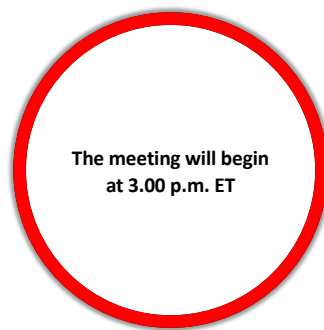


ENGL 215 Live Chat 4c



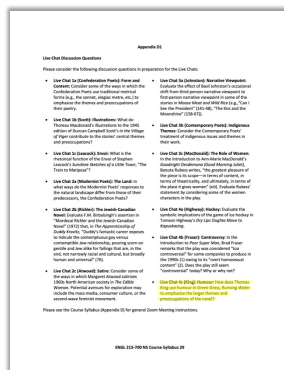
Zoom Meeting Information

- Zoom Meetings are about 60 minutes in length.
- Zoom Meetings are recorded.
- Recordings and PowerPoint presentations are posted on onQ (under “Activities” > “Zoom Meetings”).
- Participate in the discussion by using the “Chat” window or by raising your hand in “Reactions.”
- Your camera may be on or off.

ENGL 215 Live Chat 4c

Appendix D1

- **Humour:** How does Thomas King use humour in *Green Grass, Running Water* to emphasize the larger themes and preoccupations of the novel?



ENGL 215 Zoom Meetings

Weeks	1-3	Live Chat 1a Confederation Poets	Live Chat 1b Duncan Campbell Scott	Live Chat 1c Stephen Leacock
Weeks	4-6	Live Chat 2a Modernist Poets	Live Chat 2b Mordecai Richler	Live Chat 2c Margaret Atwood
Weeks	7-9	Live Chat 3a Basil Johnston	Live Chat 3b Contemporary Poets	Live Chat 3c Ann-Marie MacDonald
Weeks	10-12	Live Chat 4a Tomson Highway	Live Chat 4b Brad Fraser	Live Chat 4c Thomas King

 King, *Green Grass, Running Water*

Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz. “Native-American Humour as Resistance: Breaking Identity Moulds in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*.” *Miscelánea*, no. 42, Jan. 2010, pp. 67-90.

<https://papiro.unizar.es/ojs/index.php/misc/article/view/9416>



deconstruction

- a critical approach developed by French critic Jacques Derrida questioning the possibility of coherent meaning in language
- asserts that the dominant Western tradition is *logocentric*, has attempted to establish certainty and truth through hierarchical binary oppositions (e.g., good vs evil, white vs black, north vs south, signifier vs signified, speech vs writing etc.)
- deconstruction inverts and dissolves these hierarchical binary oppositions to show that the marginalized term has “always already” contaminated the privileged term, thus deferring a stable and authentic source of meaning
- a deconstructive reading of a text seeks to locate the *aporia*, the internal contradiction that undermines its claims to coherent meaning (Baldick 88-89)

King, *Green Grass, Running Water*

Thesis: King uses humour to deconstruct Western master narratives (68-70)		
“trickster” characters	Noah (72-73)	“Are you ... Christian rules” (145-46)
	The Lone Ranger (73-74)	“It looks ... to kill” (70-71)
	Captain Ahab (74-75)	“We’re looking ... Black Whale” (196)
	Hawkeye (75)	“Indians have ... Nasty Bumpo” (392-93)
“realistic” characters	Clifford Sifton (76-77)	“Hell, Eli ... the nineteenth” (141)
	Lionel Red Dog (77-78)	“By the ... options open” (241)
	Alberta Frank (78-79)	“I’d like ... corporate executive” (174)
	Latisha Red Dog (79-81)	“The food ... for appetizers” (108-09)
Conclusion: King’s humour is an act of resistance against colonization (86)		

King, *Green Grass, Running Water*

Natives are now writing fiction, poetry, and plays, and some of the literature being produced by them is both vulgar and hilarious. A good many stereotypes are hitting the dust, a few sensibilities are in the process of being outraged. The comfortable thing about a people who do not have a literary voice, or at least not one you can hear or understand, is that you never have to listen to what they are saying about *you*.... Humour can be aggressive and oppressive, as in keep-’em-in-their-place sexist and racist jokes. But it can also be a subversive weapon, as it has often been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical, weapons. (244)

Margaret Atwood. “A Double-Bladed Knife: Subversive Laughter in Two Stories by Thomas King.” *Canadian Literature*, nos. 124-25, 1990, pp. 243-50.

