thus, he tries to force Changing Woman into the traditional Eve role even after she breaks his rules by speaking to the animals and

resisting his advances. He assumes that the Christian god that he follows made her according to his desires, stressing the idea that humans, specifically men, are dominant in Western myth. Donaldson links Noah's treatment of Changing Woman in King's text to that of Eve in the traditional biblical myth: "Noah's blaming of Eve for his predicament articulates the time-honored Christian belief that women bear primary responsibility for the Fall" (34). Unlike the myths King revises, which evolved independently over time, King has a cohesive whole that he integrates these texts into for his story. He inserts recurring threads through intertextuality, creating themes critiquing the omnipresence of Christian myth. While the Woman narratives cover both biblical and fictional stories, King chooses to insert the idea of Native femininity winning out over white masculinity. As such, the flood myth does not end as it does in the Bible, but rather quite similarly to First Woman's garden myth: "This is a Christian ship, he shouts. I am a Christian man. This is a Christian journey. And if you can't follow our Christian rules, then you're not wanted on the voyage" (163). Noah's repeated use of the word 'Christian' reinforces both his narrow viewpoint and narrow Christian mythology. He does not allow any ideas that challenge his authority as he leaves Changing Woman, despite his earlier desire for a wife. Like GOD, Noah would rather be alone— even though the animals stay with Noah in this myth, he refuses to speak to them, seeing it as "almost bestiality" (160)— than accept or even tolerate any myths aside from his own. When he cannot control Changing Woman, he retreats into the narrative that presents him as the supreme being. With the flood myth, King creates a mythology where he can critique how Christianity treats women and its relationship to nature.

As Eli tries to hold back the waters in the modern narrative, he becomes King's Native version of Noah in the text. Donaldson explains how Eli represents the Native feminist subversive themes found in the revised flood narrative in his mother's cabin, which "represents

not only his maternal and cultural heritage but also the only hope of stopping perhaps the most effective technology yet developed for the genocidal annihilation of Native cultures” (39). Eli’s story may exist outside of the Woman narratives, but the themes are still present. He protects his tribe’s land with something that a woman built from the Western myth of dominating nature and Natives. Because King both merges and revises myth in the text, these themes can exist in both the Woman’s and Eli’s narratives. Eli remembers his mother building the cabin: “His mother had built the house. Log by log. Had dragged each one out of the small stand of timber behind the house, barked them, hewn them, and set them” (122). Eli’s mother builds a home in harmony with nature, like First Woman does when she creates the garden. The cabin represents both Native and feminine strength, necessary components in correcting the mythologies in *Green Grass, Running Water*. When Western mythology casts these strengths aside in favor of a manufactured Eden, Eli finds himself attempting to save his culture, not unlike the traditional Noah found in biblical myth. Despite earlier identity concerns, due to marrying a white woman and teaching Western literature for much of his life, after returning home Eli realizes that his identity is tied to the cabin and the memories linked to what his mother built for him and his siblings: “In the end, he had become what he had always been. An Indian. [...] At first there had been the sensation of being home, of being in his mother’s house, of reliving the memories. [...] Looking back, Eli could see that he had never made a conscious decision to stay. And looking back, he knew it was the only decision that he could have made” (289, 290). While he has lived several years off the reserve, ultimately Eli’s identity is the same as when his mother built the house. Refusing to ignore his mythology and family, Eli lives in a house with no modern conveniences for his mother and his culture. Eli realigns himself with Native myth, thus becoming the protagonist of his own story, even when it later costs him his life. He cannot leave

the garden or float away, but by staying in one spot, he shows the subversion of both the flood and garden myths found in the Woman narratives.

Readers may at first be confused that King presents Hollywood's idealized cowboy, more often than not played by actor John Wayne, as a myth every bit as powerful as the garden and the flood. But as a genre so ubiquitous to Western culture, and one of the few that often includes Native characters in said mythology, its impact on the characters in *Green Grass, Running Water* cannot be ignored. Matchie and Larson describe how the cowboy myth has evolved over time in Western culture: "In the late 1800s, during a 25-year period, no more than forty thousand cowboys— one in four of which were Mexican, Indian, or Black— created a myth filled with errors. [...] But the myth that has survived is that of a skillful white macho male moralist (like the Lone Ranger) who goes around righting wrongs by killing off the "bad guys," especially the Indians" (157). Hollywood revises the cowboy to better fit Western mythology by first defaulting him to white and male. They then give him heroic traits and Native enemies to fight in a perpetual struggle for white/Western dominance. By "righting wrongs" the cowboy myth imparts the lessons and morality needed for living in a hostile environment, but only for whites (Matchie and Larson 157). Native characters are doomed to fail in the cowboy myth, as Charlie learns when asking his mother about his father's movie career: "But that was back before they had any Indian heroes" (166). While Portland has an active career in Hollywood in his youth, his Native ancestry makes it impossible to get any roles outside what the Western mythos offers for him—he can never hope to play a "lawyer or a policeman or a cowboy" (166). Like in the Woman narratives, Portland is initially not intimidated by Western mythology, even learning how to use it to his advantage after assuming the stereotypical screen name "Iron Eyes Screeching Eagle" and going from playing extras to chiefs (166). Portland seems to find a way to work within

