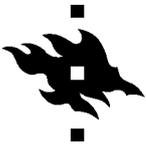


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“It looks like we got to do this all over again”

The Notion of the Circle in Thomas King's
Green Grass, Running Water

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<p>Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan Pohjois-Amerikan intiaanien tarinankerrontaperinteeseen ja sykliseen (kehämäiseen) aikakäsitykseen liittyviä symbolisia kehä ja niiden merkitystä Thomas Kingin romaanissa <i>Green Grass, Running Water</i> (1993). Tutkimusmenetelmäksi valittiin romaanin lähiluku, ja analyysin pohjana on käytetty Pohjois-Amerikan intiaanikulttuureista tehtyä antropologista tutkimusta sekä intiaanien kirjallisuudesta tehtyä kirjallisuudentutkimusta, erityisesti sellaista, joka käsittelee Thomas Kingin teoksia.</p> <p>Tutkielman ensimmäisessä luvussa esitellään romaanin lisäksi erilaisia kehä ja niiden symboliikkaa Pohjois-Amerikan intiaanikulttuureissa. Tämä toimii pohjana romaanin analyysille seuraavissa luvuissa. Toisessa luvussa käsitellään intiaanien tarinankerrontaperinnettä ja analysoidaan sitä, millaisia tarinankerrontaan liittyviä kehä romaanista löytyy ja millainen merkitys niillä romaanissa on. Tutkielman tässä luvussa osoitetaan, että kaikki romaanin sisältämät kertomukset muodostavat osittain sisäkkäisiä kehä, joita voidaan tarkastella rakenteen, motiivien, sanavalintojen ja teemojen kautta. Tämän lisäksi luvussa kuvataan sitä, millainen yhteys tarinankerronnalla ja siinä esiintyvillä kehillä on identiteetin rakentamiseen ja kotiin palaamiseen romaanin kuvaamassa intiaaniyhteisössä.</p> <p>Tutkielman kolmannessa luvussa tarkastellaan romaanissa esiintyvää syklistä aikakäsitystä ja sen ymmärtämisen merkitystä. Syklinen aikakäsitys muodostaa perustan romaanin keskeisille tapahtumille, kuten luomismyytin toistuvan kerronnan vaikutuksille, ja myyttisten olentojen mahdollisuus liikkua ajan ja avaruuden halki ilman lineaarisen aikakäsityksen rajoitteita on syklisen aikakäsityksen seurausta. Tässä luvussa näytetään myös, miten syklinen aikakäsitys ohjaa huomion ihmisten ja tapahtumien välisiin suhteisiin ja miten tämä kaikki liittyy aikaisemmin tarkasteltuun kehän symboliikkaan romaanissa.</p> <p>Neljännessä luvussa esitetään yhteenveto tutkimuksen tuloksista ja sen aikana tehdyistä havainnoista, minkä lisäksi siinä pohditaan tämän kaltaisen tutkimuksen merkitystä niin yksilön kuin yhteiskunnankin kannalta. Lisäksi viisi kaavakuvaa (liitteenä) havainnollistavat erilaisia romaanissa esiintyviä kehä ja niiden keskinäisiä suhteita.</p> <p>Tutkielmani täydentää aiempaa tutkimusta Thomas Kingin teoksista osoittaessaan, miten romaanissa esiintyvät intiaanien tarinankerronnan kehät ja syklisen aikakäsityksen kehät liittyvät toisiinsa. Tämän lisäksi tutkielmani korostaa kehien merkitystä romaanin tärkeiden teemojen ja kokonaisuuden ymmärtämisen tukena.</p>			
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1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and Methods

In my thesis, I will examine different circles found in Thomas King's novel *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993, hereafter GG). In his novel, there are circles relating to storytelling arising from ancient Native American storytelling traditions, and circles relating to a cyclical notion of time. I argue that understanding those circles and cyclic patterns helps the reader to understand and appreciate the novel more fully. I aim to prove my argument by close reading sections of the novel, using as a theoretical background both anthropological studies of Native North American cultures as well as literary criticism on Native American writing, especially about Thomas King's works.

I am aware of my position as a non-Native scholar trying to understand a Native American novel, which is why I have done extensive amount of background reading, but I recognize the limits of my knowledge and abilities in this context. I am also aware of the Western tradition of literary criticism, which has often looked at non-Western literature from an individualistic point of view, criticizing it according to Western literary tradition without necessarily aiming to understand and appreciate other approaches (Lundquist 2-9, King, "Godzilla" 10-16, cf. Parezo 210-216). I have done my best to avoid such attitudes while trying to recognize the impact that my own background, upbringing and environment has had on me, and I believe that becoming more aware of one's bias and acknowledging other ways of understanding being as valid as one's own is the key to real understanding. My thesis aims towards understanding and appreciating the novel, and by extension, the Native American worldviews. But before moving on to the novel, I would like to say a few words about the author.

Thomas King (born 1943, in Sacramento, California) is of Greek-Swiss descent from his mother's side and Cherokee from his father's side (Gruber 1-4). After a variety of different odd jobs and studies, he received his PhD in English and American Studies with his dissertation "Inventing the Indian: White Images, Native Oral Literature, and Contemporary Native Writers" (1986). In 1980, he moved to Canada to teach Native studies at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, where he also began to write.

There he made friends with the local Blackfoot, who are often featured in his literature, for example in *Green Grass, Running Water*. He is one of the best-known Native North American writers of our time, and his texts are taught in schools and universities, not only in North America, but also in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Therefore, the amount of critical response to his work is not surprising; for instance, his work has been studied from a postcolonial perspective as well as from the viewpoint that a postcolonial approach is not applicable to King's writing.¹ Other topics include his use of trickster figures and humor, intercultural encounters, deconstruction of borders, intertextuality as well as his "literary negotiations of Indigenous identity and Native-white history" (Gruber 2). However, to my knowledge, the main focus of my thesis, the relevance of the notion of circles to King's best-known work, has not been profoundly analyzed before.² That is why I aim to look at different circles in the novel, analyze their functions and effects, and provide diagrams of these circles and their connections.

I argue that cultural knowledge of the significance of circles in the Native North American worldview helps the reader to understand and appreciate the novel more. I also believe that it is important to try and understand different cultures and ways of thinking. For instance, Native Americans have often been represented with crude stereotypes in literature, and they still live on in media. Representation is not just a trivial notion to be contemplated by scholars in their ivory towers but something that directly affects millions of Indigenous peoples: the stories we tell about ourselves and others reflect the ideology and values we might take for granted, but when questioned, may be biased, based on insufficient information, or even be downright harmful (cf. Virtanen et al. 11-12). On the other hand, the stories may change and deconstruct the worldview of their listeners and readers, make them participate in the storytelling dialogue, as in the Native American tradition, and they may pass the story on. Highlighting the importance of storytelling, King himself has said: "The

¹ King himself is critical of postcolonialism, see his article, "Godzilla vs post-colonial".

² A recent collection of essays on Thomas King (Eva Gruber: *Thomas King: Works and Impact*, 2012) containing 21 contributions and covering 361 pages has no reference to circles in the index.

truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*, 2).

King's writing provides us with new perspectives and ideas and makes us question concepts we might have taken for granted. Choctaw-Cherokee critic and author Louis Owens notes that Native American writers are beginning to "demand that non-Indian readers acknowledge differing epistemologies, that they venture across a new "conceptual horizon" and learn to read in new ways" (*Mixedblood Messages* 4). King's *Green Grass, Running Water* is a great novel with which non-Indian reader can practise to do that and learn the art of "cross-reading" (Owens, *Mixedblood Messages* 5-10). Owens also notes that "More and more we will be required to read across lines of cultural identity around us and within us" (11), so that we can apply what we learn from cross-reading novels to encountering different people and cultures with a new attitude. Interestingly, Owens also points out that 20th-century Native American fiction is primarily and uniquely centripetal (moving towards the heart of the circle), as opposed to "the centrifugal energies [moving away from the circle] identified by Mikhail Bakhtin at the core of the modern, heteroglossic novel" (*Mixedblood Messages* 172). The aim of my thesis is to reflect these ideas.

1.2 The Novel: a Centripetal Plot

Green Grass, Running Water takes place primarily in the late 20th-century Alberta, Canada. It features multiple protagonists and other characters, most of them Blackfoot, and all of them converging on Blossom, Alberta. The movement in the novel is centripetal. In my thesis, I will focus mainly on the story of Lionel Red Dog and how his personal growth relates to different circles found in the novel.

Lionel is a Blackfoot man in his forties, selling televisions and always putting off his plan to go to college or do something else. His life-long dream is to be John Wayne, the heroic character of Westerns, who always wins his battles, while Native Americans are doomed to lose. This attitude has left Lionel unsure of his identity, as he is not white but does not really embrace his Blackfoot identity either.

Accordingly, one of the main themes in the novel is Lionel acquiring his Native identity with the help of four Native deities. When he first meets them, he sees them as four old Indians, a bit foolish and prone to sing off-key, but in fact, they are deities

of ancient Native American creation stories: First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman. In the course of the story, they appropriate the names of Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye, respectively, thus highlighting how the Native ideology triumphs over colonizers' stories. Likewise, Lionel needs to learn to be proud of his Native identity so that he can give up his dream of being John Wayne and come home to the Native circle he belongs to.

The novel itself forms a large circle, focusing on storytelling and Lionel's personal growth, but it includes several other circles as well (Figures 1-3). The beginning of the novel is like a Biblical creation story told from a Native American perspective: "In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water" (1), and the storytelling begins with: "And here's how it happened" (3). Accordingly, the novel ends where it began: "[T]here is water everywhere" (469) which leads to the promise of another story: "And here's how it happened" (469). The storytelling will never end.

The novel has a prologue and four parts, including four levels of narrative (Figure 4). The prologue features the I-narrator and Coyote, and it offers an explanation of what went wrong in the beginning of the creation: Coyote's dream runs away thinking it is in charge of the world. On the first level of the narrative, as in the prologue but also elsewhere in the novel, the I-narrator and Coyote discuss and observe other stories. However, they can also participate in other levels of the narratives.

On the next level, and in the following four parts of the novel, the Native deities tell the creation stories. The deities are trickster figures. They can assume different identities (including different genders), move across spatial and temporal distances, and their aim is to "fix up the world" one story at a time (133, 466). However, they never succeed completely, and while "fixing" one thing, something else usually goes wrong, which compels them to move on. Thus, storytelling never ends, and the circle of stories continues ad infinitum. For a Native American reader, this is reassuring as the stories are the lifeblood of traditional Native identity.

As the deities tell the creation stories, Coyote, another trickster figure, is trying to learn the right way of telling stories. Like the deities, Coyote can move in time and space, from one story to another, and he is not only observing the stories but constantly interrupting, interacting and participating in them so that the stories

change accordingly. He is like an over-enthusiastic child, full of mischievous thoughts and shenanigans, and armed with supernatural powers, he is prone to create chaos wherever he goes.

The four creation stories are all circular in structure and share some common elements, each explaining how the mythical woman in question ends up as a prisoner in Fort Marion, Florida. The first creation story also provides an explanation how all four mythical women escape from the prison. These creation stories are embedded into the third level of the narrative, which I call the realistic level, since it features mainly human characters in Canada and the United States, such as Lionel Red Dog and his friends and relatives.

It is worth noting that in the realistic level of the narrative, there is a mental hospital in Florida, from which the four old Indians escape, and apparently, have been escaping and returning – of their own free will – several times before. A desperate Dr. Hovaugh from the hospital decides to track down the escapees and taking the cleaning lady Babo from his staff with him, finally arrives in Blossom, Alberta, along with most of the other characters, to form the great climax of several stories.

The fourth level of the narrative deals with the four Native deities changing a plot of a Western film, which many of the human characters are watching, so that instead of losing, the Native Americans in the film win the colonizers and John Wayne among other Western heroes die. All four levels of the narrative converge in Blossom, connecting the different story circles and emphasizing the centripetal movement so crucial in the novel.

1.3 The Circle in Native North American Cultures

Many Native North American cultures view the circle as a natural form of all things. Despite different Native cultures, the circle seems to be pan-Indian in the sense that from nation to nation it is seen as a fundamental and sacred shape (Garrett & Garrett np). As my thesis discusses the notion of the circle in *Green Grass, Running Water*, I feel it is important to understand the cultural importance of this figure before moving to the analysis.

According to Philip Deere (Muskogee/Creek), spiritual leader of the American Indian Movement, “the Indian civilization was built from the study of nature.... The moon is a circle, the sun is round, and our ancestors knew the Earth was round. Everything that is natural is in a round form. So to this day, I haven’t seen a square apple... square peaches... anybody with a square head” (quoted in Lutz 195). It is no wonder that “[t]he ancient belief was in the circles” (195). Similar views were expressed by the Minneconjou-Lakota Lame Deer (also known as John Fire, 1903-1976): “To our way of thinking the Indians’ symbol is the circle, the hoop” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112). He uses similar reasoning, mentioning as examples the bodies of human beings and animals, which have round rather than square shapes.