Thesis

[Thomas King’s] ultimate aim [in his use of humour in *Green Grass, Running Water*] is to undercut some of the most prevalent and injurious discursive practices deployed by Western civilization.... King manages to subsume important passages of Euro-American religious, intellectual, and historical doctrine in an overall Native framework that reveals their nonsense and ill will. This is done by introducing such widely used techniques among American Indian storytellers as the inclusion of a trickster figure, anachronistic elements, subversive intertextual references, plays on words, or the satiric treatment of stereotypes. All these comic resources are brought into the text with a foremost aim in mind: to undo the Western performance of epistemological and spiritual domination. (Ibarrola-Armendariz 68-70)

“trickster” character Noah (Old Testament)

Are you all right? Changing Woman asks Old Coyote. / Pssst, says Old Coyote. / Why are you talking to animals? says the little man. This is a Christian ship. Animals don't talk. We got rules. / I fell out of the sky, says Changing Woman. I'm very sorry that I landed on Old Coyote. / The sky! shouts the little man. Hallelujah! A gift from heaven. My name's Noah, and you must be my new wife. / I doubt that, says Changing Woman. / Lemme see your breasts, says Noah. I like women with big breasts. I hope God remembered that. / Don't do it, says one of the Turtles. He'll just get excited and rock the canoe. / I have no intention of showing him my breasts, says Changing Woman. / Talking to the animals again, shouts Noah. That's almost bestiality, and it's against the rules. / What rules? / Christian rules. (King 145-46)

“trickster” character Captain Ahab (*Moby-Dick*)

We're looking for the white whale, Ahab tells his men. Keep looking. / So Ahab's men look at the ocean and they see something and that something is a whale. / Blackwhaleblackwhaleblackwhalesbianblackwhalesbianblack-whale, they all shout. / Black whale? yells Ahab. You mean white whale, don't you? Moby-Dick, the great male white whale? / That's not a white whale, says Changing Woman. That's a female whale and she's black. / Nonsense, says Ahab. It's Moby-Dick, the great white whale. / You're mistaken, says Changing Woman, I believe that is Moby-Jane, the Great Black Whale. (King 196)

“trickster” character Noah (Old Testament)

King's novel manages to transmit the dialogical matrix of Native oral discourse while ... undermin[ing] some of the foundations of Western myths. One of the most successful instances of this “deconstructive” intertextuality is found in the indictment that Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism and sexism receives when biblical narratives are seen in the light of Native creation stories.... Noah becomes a laughing stock during this lively conversation because of his blatant misreading of a number of elements that are commonplace in Native creation stories, which ends up making him sound like a despotic male chauvinist. Nonetheless, it is more than likely that King's most corrosive criticism is being directed at the kind of attitudes that the white man exhibited towards Native spirituality when they first came into contact. (Ibarrola-Armendariz 72-73)

“trickster” character Captain Ahab (*Moby-Dick*)

King's use of subversive allusion is admittedly attenuated by the comic brushstrokes, there is little question that his cross-textual intrusions are an attack on the values and interpretations frequently attached to some of the classics in Western literature.... No need to explain that the sinking of the Pequod in this subaltern narrative represents the vanquishing of something much larger and more dangerous than egocentric Ahab. It is the whole Western binary and hierarchical way of seeing that is being sabotaged here.... The key aim of all these intertextual references is to upset previously controlling ideologies by means of the intervention of voices and perspectives that had been hitherto excluded or, at least, relegated to the margins. (Ibarrola-Armendariz 74-75)