Western mythology and find his own sense of balance. However, this mythology is also what ends his film career, when Portland must wear a rubber nose to better conform to Hollywood's image of a Native character. This conformity proves to be Portland's undoing: "But the nose created new problems. Portland couldn't breathe with the nose on, had to breathe through his mouth, which changed the sound of his voice. Instead of the rich, deep, breathy baritone, his voice sounded pinched" (170). The Native stereotype is literally suffocating Portland. When he conforms to the stereotype for Natives in the cowboy myth, it changes him physically. The Native stereotype, which Portland has used for his benefit to this point, finally becomes overwhelming even for him. His film career ends as the white cowboy myth rejects the genuinely Native Portland, even after he tries to follow their rules. King presents the cowboy myth as harmful even for Natives that learn how to navigate, and then follow, the rules.

If Portland follows white mythology, Lionel is the true believer that makes this myth reality. His preference for Western cowboy mythology becomes a major part of his character: "By the time Lionel was six, he knew what he wanted to be. John Wayne. Not the actor, but the character. [...] The John Wayne that saved stage coaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks" (265). Lionel is not interested in the actor, but the myth that he represents. He admires the Wayne character's great deeds, which ties into the idea that myths are meant to teach people how to act in society. However, the narrowness of the cowboy myth leads Lionel to reject any other identity. When Lionel's father lists multiple Native people that he could emulate— "Warriors, chiefs, councillors, diplomats, spiritual leaders, healers (266)"— Lionel keeps responding with "John Wayne" (266). Lionel's belief in the cowboy myth's dominance leads him to excluding any Native possibility for his future. Unfortunately, even fervent belief in the cowboy myth does not grant Lionel inclusion. When he buys a John Wayne ring in an attempt to be more like his

mythological idol, it promptly breaks: “It took a while to find the crest in the prairie grass. One part of the hinge had broken, and now the crest wouldn’t stay on” (266). Like Bursum with Parliament Lake, Lionel tries to exchange money to gain entrance into a Western myth. However, the cowboy myth’s falseness becomes clear in the Native environment, as Wayne’s crest is lost in the natural grass. Whereas in the Woman narratives a woman subverts white myth, and Eli challenges the people building the dam, in Lionel’s childhood narrative his own bad luck and the environment question the Wayne/cowboy myth.

King revises the cowboy myth in both the Woman and the modern narratives to negate this myth’s power in both spheres. After leaving the garden, First Woman suddenly finds herself in the cowboy myth, or more specifically, the Lone Ranger narrative. Like in the garden, First Woman assumes the heroic role: “Just a minute, says First Woman, and that one takes some black cloth out of her purse. [...] She puts that black cloth around her head. Look, look, all the live rangers says, and they point their fingers at First Woman. It’s the Lone Ranger. Yes, they says, it’s the Lone Ranger” (75). Like before, First Woman outwits the western mythic characters. However, soldiers come after the Rangers to arrest her for “[b]eing Indian” (77). King suggests that the cowboy myth is possibly even stronger than those found in the Bible and literature. Cheryl Lousley’s “‘Hosanna Da, Our Home on Natives’ Land’: Environmental Justice and Democracy in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*” outlines the cowboy myth’s power: “As Lionel’s John Wayne fantasies, Eli’s secret enjoyment of cowboy romance novels, and Portland’s brief film career as an Indian testify, the vision of life offered by the movies can be seductive for both Native and non-Native alike” (37). The cowboy myth is omnipresent in *Green Grass, Running Water*. The just heroes attract the Native characters seeking justice in their own stories. But since Natives are not welcome in the white cowboy myth, King’s