Circles are not only manifested in the nature, but they also have symbolical and religious aspects, and they form a basis for certain aspects of Native American way of thinking. According to Lame Deer, Native Americans live in a world of symbolism to the extent that they “are all wrapped up in it” even though they do not have an actual word for symbolism (Lame Deer & Erdoes 108-109). For them, ordinary “everyday things are mixed up with the spiritual” and “the spiritual and commonplace are one” (109). Thus, it is important to recognize and understand the meanings of the circle in order to understand Native ways of thinking, and, more specifically in this context, the novel *Green Grass, Running Water*.

The circle is “holy” (Neihardt 35) and it denotes “roundness, completeness, wholeness” (Lutz 195) and “the harmony of life and nature” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112). Moreover, the circle “stands for togetherness of people who sit with one another around the campfire, relatives and friends united in peace” (112). The circle also “ties an individual in with his nation, her people or the tribe” to the extent that the individual and tribal identity are one (Lutz 197). Thus, if a Native person is not in touch with his or her tribal identity, it means that they are not in touch with themselves: they are not whole and as such cannot flourish but rather, they are likely to suffer at the mental, spiritual and even physical level (197). This aspect is relevant when considering *Green Grass, Running Water* as one of the main themes in the novel is finding one's Native identity. In the novel Lionel is struggling with his identity because he wants to be white, John Wayne in particular, which means that he is not part of the circle he inherently belongs to: the circle is broken, which affects

not only him but also his relatives, and it needs to be repaired. This will be discussed in connection with the circle in chapter 2.

Lame Deer explains how circles are manifested also in Native American ways of thinking and doing things (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112): for example, the tipis of the Plain Indians are round and they are then arranged to circles, so that the whole camp forms a larger circle. These again are part of an even larger circle. For people, it denotes to “the seven campfires of the Sioux” (Lame Deer and Erdoes 112), representing the Sioux nation as a whole. And the nation again is part of the universe, which in itself is circular and made of round shapes such as the Earth, the Sun and the stars. Oglala-Lakota Black Elk (1863-1950) described it by saying that “the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight” (Neihardt 43). Indeed, there are “circles within circles within circles, with no beginning and no end” (112, see also Lutz 197 and Little Bear 78). Also in *Green Grass, Running Water* there are “circles within circles within circles” such as those relating to levels of storytelling discussed in chapter 2.

Different aspects of the circle as they relate to Native American philosophies and worldviews have been classified by German scholar Hartmut Lutz. He maintains that the circle is “multidimensional, laterally encompassing earth, sun and moon, spiritually the natural and supernatural, and horizontally spanning all beings on this earth, both animate and inanimate” (Lutz 197). The lateral aspect was discussed above in the context of nature and round things, but the spiritual aspect needs exploring. To understand this, one must take into consideration that in the Native worldview there is no separation between the natural, physical world and the supernatural world as in Western thinking, where man is not exactly part of either world (Lutz 196-197). Rather, the supernatural, natural and the human are all part of the same world, part of the same circle. This circle is relevant in the context of *Green Grass, Running Water*, which quite easily moves back and forth between what seems to be a type of mythical reality and everyday reality of the Canada and United States in the late 20th-century. But considering the Native idea that supernatural reality is inseparable from natural, physical reality, that they both exist at the same time and humans are part of that all-encompassing reality, the novel becomes more

comprehensible to a Western reader. I argue that understanding this notion is essential for a fuller comprehension of the novel.

According to Lutz, the horizontal aspect of the circle has a connection to the idea of “relatedness of all people” (Lutz 197) which Lame Deer & Erdoes refer to as the “togetherness of people” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112). The uniting and all-encompassing nature of the circle can be inferred from Lame Deer’s characterization of the square as the opposite of the circle. To him, the square is “the white man’s symbol”, because the white man’s houses and buildings are square “with walls that separate people from one another. Square is the door which keeps strangers out, the dollar bill, the jail” as well as “the white man’s gadgets...[which] all have corners and sharp edges -points in time, white man’s time, with appointments, time clocks and rush hours - that's what corners mean to me. You become a prisoner inside all those boxes” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112-113). The circle, being the opposite of the “square world”, denotes inviting people in rather than keeping them out, uniting rather than separating people. But it is not only the human beings that this applies to: this way of thinking of “all my relations” includes also all animate and inanimate things in the world, because they are part of that great circle too. Leroy Little Bear (Blackfoot) explains that for the Native Americans, “everything is animate,” which means that “everything has spirit and knowledge” (78). That leads to conclusion that “then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations.” This is evident also in *Green Grass, Running Water*, where the Native deities and other mythical creatures, such as Grandmother Turtle, often stress the importance of “minding one’s relations” such as animals and other things they notice around them (39, 73). In addition, the circle is also “endless” (Neihardt 35) and “timeless” as opposed to “white man’s time” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112), and I will discuss circular time conception in chapter 3.

2 Circles in Storytelling in *Green Grass, Running Water*

2.1 Characteristics of the Native American Oral Storytelling Tradition

In this section, I will briefly explain some crucial features of oral storytelling tradition even though the novel is in literary form, because circles in storytelling arise from the oral tradition, long before Native Americans wrote novels. King

retains several features of oral storytelling tradition in his novel (Dvořák 15-17, O'Brien 1-5), and it is useful to explore those in order to better understand his use of circles in the novel. For instance, without understanding the function and aims of storytelling, one cannot understand the thematic circles, and without understanding some crucial elements of trickster figures, it is nearly impossible to understand the storytelling circles relating to them, not to mention their connection to a circular time view. This is why I will first analyze some characteristics of oral storytelling tradition found in his novel before moving more specifically to circles in storytelling.

In Native American cultures, “stories have serious responsibilities: to tell us who we are and where we come from, to make us whole and heal us, to integrate us fully within the world in which we live and make that world inhabitable, to compel order and reality” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 94). As Owens points out, the stories are not just for entertainment but rather have “serious responsibilities” in teaching people. Lutz also maintains that the Native American oral tradition is mainly “didactic in character” (Lutz 198-199): the stories tell people about their origin, identity and relation to others. William Rhoades, a storyteller of the Pit River People of California has remarked that “[t]he story is all told so we know who everybody is. So we remember who they are” (Rhoades qtd. in Lutz 199). Without this understanding, it is impossible to “mind your relations” – an integral concept in Native American cultures, also featured in *Green Grass, Running Water* (39, 73). At the heart of storytelling is “the need to know one’s origin and history, and to pass it on to future generations” (Lutz 199). In this way, the new generation would learn about its place in the world, including the responsibilities of minding one’s relations (and the consequences if these responsibilities are neglected), to ensure continuity and harmony in the world. I will examine in more detail the features and practicalities relating to “passing on” the stories in section 2.3.

It could be argued that one of the main functions of storytelling is to strengthen tribal identity (Lutz 198-206). Lutz maintains that “[o]ral tradition and tribal identity are inseparable” (Lutz 199). Moreover, “in a tribal sense, there is no difference between an individual’s and the tribe’s identity” (Lutz 197) and even “the possibility of conceiving of an individual alone in a tribal religious sense is ridiculous” (Deloria qtd. in Lutz 197). Thus, problems relating to one’s identity, such as separation and

alienation from one's tribal culture, cause suffering at the mental, spiritual and physical levels, because the circle tying the person to their tribe or people is broken (Lutz 197).

In order to strengthen tribal identity, "the past, present and future, mythic time, historical time and individual experiences" are incorporated into the storytelling (Lutz 198). Paul Moulton, an assistant professor at The College of Idaho who has studied the Navajo healing ceremonies, has commented on storytelling and strengthening one's identity. He notes that "all ceremonies focus on the retelling of parts of the creation story" (83) and identity affirmation in those ceremonies concentrates on "recalibrating" or strengthening patients' social and supernatural relationships and re-orienting their attachment to place and time; all these aspects are needed for strengthening one's identity (70-94). Even though the Navajo culture is by no means an archetype of all Native American cultures or an indication that they all would be similar, Moulton's study connects to the ideas Lutz has mentioned. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, one of the main themes of the novel is reaffirming Lionel's native identity, and the features mentioned above can be seen in that process, including retelling of the creation story four times in the course of the novel.

Lionel Red Dog may not know for sure who he is but he knows for certain who he wants to be: John Wayne. To be accurate, he means not the person but the character John Wayne, a hero who always wins his battles (*GG* 265). In the world around him, white people seem to be winning in everything, not just in movies, but in jobs, education, medicine, technology, whereas the reservation he comes from has problems such as alcoholism and poverty, which all makes him feel ashamed of his people (60, 84). He sees the whites as winners, buying the Western way of seeing Indians as backward, stubborn and un-modern, as stereotypical Indians doomed to fail, especially in comparison to whites. He has lost his Native identity and does not know where he belongs or what to do with his life: not having a strong identity, he is at times swept away by more strong-willed people (57-69) and not having set his mind on any real goal, time keeps slipping away as he only talks about going to the University "maybe next year" while working at Bill Bursum's video store (88-89). His aunt Norma thinks that the root of the problem is that he thinks and behaves as if

he “were white” (7), just like his uncle and her brother Eli, who “wanted to be a white man” (36).

This indicates that his connection to his tribal circle has been broken, and without his tribal identity, he is not whole. His alienation from his culture separates him from his parents and relatives at mental, spiritual and even physical levels, and thus brings sorrow to his family. He himself suffers too, not having any direction in life, and this in turn makes it impossible for Alberta, his love-interest, to take him seriously. In order to regain his Native identity, he needs to see it as worth having, to see Natives as winners and not as perpetual losers. The struggle and changing viewpoints are very well exemplified in the events regarding King’s invented Western film, *Mysterious Warrior*, which is analyzed in 3.2.2, and the same theme is found in the creation stories. The Native deities see the need for Lionel to strengthen his tribal identity and they decide to take action and help him (114, 186-187). His aunt Norma sees the same need, and in order to help him, she uses “individual experiences” from the past, such as the life story of her brother Eli, as an example to him. Norma makes it clear that it is important for him to come home like Eli did (67).

Eli left the reservation as a young man, first to study at Toronto University, and then becoming a professor of literature there, staying away from the reservation. In Norma’s eyes, he became “white” as he lost his connection to his tribal identity and the tribal circle he inherently belongs to. He was aware of this, seeing himself as “an Indian who couldn’t go home” (317). Norma was so angry with Eli “never coming home” (401) that she did not even tell him when their mother died; he learned it only “almost a month after the funeral” (401). Finally he came back to his mother’s cabin, which was in the way of the dam construction project and thus under the threat of being demolished, but he decided to fight for it (67, 121-124). Taking his stand for the cabin and, by extension, for the tribal rights and the Blackfeet community’s welfare, which the dam project threatened, made him realize this was his home and his place. In Norma’s eyes, he came home and became an Indian again. However, Lionel misses Norma’s point and claims that Eli came home only because he had retired and his mother had died, so it does not matter and has nothing to do with Lionel (67). Norma says the reasons for which he came home do not matter, “He came home. That’s the important part” (67). Coming home made Eli realize his

Native identity, his origin and relation to others. A reader familiar with Native American storytelling tradition can at this point assume that just like Eli finally came home and adopted his tribal identity, so will Lionel: the story is about how it happens. The circle will inevitably be fulfilled.

In this context, it is interesting to note that in Navajo ceremonies creation stories are told in order to reattach the patients to their relations and strengthen their identity. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the four creation stories, in which the Native deity always gains power over Western literary characters and successfully refuses to be subordinated to colonial stereotypes, remind the reader of the same thing that Lionel needs to learn: to see Native identity as something worth having, as something to be proud of. This includes breaking free from the stereotypes and imagery perpetuated by the Euro-American literary canon and culture, which has traditionally presented whites as superior by default, and learning to appreciate the value of Native culture.

In the end, Lionel begins to appreciate his culture and his tribal identity. He also learns to “mind his relations”, which is something one can do only when he understands who he is and who are his relations. In Lionel’s case, this is seen at the Sun Dance when he takes action for this tribe and culture, taking his place as a Blackfoot man defending tribal traditions by destroying the photos taken by George Morningstar of the Sun Dance ceremony³ (422-428). And at the end of the novel, he helps rebuild his grandmother’s cabin with his other relatives (459-464). The cabin was originally built by Lionel’s grandmother, Eli’s mother, and it was the cabin where Eli lived when he came home, but with the destruction of the dam, the flooding waters swept away both the cabin and its resident. Lionel decides to help with rebuilding and he even says: “Well, maybe when the cabin is finished ... I’ll live in it for a while. You know, like Eli” (464). This indicates symbolical homecoming and completing the circle: he has finally taken his place in the community within the tribal circle.

Despite such “serious responsibilities” of stories, humor plays an important role in Native American storytelling tradition. Owens mentions “[t]he crucial role of humor and play in Native American cultures” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 15) and Sam English

³ It is forbidden to take photos at the Sun Dance (*GG* 151-154, 290-291). More details are provided in section 2.4.