“realistic” character
Clifford Sifton

“Hell, Eli, those treaties aren’t worth a damn. Government only made them for convenience. Who’d of guessed that there would still be Indians kicking around in the twentieth century.” / “One of life’s little embarrassments.” / “Besides, you guys aren’t real Indians anyway. I mean, you drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games. Look at you. You’re a university professor.” / “That’s my profession. Being Indian isn’t a profession.” / “And you speak as good English as me.” / “Better,” said Eli. “And I speak Blackfoot too. My sisters speak Blackfoot. So do my niece and nephew.” / “That’s what I mean. Latisha runs a restaurant and Lionel sells televisions. Not exactly traditionalist, are they?” / “It’s not exactly the nineteenth century, either.” / “Damn it. That’s my point. You can’t live in the past. My dam is part of the twentieth century. Your house is part of the nineteenth.” (King 141)

“realistic” character
Latisha Red Dog

Every day Rita cooked up the same beef stew, and every day Rita or Billy or Cynthia or Latisha thought up a name for it. It wasn’t cheating. Everybody in town and on the reserve who came to the Dead Dog Café to eat knew that the special rarely changed, and all the tourists who came through never knew it didn’t.... The food at the Dead Dog was good, but what drew tourists to the cafe was the ambience and the reputation that it had developed over the years. Latisha would like to have been able to take all the credit.... But, in fact, it had been her auntie’s idea. / “Tell them it’s dog meat,” Norma had said. “Tourists like that kind of stuff.” / That had been the inspiration. Latisha printed up menus that featured such things as Dog du Jour, Houndburgers, Puppy Potpourri, Hot Dogs, Saint Bernard Swiss Melts, with Doggie Doos and Deep-Fried Puppy Whatnots for appetizers. (King 108-09)

“realistic” character
Clifford Sifton

[Individual Indigenous people] are quite often perceived by Anglo-Americans as the embodiment of an aboriginal identity and age-old traditions. Clifford Sifton, the constructor who built the Grand Baleen Dam, is a case in point as he can rarely see beyond inherited stereotypes and his own business interests.... In the best tradition of Socratic dialogue, but also borrowing heavily from the kind of rhetorical contests often played in Native gatherings, this conflictive exchange conveys overtly the kind of pigeonholing that indigenous peoples have been subjected to in Euro-American minds and histories. Sifton exhibits a typically colonialist attitude towards the Natives that, in marking them out as uniform and inferior, tries to simplify and reduce their variegated spheres of activity. (Ibarrola-Armendariz 76-77)

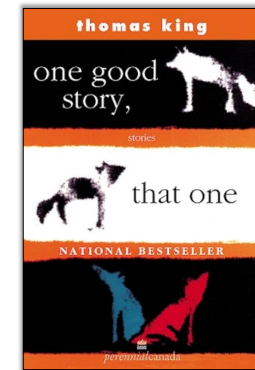
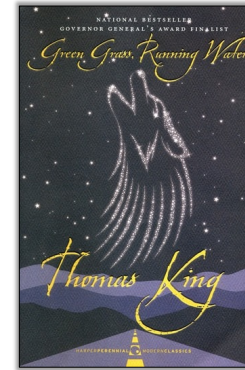
“realistic” character
Latisha Red Dog

Latisha’s “Dead Dog Café” is very likely the clearest manifestation of her profound understanding of the workings of stereotypical representations.... [S]he is aware that what may hurt the psychological poise of her people is not so much the sweeping statements and foolish generalizations made by other groups about them but, rather, their inability to see beyond the kind of false fixity that they imply.... Latisha’s consciousness that racist stereotypical discourse is not merely a question of setting up a flat and inaccurate image of the Other—but, also, of how those images are projected and introjected—allows her to reverse the positionings of her power relations with the white world. This reversal is important because it reveals a great deal of the “fantasy” (always related to defense and desire) involved in the colonizer’s habitual position of mastery. (Ibarrola-Armendariz 80)

Conclusion

Green Grass, Running Water should be read primarily as a narrative of resistance in which a Native American artist embarks on an in-depth revision of the content of the relations between his people and the mainstream culture.... King ... uses the comic strategies that his culture and intelligence afford him to wrestle with the religious, literary, and historical discourses of the West in order to redefine the content of the reality Native Americans have to face on a daily basis.... [A]lthough a superficial reading of the text may suggest that we are dealing with a light-hearted humorous literary experiment mostly aimed at entertaining the reader, there is an undercurrent of very serious and contesting critique intent on subverting some of the key ... myths of Western culture. (Ibarrola-Armendariz 86)

Conclusion



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