characters find themselves stuck. Additionally, this myth is already intertextual because it exists in book, film, and belief. Revising the myth in the Woman narratives is not enough, and King, through the intertextual device of the four old Indians, revises the cowboy myth in reality as well, removing the white cavalry that would have saved the day for John Wayne. The film's tone changes suddenly as a result: "Portland turned and looked at Wayne and Widmark, who had stopped shouting and waving their hats [...] Without a word, [Portland] started his horse forward through the water, and behind him his men rose out of the river, a great swirl of motion and color" (357). Once the myth is changed to reflect Natives favorably, Wayne and Widmark are suddenly inept, while Portland assumes the heroic role as he and his men advance "through the water" (357), recalling the same water seen in the Native creation myth. The cowboy myth, which involves selling the same ending over and over, becomes dynamic once Native heroes assume control of the story. By combining the cowboy and creation myths while also merging myth and modern narrative, King creates an intertextual story where Native characters are the victors. While the cowboy myth may be shown "again and again in the mainstream media," through revising the ending for a heroic Native myth, the effects this revised film has on the Native characters is immediate (Lousley 37). Charlie, who was once ashamed of his father for following white stereotypes, now cheers for him as he kills John Wayne (King 358). The corrected myth begins to correct Charlie's relationship with his father. The revised film marks the turning point for myth in *Green Grass, Running Water*. Now that the major myth in the modern narrative has been corrected, the Native characters can begin to assume heroic roles in their own lives.

The Sun Dance allows Lionel to become a Native John Wayne as he blocks George Morningstar from snapping photos of what is meant to be a private ceremony for white

customers of his magazine. George attempts to justify his work to his old lover, Latisha: “It’s almost the twenty-first century, Country. Look, they let you take photos in church all the time. Hell, everything the pope does is on television. People are curious about these kind of things” (420). George uses only Christian metaphors in his argument, emphasizing that he views white religion and culture as the default, and that Native culture should follow its example. His mentioning of cameras and television is meant to sound modern, but instead reminds readers of the technology used by Western myth to control both nature and Natives. George is the modern stand in for GOD, Noah, and all the other white men in the Woman narratives that attempt to force unwanted rules on Natives, securing their own myths as dominant. To help reinforce George as the proponent for white myth, he later refers to himself as “General Custer” when the four old Indians introduce themselves by their intertextual names of Ishmael, the Lone Ranger, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye (423). King uses his intertextual name scheme to reveal George’s true disdain for Native culture by aligning him with the infamous Custer. Lionel’s refusal of George begins when the John Wayne-esque jacket, that the four old Indians gave him, becomes uncomfortable. He returns their gift, saying that “it’s very nice. I mean. I like leather. And the fringe is... elegant. But I really can’t keep it” (421). Lionel begins to realize that the white hero role is not one that he can feel relaxed in, once he returns to the Native Sun Dance. Surrounded by his culture and corrected myth, Lionel no longer needs the cowboy myth to affirm his identity. This understanding leads to his shrugging off the jacket and his confrontation with George. Matchie and Larson expand on this concept: “The four mythic characters provide a John Wayne jacket for Lionel, as though the white cowboy myth is a good thing” (163, 284). However, Matchie and Larson ignore the symbolic value in the four old Indians initially giving Lionel the jacket. King reveals that the jacket belongs to George, reflecting the corrupting

influence behind the cowboy myth: “I think you should probably give me my jacket back” (424). The four old Indians did not give Lionel the jacket in an affirmation of the cowboy myth, but to make him “feel better,” a tactic that they happily admit is hit or miss (422). While the jacket was a poor decision, they admit to their mythic faults, as opposed to George and his Western mythic counterparts. The jacket also serves to highlight George’s mercenary nature, as he tries to emphasize the theft of his jacket to belie the fact that he is taking illegal photos of the Sun Dance. As Lionel stops George from sneaking away with the film, George resorts to the final tactic of all white mythic characters in King’s text, dismissing anything that is not part of white myth/culture: “Nobody cares about your little powwow. A bunch of old people and drunks sitting around in tents in the middle of nowhere. Nobody cares about any of this” (427). Like GOD and Noah, George throws a tantrum in which he tries to reinforce the uselessness of anything that is not Western myth, but is easily thwarted by Lionel and Eli, who now assume their roles as the Native Noah and Native John Wayne to protect their own myths and culture. Their realization and actions are the final shift in *Green Grass, Running Water* from a white dominated narrative to a Native one.

Green Grass, Running Water should not be read as simply a collection of revised myths. King has these myths interact with each other in different plots to intertextually create a cyclical, cohesive theme of how Western myth impacts the Native psyche. Because Western/Christian myth offers nothing for the Native characters aside from rules that do not apply to them and rejects Native mythological balance between humans and animals, King revises these myths to create stories where Native characters are the heroes, eventually bleeding into the modern narrative as well through the four old Indians and the John Wayne film. While revising the film so Portland finally wins against John Wayne is important in King’s storytelling process, the real

power is in Lionel and Charlie finally witnessing a narrative where the Native character is triumphant. As a result, Charlie repairs his relationship with his father and Lionel stands against George, protecting his culture from invaders heroically. Because of the revised myths with Native characters as the focal points, Lionel understands what he should do with his own life, specifically protecting his family and culture. King does not just revise, he recreates myth.

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