(Chippewa artist) makes a connection between humor, identity and survival by maintaining that “[h]umor ... kept us all going during the bad times” (qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 6). Little Bear highlights the importance of sharing in Native American cultures, not only of material goods but also “good feelings” and humor is a significant tool in creating, maintaining and sharing the good feelings (79). Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) points out that “Tribes are being brought together by sharing humor of the past” such as Columbus jokes (147), also featured in *Green Grass, Running Water* (203, 453, cf. Flick 146, 153). Deloria explains that traditionally, for Native Americans, humorous teasing was “a method of control in social situations” so that those who were considered as stepping out of “the consensus of tribal opinion” were teased rather than embarrassed publicly (147). Teasing is “a means of showing humility” and at the same time, it can promote a cause that is held to be important (147). Deloria claims that sometimes he wonders how anything gets done by Native Americans because of the “apparent overemphasis on humor in the Indian world” (146-147). They have “found a humorous side of nearly every problem” to the point that “The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it” (147).⁴ Clearly, humor has a central role in *Green Grass, Running Water*, too. In the novel, humor is created through parodies, comically exaggerated stereotypes, word play and inventive, unexpected commentary.

In Native American cultures, the humorous figure of the trickster plays a central role (Shackleton, “The Trickster Figure” 109). Tricksters are complex, contradictory characters.⁵ They have different roles and aspects, from clownish figures to anarchists and teachers (110-115). In trickster tales, teaching can often be inferred from trickster’s negative example, as the audience learns the consequences of improper behavior or the breaking of moral codes. The humorous side of tricksters connects to “a survivalist mentality” for humor has a vital role in helping people to survive even though terrible things happen (Shackleton, “The Trickster Figure” 110,

⁴ For examples of “Indian humor”, see Deloria: *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 146-167.

⁵ For general study of common characteristics of tricksters around the world, see Hynes: “Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide,” 1997. For characteristics of Native American trickster figures and their transformation from oral tradition to written literacy, see Shackleton: “The Trickster Figure in Native North American Writing”.

see also Wikström 106 and Little Bear 82). In addition, tricksters stimulate the audience to participate in storytelling (Wikström 106), which is something that can be found in *Green Grass, Running Water*, in Coyote's example (O'Brien 9-15, 22).

Native American tricksters take different forms, but the most common trickster figure is Coyote (Wikström 112-113). In *Green Grass, Running Water*, we meet Coyote who eagerly participates in storytelling, with questionable results. He often acts like an easily excited, enthusiastic child who also gets distracted and bored easily: he talks before he thinks things through, he wants to take part in everything but does not necessarily pay attention to what he hears, and mischievously looks for loopholes in rules. For example, when he is allowed to accompany the four old Indians on condition that he does not take any pictures, "make any rude noises" like "burping and farting" nor "do any more dancing", he innocently and willingly promises all that, but says quietly to himself: "I feel like ... singing" (370). Coyote's singing could be likened to his dancing, but he is by no means trying to live up to the principle of things but rather, he spots a loophole and sees it as an invitation to act accordingly.

Humor is created through Coyote's sayings and actions, but in addition to this type of humor, which could be said as being created unintentionally by Coyote to amuse the reader, Coyote also makes jokes intentionally. For instance, he witnesses an encounter between Thought Woman and Robinson Crusoe, when they discuss their names and realize that neither of them wants to be called Friday. He says to the I-narrator that this story-line is "beginning to get boring" so he is going to Bill Bursum's video store to follow the other story, and suggests: "How about I call you from the store to see what's happening? How about I call you Friday? Hee-hee, hee-hee" to which the I-narrator replies: "Better call sooner than that. By Friday, this story will be done" (326-327). Incidentally, this example demonstrates also interconnectedness of the narratives as well as the effect of cyclic time in the novel, which will be discussed later.

However, Coyote is not the only trickster in the novel. Other trickster figures include the four old Indians who have the ability to intervene and change things on the realistic level of the novel. In addition, Babo Jones, an African-American cleaning lady in a mental hospital in Florida, who understands the mythic trickster figures

better than other people in the novel, can be considered a trickster (Shackleton, "Have I Got Stories" 194-196). Her trickster-like characteristics include gender crossing: her name refers to a male character in Herman Melville's novella *Benito Cereno*, in which a black barber and slave named Babo leads a slave revolt on a ship and Babo in *Green Grass, Running Water* mentions that "Some people think that Babo is a man's name" (21) and that her "great-great-grandfather was a barber on a ship" (98). Another trickster-like quality is her ambiguity: it is hard for the police to figure her out, and in her own, subtle and non-threatening way, she keeps controlling the conversation with the police and not the other way round.

Apart from humor as an important element in many Native American oral tales, another feature of oral storytelling tradition is interaction between the storyteller and the audience. In oral storytelling, the listener was supposed to participate in the storytelling (Ong 41-42), and "within traditional Native American literatures, speaker and listener are co-participants in telling the story" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 6). When discussing Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) *Ceremony*, which uses somewhat similar devices of oral tradition in the literary form as *Green Grass, Running Water*, Owens characterizes the reader's position as that of "the traditionally interactive position of coparticipant" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 170). Doris O'Brien convincingly argues that King aims to do the same with his readers: the reader is time and again shown how interaction is a vital part of storytelling and he/she is required to participate in the production of meaning (9-15, 22). The reader is invited to participate like the listeners: make the meaning and sense of the story, to learn about stories and storytelling. The reader is at times put into the position of Coyote: Coyote needs to learn the proper way of storytelling as does the reader. He begins to figure it out but still does not "get it right" (*GG* 106-107, 361, 439, 459, 469). He is not a passive listener: his actions have an impact on the stories (360-361, 450-451, 456), and he is encouraged to participate just like the storyteller and his audience were interacting in the old days. Thus, the reader can learn from Coyote's behavior, both when he succeeds and when he does not, which is in harmony with the tradition of trickster stories usually having a pedagogical aim. Moreover, the point of Coyote learning the story is that he can become a storyteller and pass it on (297, 469), also an important factor in storytelling.

This relates to another characteristic feature of oral storytelling: the understanding that words have power. Within oral tradition, words have “great power”, even “magical potency” (Ong 32). Owens notes “[t]he coercive power of language in Native American oral tradition – that ability to “bring into being” and thus radically enter the reality” (*Other Destinies* 9, 22). For example, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* begins with a poem rendering her version of the Pueblo creation story: “Ts’its’ tsi’nako, Thought-Woman/is sitting in her room /and whatever she thinks about/ appears.// She thought of her sisters,/ Nau’ ts’ ity’i and I’tcts’ity’i,/ and together they created the Universe/ this world/ and the four worlds below.// Thought-Woman, the spider,/ named things and/ as she named them/ they appeared” (1).

Despite the Western literary tradition with its billions of words found in print, it is almost ironic the written tradition does not usually attribute that much power to words (Lutz 199, Ong 32-33). Owens claims that “with written literacy the language ... begins to lose its unique power as creator of reality” (*Other Destinies* 9). However, in *Green Grass, Running Water*, King follows along the oral mindset and grants words the power to mold, change and create reality (360-361).

Names are a subtype of words and thus in oral tradition they are considered as “conveying power over things” (Ong 33). Names are not merely labels, like they are often viewed in literary cultures, but have inherent power; by naming someone, one gains power over that person (Ong 33). Even though this is typical in all oral cultures (Ong 32-33), it is especially important in Native American cultures. N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) has said: “I believe that a man is his name... Somewhere in the Indian mentality there is that idea that when someone is given a name – and, by the way, it transcends Indian cultures certainly – when a man is given a name, existence is given him too” (qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 98). Likewise, Lame Deer maintains that a Native American name has “a story behind it, a vision” and by linking the person to “the source of the name ... to nature, to the animal nations” “[i]t gives power” so that one “can lean on a name, get strength from it” (117).

Names are important in *Green Grass, Running Water*, and almost every name has a more complex meaning, history or connotation behind it. They are not random, artificial labels. In fact, one could say that there is a story behind each name, and depending on reader’s background knowledge of both Native American and Western

cultures, history and literature, he or she will either notice the stories and ironies or not. For instance, the names of the students that Alberta Frank teaches are taken from history, and each of the students reflects the attitude of their historical namesake towards the Native Americans (14-19): the student Henry Dawes, armed with arrogance and lack of understanding or caring, reflects the attitude of Senator Henry Dawes, the originator of the Dawes Act of 1887, which led to the dispersal of more than 90 million acres of Indian lands, with theft, injustice and suffering in its wake (Flick 144) whereas the historical John Collier, US Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the 1930s, reversed Dawes's politics and aimed to better Native American's welfare (Flick 144-145), and likewise, the student John Collier listens attentively at the lecture. This is true of human characters in the realistic narrative but also of the mythical characters. For instance, the original Native names of the four old Indians represent the cycle of life (Figure 1, O'Brien 38-40, cf. Flick 143) but in the course of the narrative, they also appropriate names of Western settler icons (the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye). This act "conveys power" over the non-Indigenous people who try to resist and even stop them and allows the four old Indians go on with their mission of fixing up the world.

2.2 Circular Structure of the Stories

Let us now briefly examine the structure of the stories. In traditional storytelling, the outcome of the story is usually known from the beginning, so the focus is on the way the story is told (Owens, *Other Destinies* 96, 176-177). The stories usually make a full circle in that sense: the audience knows that in the end they are back at the beginning, but with more understanding of themselves and their place in the universe, which then gives a possibility, or even a responsibility, to pass the story on. This connects to symbolism of the circle discussed earlier, to completeness and wholeness, and the function "to make us whole" can be thus fulfilled (Owens, *Other Destinies* 94). This feature of oral storytelling tradition is manifested also in Native American literacy, as it is such an integral way of thinking. For example, N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* begins and ends with Abel running (Momaday 1-2, 185), and the author himself has said that he "see[s] the novel as a circle. It ends where it begins, and it is informed with a kind of thread that runs through it and holds everything together" (qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 95).

Likewise, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* begins and ends with sunrise, and during the progress of the novel the protagonist Tayo finds wholeness, integration and the tribal identity (Silko 4, 244). In *Green Grass, Running Water*, there are several stories, which are circular in structure. In addition, I argue that there are motifs that are circular by nature, discussed in 2.4.

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, there are four levels of narratives. The whole novel can be seen as a large circle, which is emphasized by the I-narrator saying in the prologue: "And here's how it happened" (3) and repeating the same thing in the very end of the novel, in fact as a last sentence of the book (469) thus tying all the events together as a large circle. Still, as a closing statement, "And here's how it happened" indicates that the story will be told again even though the novel itself ends. This relates to the symbolism of the circle: to ensure harmony and continuity. It also emphasizes one of the aims of storytelling, the intent to pass the stories on (Lutz 199).

However, there are more stories in the novel than just the one beginning with "And here's how it happened." It is implied each time a creation story is told, not in those words but there is always some indication that a story is about to follow (*GG* 107, 250, 361), marking the beginnings of the four parts of the novel. Obviously, Coyote has not understood and learned the story, as revealed by his questions and guesses, even though "it's the same story" every time (367). This leads to the realization that the story has to be told again (107, 250, 361, 469) and each of these Native origin stories form a circle. Accordingly, the second level of the narrative consists of the four circular Native origin stories, which will be discussed in the next section (2.3).

In the third, realistic level of the narrative, Lionel's story also forms a circle. In his analysis of circles in Native American fiction, concentrating on eight novels,⁶ Lutz identifies six stages of development in the storyline, which forms a circle. The beginning and the ending relate to "holistic *tribal identity*" which in the beginning is shown as having been "destroyed by the forces of the dominant society" (204). This

⁶ The novels in question are D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936) and *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978), N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Hyemeyohsts Storm's *Seven Arrows* (1972), James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), and *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984).

deviation is characterized by *separation*, either by “uncertain “Halfbreed” identity” (204) or by physical separation, being relocated somewhere else, and so the protagonists’ connection to their tribal circle is broken. Thus, they become *alienated* from their culture, which often leads to *conflicts*. Their state could be characterized as “cultural schizophrenia” (204). Those who survive this far *return* to their reservations but with confusion and inability to re-integrate to the society. To re-establish the tribal identity, some form of *renewal ceremony/ritual act* is needed for the protagonists to restore the identity and make the circle whole, including the supernatural and spiritual ties (204-205, 208). This leads us back to the continuity in the storytelling: once the circle is fulfilled, the story of finding one’s place in the community and one’s tribal identity can be retold again.

I argue that these stages can be found in *Green Grass, Running Water*, too. In Lionel’s case, his *tribal identity* has been destroyed by the Euro-American society to the point that he wants to be John Wayne, instead of being a Native American (265-266), his cousin calls him “John Wayne” (89) and even his aunt thinks he sounds as if he “were white” (7, 36). He is physically *separated* from his tribe, living in a city and working for a white man (85), and does not come home to the reservation, not to mention to the Sun Dance, very often (60, 66, 411). He has become *alienated* from the tribal culture, which leads to internal and external *conflicts*, especially with his aunt Norma, who insists that he should come home more often and become a Blackfoot man, proud of his heritage, instead of trying to be white (60, 84). He finally *returns* home, to the Sun Dance, but is tempted to drive away, as he feels “completely out of place” (403, 405). However, he persists and begins to see himself as a Blackfoot, feeling “peaceful, as if the rest of the world . . . had disappeared” (406). The *renewal ceremony/ritual act*, which is needed in order to restore the tribal identity, is in his case the act of giving away George Morningstar’s jacket, a symbol of his desire to be white like John Wayne, and by this act he situates himself in the tribal circle, taking his stand in defending sacred tribal customs (425-428). My figure of this circle is based on Lutz’s diagram. I have only added short explanations on how his theory and diagram apply to Lionel’s story (Lutz 208, Figure 3).

Following the circular plot-structure outlined above, the result is happiness, harmony and continuity for all beings who are affected by the circle, “the circle encompassing

the supernatural, the natural and the human being” (Lutz 205-206). In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the four old Indians, who are supernatural beings, are very much involved in the process of unification: they help Lionel find his Native identity, bringing happiness not only to him, but also to his family and friends, and to the supernatural beings themselves (466-467), thus resulting in happiness to “the whole circle” (Lutz 206).

The fourth level of narrative deals with a Western called *The Mysterious Warrior* and how the four old Indians change the plot of the film in front of several human characters and Coyote, so that the ending of the film is quite the opposite from what it used to be. The film *Mysterious Warrior* itself does not form a circle plot-wise, as it is a Euro-American Western, but the fixing of the Western, and the events revolving around it at Bill Bursum’s video store, relate to circles: the four old Indians mention that they have “fixed” the film earlier, but for some reason, the “fixing” has not stuck and they need to “fix” it again (247-248, 351-352, 356-358). This indicates a recurring cycle of “fixing” – and their idea of “fixing” the world, piece by piece, is something that acts as a catalyst for their endeavor to help Lionel as well as for the other stories implied in the novel (114, 133-134, 186-187, 458, 467). Their circular pattern of “fixing” something is discussed in more detail in 3.2.1 In addition, the “fixing” of the Western connects to the themes in the novel: the Native triumph over colonizers’ stories, which is something the Natives need to see in order to strengthen their Native identity. Thus, the thematic circle connecting this narrative to other circles in the novel is found also in this instance as one of the stories in which the Natives win.

I have drawn a diagram of the levels of the narrative in *Green Grass, Running Water* (Figure 4), which also shows how these narratives intersect at times. Thus, when one looks at different levels of the narrative, *Green Grass, Running Water* can be seen as a series of “circles within circles within circles” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112).

2.3 Recycling of the Stories

Oral stories were made to be remembered, to be retold, to pass on (O’Brien 3). In time, the listeners are supposed to become storytellers, as they find their place in the community and learn about their responsibilities. Naturally, repetition would aid

remembering these stories so that future generations would also learn about their place and responsibilities in the world, to ensure continuity and balance in the world. Owens sees this as keeping the culture alive (*Other Destinies* 169) but it is more than what Euro-Americans usually understand that expression to mean: it is not only keeping a certain culture alive but rather, keeping balance and harmony in the whole universe (Owens, *Other Destinies* 20, Little Bear 78).

However, when talking about repetition, we need to make a distinction between Euro-American and Native American understanding of the word. Generally, when a number of people tell the same stories forward, it is only natural that some variation occurs, both intentionally and unintentionally, and the stories change. To understand the Native attitudes towards this variation, one needs to consider yet another difference between oral and written literary tradition. With written literature, it is possible – and often recommendable – to pinpoint the author behind a certain text. There is an obligation to give credit to the source, or originator, of the text and if the text is quoted, the quote should be as faithful as possible to the original words and intentions – failing to do that might even lead to accusations of plagiarism (“Plagiarism”). With written text, this can also be verified.

On the other hand, for Native Americans in pre-Columbian times, the mere idea of a single author or originator behind any story would have been impossible to imagine (Owens, *Other Destinies* 9). The storytellers situated themselves in the line of other storytellers, who passed the story on. The aim of the storyteller was to serve his or her listeners, and “[f]or the traditional [Native American] storyteller, each story originates with and serves to define the people as a whole, the community” (9). In order to do that, he or she would adapt and change the stories to serve this purpose. For instance, it has been observed of Zuni community in New Mexico that “the storyteller-interpreter does not merely quote or paraphrase the text, but may even improve upon it, describe a scene which it does not describe, or answer a question which it does not answer” (Tedlock qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 9). The traditional storyteller William Rhoades of the Pit River people once retold the creation myth of his people with inclusion of current political struggles, thus applying and modifying the old story in a new way, explaining and giving meaning to ancient stories (Lutz 199). This is in harmony with the oral storytelling tradition.

One can see that “the relationship between the text and interpretation is a dialectical one: he or she [the storyteller] both respects the text and revises it.” (Tedlock qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 9). This type of appropriation of stories and changing them to suit different situations, even to make a new point in a new situation, is natural in Native American way of thinking, and it has transferred from oral tradition to written literary texts. For instance, in her novel *Shadow Tag*, Louise Erdrich (Chippewa) has her main protagonist telling her husband anecdotes and stories from the books she reads, for example of the painter Catlin (Erdrich 44-46). He notices that the stories she tells him are not what she has read: the stories originate from the book but may have completely different events or purposes. She tells him those stories according to Native tradition, appropriating and adapting them to what she sees as their current needs, and he sees that she is trying to communicate certain points to him via those stories. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, King continues this tradition and “both respects” and “revises” the creations stories told by the Native deities.

Thus “repetition” in the Native sense of the word is different from the Western interpretation. Without a concept of a single author whose words should be faithfully followed, there is no need to even attempt to keep the story as “original” as possible. To be precise, “stories are never original” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 169) because they do not even have an origin or originator as such. Thus, speaking of recycling of stories, instead of repetition, makes more sense: that expression allows more variation and freedom for the storytellers to adapt the stories to current situations. In addition, as the aim is to benefit the listeners (Owens, *Other Destinies* 9) and keep the culture alive (169), the changes and adaptations to new different situations are welcome. Adaptation has been the key for survival in many Native American cultures, even in a physical level, such as the need and ability to adapt to changes in the nature as well as adaptation to cultural changes (Bastien & Kremer 12), and this applies to the stories as well. In fact, Silko’s *Ceremony* suggests that changes, for instance in ceremonies, are needed to keep the people and culture alive, so naturally this ideology allows for changes and variation in stories as well.

Based on this, one could suggest that there are as many stories as there are storytellers, but I argue that there are even more. Every storytelling situation is different. There are different audiences, and the storyteller changes the story to suit

current audience and its need. The storytelling is usually interactive, so the audience reacts, responds and participates on storytelling, which changes the story. This leads to the conclusion that there are as many stories as there are situations in which stories are told (Ong 42). Considering this background, the changes and adaptations King makes to the Native creation stories are not disrespectful of sacred myths but rather the natural Native American way of using them to benefit the current needs and purposes, with respect.

In order to understand the creation stories and the inventive changes King has made to them in *Green Grass, Running Water*, the Euro-American reader (and certain Native American readers) may need some background information about the creation myths and the female deities they feature. There are four versions of those stories, so there is some variation as each storyteller is different, but the crucial elements are in essence the same.

Many Native American creation myths begin with water (Erdoes & Ortiz 75-76). In fact, almost all of them have a watery environment except the Southwestern myths, where life generally emerges from the lower worlds. The water world in the beginning of creation is featured, among others, in the stories of Jicarilla Apache, Gros Ventre, Mandan, Blood Blackfoot, Maidu, Joshua, Crow, Cheyenne, Acoma (Pueblo), Alabama, Coushatta, Creek, Cherokee, Seneca, Osage, Yakima, Hopi, and Yuma tribes (King, *Inventing the Indian* 81-89, Erdoes & Ortiz 75-93, 105-107, 115-119). The understanding that in the beginning, there was “just the water” (GG 1, 469) is shown to be an integral part of the correct way of telling stories in *Green Grass, Running Water*, and it is stressed repeatedly.

Many of the origin stories with the water world are so-called Earth diver creation stories (Flick 147, Erdoes & Ortiz 75-76). They share some common features: in the beginning, water covers everything, and the Earth is created as someone (either a mythological creature or an animal) dives to the bottom and brings some mud to the surface, from which the Earth is then made. In some of these myths, it is the turtle who either brings up the mud or lets the Earth be built upon her shell – hence the name “Turtle Island” for North America in many Native American cultures (King, *Inventing the Indian* 83-84, GG 39, Lutz 195).

The Cherokee also have creation stories involving a water world (King, *Inventing the Indian* 88-89). In one of them, the animals lived in a world above the water world, but when that world became crowded, the animals decided to move into the water world. The Earth was then created by the animals. In the Seneca story, First Woman falls from the Sky World into water, which fills the world, and helps animals to create the Earth (Flick 147, King, *Inventing the Indian* 89-90). Another Cherokee variant of this story features Star Woman or Star Maiden who falls from the sky to the water world (Flick 147). In *Green Grass, Running Water*, all the female deities fall from the sky into water, but the details of the fall as well as what happens next vary from one story to another. One of these deities, the first storyteller in the novel, is First Woman.

Stories of First Woman are found in several Native American cultures, for instance among the Navajo, but Changing Woman is a deity the Navajo respect “above all gods” (Reichard 50-62, 75-79). She is one of the creator figures in their mythology (Owens, *Other Destinies* 239). Changing Woman has a “somewhat fluid identity” and she possess eternal youth (239-240). According to myth, she taught humanity how to “keep the natural forces of wind, lightning, storms, and animals in harmony” (240). Navajo myths do not recount Earth diver stories but explain that humankind emerged through four subterranean worlds to this fifth world we are currently living in, and Changing Woman, “the holy person of miraculous birth” has blessed especially the Navajo people (Flick 152). However, in *Green Grass, Running Water*, Changing Woman does fall from the sky in Earth diver fashion. This is yet another example of how King revises old myths into something that fits his purpose in the novel. In fact, making Changing Woman fall down from the sky into the water like the other deities emphasizes the shared characteristics and circularity of the creation story more efficiently than retaining all the traditional Navajo elements of subterranean worlds in this story.

The Navajo have also stories about Thought Woman (Flick 159). In addition, she is one of the three important Pueblo deities (Austgen np). She is a creator figure who creates the world by thinking it into being (Flick 159, Austgen np). In her novel *Ceremony*, Silko provides a rendition of the Keres Pueblo creation myth: “Thought Woman/ is sitting in her room/ and whatever she thinks about/appears” (Silko 1).

This myth connects the creation to the power of words and storytelling, and it presents storytelling as a means to connect people with deities – an important function considering that people’s “ritual life is based on the myths” (Austgen np). Thought Woman is one of the master storytellers, whose storytelling grants her the possibility to move in time and space, which is true of all four mythological Women in *Green Grass, Running Water*.

Old Woman can be found in Blackfoot stories. However, she does not feature in Blackfoot creation myth, which is a type of Earth diver story. In the Blackfoot creation story (King, *Inventing the Indian* 83-84), water fills everything except the log where the principal creator Napioia, Old Man, is sitting with four animals. He sends each of them in turn to the bottom of the waters to see what they find, but they all perish except the turtle, who brings up some mud from which Old Man makes the Earth. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, King has changed the creator figure’s sex, which is only one of the instances in the novel where gender divisions are deliberately blurred. It is not, for example, clear to everyone whether the four old Indians are male or female (*GG* 54-56). This gender-crossing is not uncommon in trickster figures (Shackleton, “Have I Got Stories” 195).

King’s Old Woman connects also to a Cherokee creation story, in which Star Maiden or Star Woman, who lives in the sky, is digging under a tree in her father’s garden (Flick 161). One day she digs too deep and creates a big hole, through which she falls down to the Earth. Something similar happens to Old Woman in *Green Grass, Running Water*: in her version of the creation story, this is the reason for her falling from the sky, whereas other mythological women have different reasons for their fall. In addition, Old Woman is “an archetypal helper to a culture hero” in many Native American stories (Flick 161), and in *Green Grass, Running Water* she offers to help Young Man Walking On Water (the Native interpretation of Christ), and more successfully, she manages to help Lionel in refinding his Native identity.

King “respects and revises” (Tedlock qtd. in Owens, *Other Destinies* 9) traditional creation stories to suit his purposes, in harmony with the oral storytelling tradition which not only allows but even encourages such modification. In *Green Grass, Running Water* there are certain common features in the creation myths told by the

four old Indians, even though the details are different, and O'Brien identifies seven common characteristics:

- (1) The story is begun ceremoniously
- (2) The Woman is located in Skyworld which is above water world
- (3) She walks off Skyworld and falls into water world
- (4) There is a confrontation between Woman and a man from Western Culture
- (5) Rules are brought to light and Woman will not follow
- (6) She appropriates the new name and departs on water
- (7) She ends up in the Florida jail and then departs with her three companions (49).

I have drawn a diagram using these stages as a basis for my figure (Figure 2), but I have also made some adaptations. First of all, I changed the sixth claim to only "She appropriates the new name" leaving the end claim out, because in fact First Woman does not "depart on water" like the other deities, but rather by train to Fort Marion (*GG* 105). Second of all, to emphasize the idea that these stages form a circle, I have added "by beginning to tell a creation story" to the seventh stage so that the connection to the first stage ("The story is begun ceremoniously") is clearly seen. How and why the deities depart by telling creation stories will be discussed in 3.2.3.

Each time, departing from the jail in Florida to "fix the world" is the beginning of a new adventure for the deities, and each new adventure is begun by telling a creation story (12, 38-40, 112-113, 254, 365-367). For the reader, the story is told four times in the course of the novel, but the indication is that the story will be told time and again (3, 107, 250, 361, 469). Thus, the repetitive circle, recycling of the creation story, assures the reader of continuity in the world. The number four, moreover, is not coincidental but, rather, a number that is "especially powerful in [American] Indian tradition" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 243). Furthermore, when discussing another Native American novel, which is divided into four parts, namely Gerald Vizenor's *Griever*, Owen notes that "For Native Americans a four-part structure, paralleling the seasonal cycles, suggests completeness and wholeness as well as closure" (243). Similarly, King's use of a four-part structure in *Green Grass, Running Water* may remind those readers who are familiar with a Native American

understanding of numbers of Lionel's quest for wholeness, and reassure them of the closure he will find in his journey.

It is interesting that while in many Native American cultures numbers have special meanings and connotations, the number four is one of the most significant numbers (Palms np). "[A]most all tribes have some representation of the four directions as a circular symbol of the harmony and balance of mind, body, and spirit with the natural environment (and the spirit world)" (Garrett et al. 21), and in the context of my thesis it is interesting to note the connection between number four, such as in four directions, and the connotations of the circle (harmony and balance). Moreover, from a Native perspective "life can be seen as a series of concentric circles[.]" namely of four circles: first, "the inner circle" (within us), then a circle of "family/clan", third circle of "the natural environment, Mother Earth, and all our relations" and the fourth, biggest circle consisting of other circles with "the Creator ... with all our ancestors and other spirit helpers/guides" (Garrett et al.21). The number four can also be seen as reminding people of their "interdependence between Nature and our human existence" as it is connected to space by the four cardinal directions and the four winds that blow from these directions, to time by the four seasons and the four life stages (infancy/childhood, youth, adulthood, old age) and to the Four Sacred Obligations of the Zia Pueblos, namely to "develop a strong body ... a clear mind ... a pure spirit ... [and] a devotion to the welfare of your people" (Palms np).

A noteworthy example could also be taken from the Lakotas, to whom the numbers four and seven are sacred (Andersson, *Lakotat* 80). Number four is even more sacred, "more *wakan*" (Lame Deer and Erdoes 116), because it is the number of Wakhá Tháka, the Great Spirit. Wakhá Tháka has sixteen (four times four) different forms of existence, categorized hierarchically into four groups of four (Andersson, *Lakotat* 65-69, 80). Lame Deer mentions that four represents "the four corners of the earth[.]" the four winds, the four things that "make the universe" (earth, air, water, and fire), and there are four especially important virtues for a man and four virtues (two of them the same, two different) for a woman (Lame Deer and Erdoes 115-116). This also relates to actions: "We Sioux do everything by fours" – be it four puffs when smoking the peace pipe or four nights spent seeking vision quests (116).

These examples emphasize the fact that when reading Native literature, it might be useful to pay attention to certain numbers, especially if they seem to be a recurring theme. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the number four is significant. There are four storytellers (the four old Indians/four Native deities) and the story is told four times. In the novel, there are four parts, which are named in the Cherokee syllabary according to the four cardinal points of the compass, each of them connected to a certain color, so there are four colors, which in turn are assigned to the four old Indians (Flick 143, Figure 1, see also Palms np). The first part of the novel is dedicated to First Woman/the Lone Ranger, who in turn is connected to the color red and East, and East symbolizes new generation or the beginning of growth. The second part is primarily presided over by Changing Woman/Ishmael, and her color is white and direction South, and the symbolic meaning here is further growth. In part three of the novel, Thought Woman/Robinson Crusoe is linked to black and West, symbolizing ripeness, and finally Old Woman/Hawkeye, with her blue color and North, represents old age in the fourth part of the novel. The four old Indians are also called Mr. Red, Mr. White, Mr. Black, and Mr. Blue, always in that order, by the police (54-55). It is also interesting that when fixing the Western *Mysterious Warrior*, a black-and-white film, the four old Indians make it colorful and as a result on a screen there is “a great swirl of motion and colors – red, white, black, blue” (357). Again, these four colors in that particular order emphasize the presence and impact of the four deities.

The number four is often connected with teaching (O’Brien 35), so the aspects of learning and teaching are especially emphasized here. There are also “four parts to a person, which makes a whole one: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual” and to be a whole and healthy person, one must be in touch with all of these aspects (O’Brien 35-36). In *Green Grass, Running Water* teaching and learning relate both to storytelling (which is seen, for instance, in the telling of the creation stories) and to strengthening Native identity, to making one “whole” (as seen, for example, with Lionel).

2.4 Circular Themes and Other Circles in Storytelling

Hartmut Lutz identifies circles in contemporary Native American writing on four levels: 1) contents and story-line, 2) motifs and plot-structure, 3) philosophy and

function, and 4) individual and tribal protagonists (203-208). I have already discussed circles relating to the content, story-line and plot-structure as well as the philosophy and function of the circle, so in this section I will analyze other circles mentioned by Lutz. In addition, some recurring themes in Native American storytelling could be regarded as circular, and I will demonstrate how the themes of homecoming and strengthening one's tribal identity can be seen as circular in Native American storytelling.

Lutz notes that "The completion of the circle is achieved not only on the level of contents and motif, but on the structural plot and even syntactic level as well" (206). This is true also of *Green Grass, Running Water*. For instance, the prologue of the novel as well as the whole novel ends with storytelling, using the same sentence: "That's true," I says. "And here's how it happened" (3, 469), which indicates a circle has been completed. The smaller circles, such as the four parts of the novel, including the four Native origin stories, each have the thought relating to storytelling that "we got to do it all over again" (107, 250, 361, 468).

Moreover, different stories such as those of different characters in different places are sometimes connected by using the same or similar phrases. For example, at the end of one section, the Lone Ranger asks the other Indians: "What else would you like to know?" and the next section begins with Babo asking the same question from Sergeant Cereno (51). Even different levels of storytelling are sometimes connected in a similar manner: once Coyote says to the I-narrator: "I've never been to Canada" which is immediately followed by Babo saying the same words in the realistic level of the narrative (261).

Likewise, different narratives are sometimes tied together within the same paragraph, for instance when four persons in different places ask at the same time the same question: "Where did the water come from?" (104). It is one of the key phrases in the novel (3, 22, 37, 469) along with the understanding that "In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water" (1, 97, 100, 103, 112, 469).

Furthermore, the water motif links together different circles: the biggest circle, the novel itself, begins and ends with water, each of the four Native creation stories begins with water (and ends at Fort Marion, Florida, by the sea), and water is present

in the realistic level of the narrative, as Alberta, Lionel, Charlie, Babo and other human characters notice several times water where it is not supposed to be, indicating that something connected to mythical figures is taking place.

An example of the water motif linked to mythical figures on the realistic level of the narrative can be seen when Babo notices a “yellow dog” – Coyote – sniffing around her car, which suddenly sits in a puddle of water even though there was no puddle when she was parking it. As she wonders, “where the water had come from” she sees the water level rising and her car floating away (20, 22, 26). Likewise, the cars of Alberta, Charlie and Dr. Hovaugh disappear from their parking space at Blossom Lodge, with only puddles left where the car should have been (279, 314, 350).⁷ Later, these cars “float in the dam” when an earthquake takes place, and “the dam gave away, and the water and the cars tumbled over the edge of the world” (453-454) until in the end, “in the valley, the water rolled on as it had for eternity” (455). The reader can see how water is present in the great culmination of the events, indicating trickster’s involvement in the story. Moreover, water rolling on is linked to the thoughts of eternity, and to the old and natural way of how everything should be in the Native world now that the Euro-American dam, an obstacle to the water, has been removed. Thus, on this level of the narrative, the story ends with a water motif too. This shows how these all story circles, bigger and smaller, are interconnected.

Another intriguing aspect of circularity is the “use of a collective rather than an individual protagonist” (Lutz 206-207). There are a few novelists offering this “Native perspective” (Lutz 207), among them Louise Erdrich with her *Love Medicine*, along with her later novels of the same series. The connection between circularity and a variety of protagonists is based on the idea that even though there are individual protagonists in a novel, “their development is never portrayed as an individual achievement or failure, but rather as something happening within a larger circle of family and tribe” (Lutz 207). For example, Erdrich “focuses on a whole collective” and “Instead of taking just a segment out of the circle, she describes the interaction of the whole group/hoop” (Lutz 207). In *Green Grass, Running Water*,

⁷ To be precise, only three cars go missing: Babo’s red Pinto, Alberta’s blue Nissan and Dr. Hovaugh’s white Karmann-Ghia. Babo’s red Pinto disappears in the beginning of the novel and finds its way to a Canadian car rental place where it is taken by Charlie, who mistakes it as the car he rented and drives it to Blossom. There it disappears from the parking lot of Blossom Lodge, just like the other two cars (320-322).

the stories of Latisha and Lionel Red Dog, Eli Stands Alone, Alberta Frank and Charlie Looking Bear are each told from their own perspective, their interconnectedness is shown several times and their personal growth and development is clearly portrayed “as something happening within a larger circle of family and tribe” – none of them has gotten or regained their Native tribal identity in isolation. In this process, not only “the circle of family and tribe” is involved, but also the larger circle encompassing supernatural beings plays an important role.

In addition, some themes in Native American storytelling, both in oral tradition and written literature can be seen as circles. One of them is homecoming, which has been a central theme in contemporary Native North American writing (Shackleton, “The Return” 155-163), and at least three reasons can be found to explain this phenomenon (158). Firstly, earlier in history, the indigenous people of North America were removed from their homes and lands by settlers, which “created the need to “come home” through words” (158), to regain the home in a sense of regaining the stories and memories belonging to the tribal land. Secondly, Leslie Marmon Silko explains that stories have always had the function of “bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together” (qtd. in Shackleton “The Return” 158). These stories used to be told orally but now in the written form they continue to bring people together, to strengthen the unity and identity of the people, which in turn helps them to fight feelings of isolation and fragmentation. Thirdly, novels like Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Silko’s *Ceremony*, featuring Native American soldiers returning from the Second World War to their homes, ironize and raise questions about the thought of America as a “homeland” to contemporary Native Americans (Shackleton, “The Return” 158). One of the many Native North American novels discussing the theme of homecoming is the novel under consideration, *Green Grass, Running Water*.

In the novel one of the key points regarding these themes, a symbol of successful homecoming, is the Sun Dance festival in Blossom, Alberta, where all the Native protagonists end up, albeit coming from different routes and with different motives. The Sun Dance is a Plains Indians⁸ ceremony to honor the sun (Andersson &

⁸ All the protagonists in the novel are Blackfoot, who are Plains Indians. For a historical account of the Blackfoot Sun Dance, see Ewers 174-184. For a description of contemporary Lakota Sun Dance, see Crawford 19-25.

Henriksson 205, 484, Encyclopedia Britannica). Traditionally, those who wanted to prove their bravery had an opportunity to do so by enduring pain and self-mortification, which was seen as giving a sacrifice to the sun. People could also renew kinship ties, arrange marriages, exchange property, and strengthen their mutual relations as well as their common faith and ties to the supernatural world. The sweat lodge ceremony provided both physical and spiritual purification, and as young people had a chance to get together, many romances began there (Andersson & Henriksson 205).

However, in Canada, the Sun Dance, among other Indigenous religious rituals, was banned by the Indian Act of 1885 (Gadacz np). Some continued to celebrate it in secret until the ban was lifted 1951 but many young ones had either lost their connection to the tribal heritage or had difficulties in relating to it. In the United States, the Sun Dance, like many other Indigenous ceremonies, was criminalized by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior in 1883 (Encyclopedia Britannica). Despite the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and John Collier's BIA Circular 2970, which stated that there should be "no interference with Indian religious life" (thus officially reversing the prohibition of Indigenous ceremonies), the time of religious oppression was not over (Irwin 35-55). Sun Dancers were arrested even as late as 1971, and only in 1978 did the Congress pass the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which allowed the Indigenous peoples to practice their religious ceremonies. The Sun Dance, among other ceremonies, has been actively revived by some Native Americans (Henriksson 212) and it continues to be a significant ceremony among Plains Indians (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Considering this background, it is easier to understand the importance of the Sun Dance in strengthening tribal identity, which is also manifested in *Green Grass, Running Water*. It is worth noting that King does not describe the actual ceremony in his novel, he only relates secular things which take place at the event, which is in harmony with the principle of holding the Sun Dance sacred. It is not, for example, allowed to take photos in the Sun Dance (151-154, 290-291). In the novel, George Morningstar (an arrogant Colonel Custer-like character) attempts to violate this rule, even though he knows it is not allowed, and then belittles its importance by saying "no harm in a couple of pictures" (423-425). Considering how the Sun Dance has

been exploited and banned by people reflecting George Morningstar's attitude – an attitude which later leads him, when confronted, to call the Natives “a joke” and the Sun Dance “shit” and “ice age crap” (427) – it is no wonder that the assembled Blackfoot take very seriously Morningstar's attempt to exploit the ceremony. This creates a conflict, which in turn raises questions of cultural appropriation and identity. It proves to be a crucial moment in Lionel's personal development as well: he decides to defend tribal customs and situate himself in the tribal circle, which indicates that he has abandoned his Western-influenced worldview of seeing Native Americans as losers and, instead, he sees the tribal customs and Native identity as his own and worth fighting for (423-428). The same thing is demonstrated when he gives up the leather-fringed jacket, a symbol of his desire to be white, as both he and George Morningstar see it as George's jacket, representing George's identity rather than that of Lionel's (425-426). All this takes place at the Sun Dance, highlighting its significance in Lionel's return home.

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the theme of homecoming can be seen in several different ways, which all form a circle. One of the circles is geographical: the Native protagonists come home to the Sun Dance (Shackleton, “The Return” 161). For instance, Lionel is born on the reservation but strays away from his home and identity. His coming to the Sun Dance is both a geographical and a symbolical homecoming, and this coming home to his roots can be seen as completing the circle. Furthermore, this is also a homecoming in a sense of finding one's place in the community and reaffirming one's tribal identity. This connects to the function of storytelling. Lionel has now adopted his Native identity and will be ready to tell his story again to someone who needs to hear it, which is confirmed by Thought Woman/Robinson Crusoe telling him: “In years to come, ... you'll be able to tell your children and grandchildren about this” (*GG* 428), just like his uncle Eli's story of Eli's own homecoming and adopting Native identity has been told to Lionel. A story has been told, the circle has been completed, and yet another story is waiting to be told – the continuity is ensured.

However, in the novel, there is also an ideological or “mythical level” of homecoming which relates to storytelling (McLeod 17-34, Shackleton, “The Return” 161). The stories of the settlers, the master narratives with their ideals, norms and

stereotypes, are subverted so that the Indigenous narrative is reasserted instead, thus strengthening the Native point of view. Thus, one could talk about ideological homecoming, and as argued above, homecoming is a circular motif in Native American literature. Moreover, the Native stories are often circular by structure, especially those recounted in *Green Grass, Running Water*, so there is yet another level of circles: Native narratives, circular by structure, triumph over un-circular, linear narratives of the colonizers, and all this forms an ideological, circular homecoming. There are indeed “circles within circles.”

All these levels, all these circles, are important and interconnected in *Green Grass, Running Water*: Lionel would not find his identity as a Blackfoot man without geographical, literal homecoming to Sun Dance but without realizing his Native identity, the literal homecoming would not be enough, as demonstrated by Eli’s failed homecoming as a younger man (224-232, 287-291). The different type of ideological level is also important: Lionel needs to see the Natives as valuable people, as winners, which is clearly demonstrated with the subverted movie plot of John Wayne and the Indians, but even that would not be enough without literal, geographical homecoming. One could say that Lionel would not find his self, his tribal identity without this combination of interconnected circles of homecoming. And one of the main themes of the novel, as is the case with many other Native American novels too, is “a circular journey towards home and identity” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 191).

3 Circles in Time in *Green Grass, Running Water*

3.1 Cyclic View of Time

There are different concepts of time around the world. The Western world tends to view time as linear (monochronic), progressing constantly from the beginning towards the future ahead (Little Bear 82, Reynolds np). In his book *History, Time and Deity* Professor S.G. F. Brandon discusses five views of time, and one of them is called “the cyclic view of Time” (4). Its key elements are the understanding that time moves “in cycles, usually with a preconceived pattern”, which results in the repetition of events (4, 74). However, there are several different understandings of what kind of repetition occurs. For instance, Brandon discusses at length about the

ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek and Asian understanding of the cyclical view (65-105), but these views are quite different from Native American cyclicality, which – like other Indigenous views – is not presented in the book. As the ancient Greek view may be familiar to the Euro-American reader, I would like to point out some aspects in which this view differs from the Native American understanding of time. For example, in Greece, the understanding that everything happens repeatedly led some philosophers to conclude that not only similar events, but even identical people come back at some point, and this eternal repetition renders everything pointless and meaningless (92-95): it “robbed human life ... of any worthwhile meaning” (93-94) and there was “no ultimate significance” in any event or life (95). And even among those who did not have such a drastic view, the “sense of fatalism” prevailed (96) and humans’ situation was viewed rather “pessimistically”, albeit not without a hope of deliverance of this painful repetition (91). Yet Native American understanding of time and the conclusions based on that understanding are different from those mentioned above.

Native American views resemble other Indigenous views of time. Indigenous peoples around the world tend to think of time as cyclic and repetitive (Doble, Rick np). This view is influenced by natural cycles: the seasons of the year, the migration patterns of animals, and so forth (Little Bear 78). Moreover, a year can be seen as a circle, with seasons coming and going, its beginning and ending tied together only to begin a new circle.⁹ However, this repetitiveness does not lead Native Americans to the conclusion that everything would be identically repetitive and life meaningless, like the philosophers in ancient Greece, but rather they see cyclical patterns as a reassurance of continuity and harmony as discussed earlier in connection with connotations of the circle (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112). Everyone and everything has its place in the universe, each meaningful and valuable, and as “all are my relations”, people should “mind their relations” (Little Bear 78, see also Owens, *Other Destinies* 178). This gives life the “worthwhile meaning” the Greek philosophers were lacking. Cyclicity ensures continuity also in a sense that people can (and sometimes need) to take their place in connection with ancient events, like in Silko’s *Ceremony*, where

⁹ It is interesting to note that Black Elk describes day as a circle: “I saw that the whole wide circle of the day was beautiful and green” (Neihardt 42). Even though this does not indicate that it is a pan-Indian way of seeing days, I think it is worth mentioning in this context as an example of how many circles and “circles within circles within circles” a Native American person might see (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112).

Tayo takes the mythical hero's place as the old stories are happening again (Owens, *Other Destinies* 184-191). In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the creation stories are happening again, as discussed before, but before analyzing it from a temporal perspective in 3.2, I would like to explore the Native American view of time in more detail.

Leroy Little Bear explains some crucial elements in Native American view of time (77-78). The “holistic and cyclical view of the world” is based on the idea that “existence consists of energy”. Energy makes all things animate and they are in “constant motion or flux”. To see the patterns of recurring motion, such as the patterns of “cosmic cycles”, one needs to “look at the whole”. In a world like this, “interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance”. Likewise, Dr. Sana Reynolds notes that cultures with a cyclical view of time usually see “connections and interrelatedness in people and events” and aim to “understand the linkages and connections” in order to understand the whole (“Linear, Flexible, and Cyclical Time” np). Thus, it is only natural that events are considered “in relation to other events” rather than in “a chronological, linear, and hierarchical way” (Stewart 187). In addition, a cyclic view of time focuses on the past more than some other time concepts do, because people with such a point of view “believe they can find many links and connections there” (Reynolds, “Linear, Flexible, and Cyclical Time” np). Neal McLeod connects looking at the past to storytelling and remarks that “to tell a story is to link, in the moments of telling, the past to the present, and the present to the past” (17). I will discuss the aspects of connections and interrelatedness of people and events in *Green Grass, Running Water* in section 3.2.2.

Leslie Marmon Silko explains in an interview:

It is very important how time is seen. The Pueblo people and the indigenous people of the Americas see time as round, not as a long linear string. If time is round, if time is an ocean, then something that happened 500 years ago may be quite immediate and real, whereas something inconsequential that happened an hour ago could be far away. Think of time as an ocean always moving... That passage of time [the 500 years mentioned earlier] 'doesn't mean the same thing to us as it might mean in a culture where the people stretch the string out and say Oh, this was a long time ago. That is not the way my people experience time. (Irmer, np)

Silko's words that Native Americans "see time as round" indicate a cyclical view of time. The distance in time is not based on year-count but rather on significance, the importance of the event. The comparison of time with an ocean, "always moving", emphasizes the cyclicity and repetition of certain things. Thus, mythic reality and creator figures are always around and the actual creation can be seen as happening repeatedly whenever a story is told (Owens, *Other Destinies* 238). This is what happens in Navajo healing ceremonies as well (Moulton 83-88): the Navajo concentrate on telling parts of the creation story, so that the patient performs part of the creation story, for instance by singing certain ritual songs. These rituals "remove the participants from temporality" (Moulton 88) and move them into "mythical time reactualized by the festival itself. Hence sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable" and mythical time can be restored (Eliade qtd. in Moulton 88). This indicates that mythical time, which usually refers to the time of creation, is something that can be restored in the present time. Like waves in the ocean, the past can come near to us, be "quite immediate and real" and creation can be closer to us than something not so significant which took place yesterday. In fact, Leroy Little Bear maintains that "Creation is a continuity. If the creation is to continue, then it must be renewed" (78). And "all the renewal ceremonies, the telling and retelling of creation stories, the singing and resinging of the songs are all humans' part in the maintenance of creation" (78). This is what happens in *Green Grass, Running Water* as well: creation takes place as the creation story is told four times in the novel, and Coyote, who has the ability to jump from one story to another, can witness the creation happening at the same time as the events in Blossom, Alberta in the late 20th-century. King's Coyote comments on both narratives, sometimes excusing himself for being late in one story by explaining that he was following the other one (359). This indicates that the events of both stories are taking place simultaneously.

For the last key feature in Native American view of time, I would like to discuss the relationship between time and space. For Native Americans, "space is a more important referent than time" (Little Bear, see also McLeod 17) as opposed to the Western view with its emphasis on time. In Western cultures with linear time concept people are often very focused on the temporal: we measure time strictly and aim to control it, and there are expressions and proverbs in many Indo-European languages about time as a precious commodity, such as English expressions of

“saving time” or “not wasting time” which indicate that time is seen as something we could misuse or lose if not used efficiently (Reynolds, “How Different Cultures Tell Time”, Klein 173-174). However, space just *is* around us. We tend to pay more attention to time and time-related things in our lives, and most Euro-Americans, when moving from one place to another, do not feel that the change of geographical location would mean the loss of connection to something sacred or divine.

For Native Americans, it is the other way around. Space is important because, first of all, “Earth is our Mother” and “cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians” (78). This highlights the thought that important events, sacred patterns and cycles are observed from the Earth, and to be more accurate, from certain places, which can be regarded as sacred. This is also why tribal lands are of vital importance, and why their loss and relocation policies have had such devastating effects (Little Bear 78, Bíró-Nagy np). In addition, the Earth constitutes a part of the actual “being of Indians,” connecting identity to the Earth and, more specifically, to a specific place on the Earth. Professor Katalyn Bíró-Nagy explains that a place is sacred because it “radiates eternal spiritual power” (Bíró-Nagy np), and as discussed earlier, for Native Americans, spiritual things are inseparable from other aspects of human life or identity. Moreover, a “strong sense of place ... more elementally shape[s] culture than time does” and it “contribute[s] to the formation of the tribe’s identity” (Bíró-Nagy np) and by extension, the identities of all those individuals who form the tribe. Time, on the other hand, is all around and everywhere. It is not running out but is an ever-moving ocean where the significance of an event counts more than its temporal distance (“Time just is”, Little Bear 78).

Understanding this background helps the reader of *Green Grass, Running Water*. Rather than desperately trying (and failing) to force Euro-American linear time and monochromic logic on the reading of the novel, by understanding and acknowledging cyclic time in the novel the reader can enjoy the mind-twisting turn of events both in time and space. For the I-narrator, Coyote and the four Native deities, “time just is” – it is not something running from beginning to end and if not used well, is lost forever; rather, time is around them always, like an ocean. The deities move in time by telling creation stories to get to specific geographic locations, such as to the road in Blossom, Alberta, where Lionel would pick them up, and

eventually to the Sun Dance, which plays a part in Lionel's personal growth, in the formation of his identity (12, 50-51, 103-104, 114, 131, 406), signifying the importance of the geographic location in relation to identity.

3.2 Circular Time Concept in *Green Grass, Running Water*

3.2.1 Cyclicity and Repetition in Time and Storytelling

In the Native American view of time, repetition ensures harmony, continuity and purposeful life, as discussed in section 3.1. In the novel, the Native deities tell their stories in order to help others, to "fix" the world. However, it is not something they can finish completely, the world is never fully fixed. The deities cannot fix all the things that are wrong in the world, and even when they do fix something, the deities, with the questionable assistance of Coyote, never "get it right" (107). In fact, they know beforehand that there will be mistakes, as demonstrated for instance in the early part of the novel, when they check whether they have everything they need for storytelling (8-9). Already before they begin, they discuss the need for the apology, which inevitably will ensue later, and the Lone Ranger suggests Coyote do that. Later, they tell Babo that they "fixed up part of the world" but in the process, "part of it got messed up, too" (466-467). We have here a cyclical pattern: a constantly repeated cycle of fixing something which at the same time causes something else to go wrong. The deities know that there is always something to do, for after having helped Lionel they immediately start thinking who they should help next time (467). Thus, the repetition in time does not lead them to feel that everything is identically repetitive and meaningless, as did some Greek philosophers with their cyclical view of time (Brandon 91-96), but rather they always have something meaningful to do, a purpose in life. They also rejoice when they are able to make a difference and help someone: When the deities come back to the hospital, they tell Babo that they "fixed up part of the world" and the Lone Ranger says: "it was very satisfying" (*GG* 466-467). Cyclicity in time and storytelling assures the deities, and by extension, the reader, of the continuity of purposeful life and happiness.

Closeness of events in time is based on the significance of the events: the more important the event, the closer it seems to be whereas an unimportant event, even though it might have just happened, is seen as being farther away in time (Irmer, np).

Creation is a significant event, so it is seen as being very near in time. In fact, it can be seen as happening constantly, repeatedly, each time the creation story is told. The mythical reality with its creator figures is always present, always happening. Thus, First Woman still falls down from the sky, while Coyote continues to observe her doing so; Thought Woman is endlessly captured with the help of Coyote, and so forth. The stories are experienced as happening at the moment, which is evidenced by the fact that Coyote can jump from one story to another, in the middle of the events, (*GG* 326-327, 331-332), and his participation has an impact on the stories (221, 360-361), and at the same time, they have always happened. If this were not so, the thinking goes, creation would not have existed nor would the pattern for the storytelling have become established. After each creation story, Coyote and the I-narrator come to the conclusion that the story has to be told again, indicating that it has been told many times before and it will be told again (107, 250, 361, 468-469). The cyclicity of storytelling as well as that of time is manifested in the very structure of the novel itself.

Circular time is the premise, which enables interaction between human and mythical characters. The latter are not limited to being creator figures in the beginning of time, immovable and restricted from moving or from changing events later, instead time circulates around them as an endless resource. Distance in time is not a problem, even when mythical creatures move in time, since there are no linear distances to be covered: time is round and around us, like we tend to view space – it enables one to move in any direction one might want to go.

In the Native American cyclical worldview, “space is a more important referent than time” (Little Bear 77-78). Place and identity are closely related, as discussed earlier in relation to Eli and Lionel, and in *Green Grass, Running Water* place matters more than time for both mythological and human characters. One has to be in the right place to learn or to teach: the deities have to be at the Sun Dance in order to help Lionel, and he has to be there to embrace his Native identity; likewise, Eli had to come home to become reattached to his Blackfoot roots. Time is not as important a referent, since time and events in time can be changed, molded and fixed. I will analyze this aspect in the following sections using the Western called *The Mysterious Warrior* as an example.

3.2.2 Connections and Interrelatedness of People and Events

As discussed earlier, cultures which have a cyclical concept of time focus on connections, both temporal connections such as to the past, and connections and interrelatedness of people and events (see section 3.1). In the novel, the connections to the past are obvious, for instance the right way of telling stories arises from ancient traditions. It is demonstrated in the telling of the origin stories, where it is essential to begin in the right way (9-12). The Lone Ranger explores this by first beginning to tell a story with “once upon a time” but gets interrupted by the other old Indians since it is not the correct way to begin. The second attempt of another fairy tale beginning of “A long time ago in a faraway land” gets the same treatment, as does a Hollywood-style mock-Indian beginning and even quoting the Genesis of the Bible. Finally, using “Gha!” a ceremonial beginning in Cherokee, and then identifying herself as First Woman, she gets the acceptance of the other deities, and can begin to tell her story (Flick 144, 147). The others join her story in English and in Cherokee, and thus the connection to the tribal past is established.

The deities themselves are connected to the past by other people as well. They seem to be very old but of indeterminable age. Babo estimates their ages to be “four, five hundred years” (*GG* 52). Dr. Hovaugh says that they were old when they arrived at the hospital in 1891 during his grandfather’s time (102-103). He suspects they are involved with all sorts of chaotic events and catastrophes, at least “thirty-seven times that we know of” (49), and the earliest he mentions is the eruption of Krakatau on August 27, 1883 (48).

In a world with fluid, moving distances between certain events in time, one of the fixed points in time and space is Fort Marion, Florida, in 1875. To make the reader familiar with the importance of the events connecting to Fort Marion, in the beginning of the novel, King has Alberta Frank teaching a class where she explains some historical facts about the Fort (14-19).¹⁰ In 1874, the U.S. Army began its “campaign of destruction” (14), which aimed to force the Southern Plains tribes onto reservations, and by the end of the Southern Plains Indian wars in 1875, 72 Native American captives who were considered dangerous were taken to Fort Marion and

¹⁰ For more information about Fort Marion and its Native American prisoners, see Glancy, Diane: *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education*, 2014.

imprisoned there. After the lecture, one of the students in her class asks: “what happened to them?” (19). The question is left hanging in the air, but a clue that connects Fort Marion with the four ancient Indians is the very first sentence of the next section: Hawkeye’s question: “What happened to the trees?” (19). The reader begins to connect these characters and events, and as one reads on, the connections multiply. In what now follows, I will focus on links with Fort Marion.

Dr. Hovaugh’s mental hospital where the four old Indians reside is in Florida, that is whenever they are not somewhere else “fixing” the world. He does not understand how they escape (or turn up again) and his records show that this has been happening throughout their time in the hospital. It is worth noting that the escapees tell stories where a Native deity who is telling the story always ends up in Fort Marion. In the case of First Woman, the soldiers take her to Fort Marion where she, for a while, watches other prisoners making ledger art but then realizes that the world needs fixing up and disguised as Lone Ranger, she walks out of prison with her friends Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe and Hawkeye (*GG* 105-106). Changing Woman ends up on the shores of Florida when the black lesbian whale Moby-Jane takes her there, and then soldiers drag her to Fort Marion (249-250). Thought Woman is also taken to Fort Marion when Coyote participates in the storytelling and creates soldiers to capture her because he gets angry with her dismissal of Coyotes (360-361). And Old Woman, who takes the name of Hawkeye just because that is a name the soldiers recognize, is sent to Fort Marion, charged with the offence of “trying to impersonate a white man” (438-439). The connection between Hovaugh’s mental hospital and Fort Marion is suggested several times, but it is left for the reader to make the link. For someone with a linear time conception it may sound quite baffling but understanding the Native concept of time and the importance of cyclicity makes it easier to accept. As the events are happening repeatedly, it is not only possible but even probable that such cycles take place. The old Indians escaping and returning to the mental hospital is likened to the Native mythological women’s evasion of and incarceration in Fort Marion. Western institutions, culture or even stories cannot hold the Native deities imprisoned or stop them from doing what they deem important. Their stories take them wherever they want to go, and their travelling is not limited by the restrictions of linear time, as there are no linear time lines in their world. The past, such as the creation, can happen again, and it is vital to be connected to the past,

as the deities demonstrate, in order to be able to recreate certain events, learn from them, and help others with what one has learned (8-9, 466-467).

However, the past is not the only thing one needs to have connections with. In addition, the connections and interrelatedness of people and events are of great interest in cultures with a cyclical concept of time. This aspect is evident in *Green Grass, Running Water*, too. There are several protagonists and other characters whose connections form a sort of web. I have divided these connections into three categories: 1) those of human characters with each other, 2) human characters with mythological characters, in which there are direct, indirect and unknown interactions, and 3) mythological characters of different levels. I will demonstrate these categories with a few examples.

First, the human characters are linked to others. Lionel, for example, is connected to his relatives and has different relationships with each of them. With his parents, he has a somewhat distant relationship where everyone means well but does not quite understand each another. Lionel is closest to his aunt Norma, who compares him to his uncle Eli, her brother. She feels that both men should come home and reattach themselves to their tribal roots, and once Eli has done it, she wishes him to teach the same thing to Lionel. Eli himself begins to recognize himself in Lionel, although not fully agreeing with Norma. Another connection is that both Lionel and his cousin Charlie have a sexual relationship with Alberta, although none of the three is quite satisfied with the arrangement. Many of these links revolve around Lionel, but other characters have complex webs of connections as well. For example, Alberta and Lionel's sister Latisha strengthen one another when they meet on their way to the Sun Dance, and the reader can trace how Eli's life and his relationship with Norma changes during their lifetime. In *Green Grass, Running Water* the interrelatedness of characters is placed within a cyclical view of time as well as within the circle of multiple protagonists.

The second category is the connections between human and mythological characters, which can be further divided into three sub-categories: direct, indirect, and unknown interaction. First, direct interaction can be seen, for example, when Lionel and other human characters meet the Native deities/old Indians and discuss with them. Even though the human characters directly talk to the deities, they do not necessarily

realize their mythical nature. Lionel, for instance, sees them first as mad old Indian elders, prone to sing off-key and be ridiculously otherworldly, and even though his attitude changes into a more appreciative one, he never realizes that they are in fact more than just humans. They manage to help Lionel towards internal growth and stronger identity without him really understanding them. However, the cleaning lady Babo, a modern female version of Melville's trickster slave from *Benito Cereno* (i.e. partly a "realistic" human, and partly a literary character), realizes Coyote's and the four Indians' mythic powers, repeatedly commenting on their doings with "isn't that the trick?" (246, 262, 350).

Indirect interaction between human and mythological characters revolves around Coyote. He participates in the events on the realistic level narrative but remains unseen and unheard most of the time and to most people. At Bill Bursum's video store, he takes part in discussions between human characters and the Native deities, but apparently only the deities can hear him (329-332). However, his presence and participation affect the realistic narrative, both in discussions and events, the biggest one of these being the destruction of the dam (370, 446-451, 453-456). And sometimes, some people can actually see him even though they do not always recognize him: Latisha, Babo and Dr. Hovaugh, among others, see occasionally a yellow dog and Bill Bursum hears him scratching his door, even though he cannot see the cause for it (293-294).

By "unknown interacting" between humans and mythological characters I mean those instances which are pointed out in the literary text, even though the characters do not seem to know these connections. I mentioned earlier the example of Coyote and Babo saying one after another in different levels of the narrative, "I've never been to Canada" (261). This literary device, using exactly the same or very similar sentences repeated immediately after one another but in different level of the narrative, is used to create parallels between mythical and human characters, and to remind the reader that there is a connection even though the characters do not see it yet. The mythological world, as the Native tradition sees it, is not separate from the ordinary, natural world like the Western worldview deems it to be (Lutz 196-197), but rather all these levels of reality, both mythological and natural, are present at the

same time and affect one another. This is demonstrated by these examples of similarity and connections.

The third category is the interrelatedness of different mythological characters. As discussed earlier, the novel consists of four levels of narrative: 1) the storytelling and discussions between the I-narrator and Coyote, 2) the origin stories by the deities, 3) the narrative situated in late 20th-century Alberta, 4) the TV Western and its sudden changes in the plot. However, the characters at each level are not restricted to act only on that level of narrative and the levels of narrative are not independent of each other: for instance, Coyote participates in the origin stories as well as the realistic narrative, and he is present when the events in the TV Western change. Coyote's participation causes the origin stories to change accordingly but he also converses with the deities in the realistic level of narrative in Alberta (351-352, 360-361). These connections between different mythical characters are important, and the interrelatedness is invaluable when telling stories and living the stories that are told. It is no wonder then that First Woman/the Lone Ranger reminds Thought Woman/Robinson Crusoe at the beginning of their storytelling that "you can't tell it [the story] all by yourself" (11).

Not only are the characters interrelated, so are the events. In addition to the discussion above, which indicates the events being interrelated by the force of characters' interaction and thus changing the events, I would like to examine briefly "fixing" of the TV Western and factors relating to that. In the novel, several characters are watching (or refusing to watch) a TV Western called *The Mysterious Warrior* in which John Wayne in his leather-fringed jacket wins a battle against savage but noble Indians. Eli is reading the novel based on the aforementioned movie (177-178, 180-183, 222-224, 227, 229, 232, 244). Interrelatedness of his reading of the novel and others watching a movie is emphasized several times, to the point that the movie comes from channel 26 and the events at that point of movie when most of the characters begin to watch it on television are the same as in Eli's book in chapter 26 (232).¹¹ Different characters react differently to the Western. Eli reads the novel although he considers it trash, something akin to junk food, which one might enjoy

¹¹ After having written my thesis, I noticed that O'Brien notes this similarity too. However, she only mentions it as an indication that the novel and the movie are actually the same story and continues to look at the characters' reactions to it whereas my thesis discusses its relation to interconnectedness and cyclic time concept.

despite knowing its bad consequences (180-181). The movie makes Charlie miss Alberta and he watches it even though he mutes the sound at some point (232, 240), whereas Alberta, after watching it distractedly for a moment, turns off the television (241). Likewise, Latisha and her children come to the conclusion that there is no point in watching the movie since everyone knows what is going to happen: the white people win, and the Indians lose (216, 242). Bill Bursum loves that type of result and thinks the Western is one of the best ever made (211, 244, 335). Lionel has the television on, but he sits in his chair with his eyes closed and thus misses seeing how “four old Indians waved their lances. One of them was wearing a red Hawaiian shirt” (242-243). This is worth noting, since already at the beginning of the novel, we learn that Hawkeye is wearing a red shirt with palm trees, lent to her by Robinson Crusoe (8). Babo, on the other hand, sees and recognizes the four old Indians (245-246), and so does Dr. Hovaugh (246-247). And the four old Indians themselves, the Native deities, see themselves in the movie (247-248). They think they had “fixed” the movie before but for some reason, the effect has not lasted, and they realize that they need to fix it again.

The next day, Lionel, Eli, Charlie and the four old Indians meet at Bursum’s video store (327-336, 351-359). Bursum is eager to impress others with his new television screen design and he shows *The Mysterious Warrior* to his audience. The deities mention in passing that they have already “fixed” the film for the director as “he didn’t get it right the first time” (351-352). However, as mentioned earlier, the movie needs to be “fixed” again, and the deities begin to sing. Suddenly, the white soldiers coming to assist John Wayne and his friends just disappear. Colors come to the black-and-white film, new sounds are heard, and the Indian chief, played by Charlie’s father Portland, sees his opportunity and wins the battle with the rest of the Indians. Shaking his head “in amazement and disbelief” (358) John Wayne dies, and the movie is over.

This event is significant in my analysis because, in addition to emphasizing the connections and interrelatedness of people and events, it adds to my analysis of the concept of non-linear time. To begin with, *The Mysterious Warrior* was first in its original state, Western heroes beating the Indians. Then it was fixed by the deities so that the Indians won, even though in this novel it is not told when or where this

fixing takes place. In the process, the deities were recorded and became seen in the film. The film subsequently resumed its original state plot-wise, ending with John Wayne triumphing over the Indians, but still the deities remained visible in the film. And finally, at Bursum's store the deities fix the film again. This would be hard to understand with a linear sense of time, but an acknowledgment of cyclic time makes it easier to accept: for the deities, time is all around and always available. They can change things even in a movie filmed a long time ago, and do it several times if needed, because the time around them is an endless, ever-present resource, like an ocean, with its waves in constant motion. From their point of view, it is probably not much different than their telling and retelling of creation stories, which makes creation happen as the stories are told. Compared to that, changing events in a movie is not very complicated as they have the power of storytelling and ever-present time on their side.

The movie incident also indicates that some events are recurring, which is one of the key elements in cyclical time, such as the need to fix some events and attitudes in the world. In my reading, the recurring need to fix the movie indicates that attitudes reflecting the Western movie worldview and stereotypes (such as the colonial ideology of whites always winning and noble but savage Indians losing) are not that easily or permanently fixed – it is something that needs to be addressed often and repeatedly to make a permanent change.

All these aspects represented in *Green Grass, Running Water* relate to time: the cyclic understanding of time directs one's attention into looking for connections between people and events and linking one's understanding of the present-day world to the past.

3.2.3 Travelling in Time and Space via Storytelling

As established before, in the Native view, time is all around, and it includes what might be called “mythic time,” the time of creation. The creation stories are recounted and thus, they are made to happen, so creation happens all the time, too (Owens, *Other Destinies* 238). The Native deities can travel through time and space, and their method of travelling is storytelling. In fact, they tell creation stories, making them happen, and this makes it possible for them to travel wherever they

want to go. I will demonstrate this with an example from the very beginning of the novel.

The deities in the mental hospital in Florida start telling the story of creation (*GG* 8-12) and consequently, they appear or materialize in Canada (19-20). Looking around, Hawkeye asks, “what happened to the trees?” (19). There were trees around the mental hospital in Florida (13), which indicates that they have vanished from the mental hospital where Hawkeye had just looked at the trees.¹² The Lone Ranger answers here that “it was my turn” to tell the story, which is why they came to Canada, and not, for example, to Mexico or some other place the others might have wished to go (19-20). The white people, such as the hospital personnel and the police, cannot understand how the deities escape or come back (50, 54, 81-82). It is not surprising that the whites do not understand it since they do not acknowledge the power of Native stories. In addition, they do not see things clearly from any other viewpoints than from their own preconceived or prejudiced point of view. This is demonstrated several times in the novel, for example the Western male-dominated worldview misleads them so much that they cannot even see that the deities are in fact women and keep referring to them as men (54-56). They do not see that a certain whale is actually black and female, but keep insisting it is a white male, blinded by their Western literary bias (Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, of course). And the Archangel Gabriel (in King’s updating represented as a sleazy official, A.A. Gabriel) sees Thought Woman as the Virgin Mary despite her insistence that she is Thought Woman. They try to force their own worldview and narratives on those of Native Americans, so naturally they do not see the power of the Native stories nor acknowledge that Native North Americans could be capable of escaping from the white prison and actually changing the world.

Coyote as a mythical trickster can move in time and space, too, and his travelling is linked to storytelling as well. Coyote travels by following the stories and participating in them. He listens, reacts and acts in them, which has real effects both on the level of the creation stories (360-361) as well as in the realistic level of the narrative in Alberta, Canada. The biggest turn of events is caused by his dancing and

¹² Note also how Babo remarks exactly the same thing as she wakes up after sleeping in the car while Dr. Hovaugh drove them from the mental hospital to Canadian border: “Where happened to the trees?” (258).

singing “just a little”— it results in bursting of the dam (370, 446-451, 453-456). As he follows the stories, he can turn up in different narratives. Once, the I-narrator calls him back to observe Thought Woman’s creation story, so he tells the four old Indians that he has to go but he’ll be back, and then “dances back into this story” (324). However, he soon complains that the story of Thought Woman floating around is boring, so he jumps into Lionel’s story (currently taking place at Bill Bursum’s video store) and phones from that story to the I-narrator to ask, “What’s happening with Thought Woman? ... Is she still floating around?” (326-327, 331-332) – yet another reminder that both stories are happening simultaneously.

In this context, it is also good to bear in mind that the stories need to be told, as they “tell us who we are” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 94). The stories have a vital role in building identity. In the novel, the Native deities’ creation stories triumph over Western colonial stories. This is the essence of what Lionel needs to see: he has to learn to see himself and other Native Americans in a new way, not as losers but as victors over colonial attitudes. Even though the creation stories are apparently told in order to teach Coyote so that he would be able to tell them again correctly (297-298, 469), their themes are in essence what Lionel needs to learn, as discussed earlier. We can assume that something is leaking through, even though some of it is what I call an “unknown” interaction, indicated also by similar phrases at different levels of the narrative. What Lionel does see, however, are the changes in the TV Western: the Indians beat John Wayne and other white movie stars. Again, the theme is the same as in all these levels of narrative: Native victory over colonial stories. In a sense, all these stories are the same story. The stories begin to affect Lionel and push him towards understanding and embracing his Blackfoot identity. This is yet another reason why storytelling is important: it can change the world in many ways.

Concomitant with this view of the world is a cyclical view of time, where time is seen as an endless resource and not as a linear progression. The mythical characters can “fix” some events even after they have happened, and if needed, repeatedly, as seen in the instance of the fixing the movie. The cyclic understanding of time looks for connections to the past as well as the interrelatedness of people and events. It aims for harmony between all living things, both natural and supernatural. It also

carries the promise of the continuity of life and of storytelling: the ever-lasting “and here’s how it happened.”

4 Conclusion

4.1 The Analysis of the Circles in *Green Grass, Running Water*

In my thesis, I aimed to show the importance and meanings of different circles in *Green Grass, Running Water* and how understanding them gives greater comprehension and depth to the reading of the novel.

To begin with, the thesis showed that circles are important in Native American cultures and it is good to pay attention to them when reading Native American literature (1.3). The significance of the circle and its connotations, such as “completeness, wholeness” (Lutz 195), “the harmony of life and nature” (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112) and timelessness (Lame Deer & Erdoes 112), formed a foundation and motivation to study them in the context of this novel.

Circles in storytelling arise from ancient oral traditions, which is why it was crucial to take look at the characteristics of oral storytelling tradition (2.1). In that section, the connections between storytelling and identity became obvious, as one of the main functions of storytelling is to strengthen tribal identity. In the context of *Green Grass, Running Water*, Lionel’s dream of being John Wayne has left him unsure of his identity, and the novel traces his centripetal journey towards embracing his Native identity and finding his place in the tribal circle.

In addition to circles relating to identity, Native American stories usually make a full circle in a sense that the end is known from the beginning, for instance, the protagonist will return home with more understanding of his or her place in the community, and story is not so much about what happens but rather, how it happens. For example, in Lionel’s case, it is important to note the process by which his Native identity is re-formed, how he acquires the new understanding of himself. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, different stories make full circles in that sense. In fact, there are four levels of narratives, which, I argued, can all be seen as circles (2.2).

The whole novel forms a large circle (Figure 1), tied together with the promise of a story: “And here’s how it happened” (3, 469). The second level of the narrative consists of four creation stories, all circular by structure (Figure 2). Lionel’s story on the realistic level of the narrative forms a circle (Figure 3), and on the fourth level, the fixing of the Western turns out to be a circular story, following the ever-repeated pattern of fixing something, while something else goes wrong, which then creates a need to fix that mistake. Different levels of the narrative circles are interconnected, as seen in Figure 4.

Recycling of creation stories (2.3) provided an insight into how the ancient stories may change according to current needs and yet carry out their function of strengthening the Native identity. All the four versions of the stories were found to be circular and have some shared characteristics (Figure 2), even though the details may differ.

Even more circles were found in the novel (2.4). Some of them can be seen on the syntactic level while others relate to recurring motifs, such as to the presence of water, which then ties together different levels of the narrative circles. The use of several protagonists also links to circularity, even though in my thesis I did not have an opportunity to dwell profoundly on this aspect. Moreover, the theme of homecoming, so essential in the novel, was found to be circular. Lionel’s homecoming happens on both the geographical and the symbolical levels, as he finds his place in the community, but the ideological homecoming also happens on the level of creation stories, reasserting the Native storytelling tradition rather than the Western literary canon, resulting in coming home through stories.

Native Americans see time as cyclic and repetitive, and the cyclical patterns are seen as a reassurance of continuity and harmony (3.1). Cyclic time concept was found to be essential in understanding the novel (3.1). This is the premise for the thought that the creation stories can actually happen again as the story is re-told (3.2.1).

Moreover, cyclic time is what enables interaction between mythical beings and human agents: mythic characters are not bound by linear time lines to the moments of creation but rather, time is seen as an endless resource, giving them the opportunity to move in time and space as they please. For the Native deities, time circulates them as an endless resource, like space, allowing one to move in any

direction one wants. In the novel, the deities tell their stories in order to help others, to “fix” the world. However, it is not something they can finish completely, and a cyclical pattern emerges: a constantly repeated cycle of fixing something which at the same time causes something else to go wrong. When the old Indians/Native deities return to the hospital, having “fixed up part of the world[,]” they tell Babo that “it was very satisfying” but “Unfortunately ... part of it got messed up, too” (466-467). The deities then begin to talk about who they should help next (467). This indicates that “fixing” of the world continues, and that the continuity of storytelling plays a vital part in the fixing of the world.

Cyclic time concept directs one’s attention to connections to the past as well as to the interrelatedness of people and events (3.2.2). In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the connections to the past are obvious, for instance the right way of telling stories arises from ancient traditions. It is demonstrated in the telling of origin stories, where it is essential to begin in the right way (9-12). Moreover, the connections and interrelatedness of people and events are abundant in the novel. I divided these connections between different characters into three categories: 1) human characters connected with each other, 2) human characters connected with mythological characters, in which there are direct, indirect, and unknown interactions, and 3) mythological characters connected at different levels. In addition, interconnectedness is further emphasized by the fact that the characters are not restricted to acting only on a certain level of the narrative, the level which they would seem to belong, and the levels of narrative are not independent of each other (Figure 4). I analyzed, for example, the “fixing” of the Western *The Mysterious Warrior* from the point of view of the concept of cyclic time as well seeing it as an example of the interrelatedness of people and events. Cyclic time allows the deities to change things even in a movie filmed some time ago, and they can do it several times if needed, because the time around them is an endless, ever-present resource. Bearing in mind that the four old Indians’ telling and retelling of creation stories causes the creation to happen as the stories are told, the “fixing” of the movie, even changing events afterwards, is probably not very difficult since they have the power of storytelling and ever-present time on their side.

A cyclic understanding of time and the power of storytelling allows the Native deities to travel in time and space and “fix” things event after they happen (3.2.3, Figure 5). And Coyote follows the stories, which enables him to travel in time and space. He tries to learn how to tell stories, following the ancient intent of “passing on” stories, the intent in which the listener becomes another storyteller who could then pass the story on to others. However, he does not pay quite enough attention to the stories and keeps making mistakes, so the stories end with a realization that they have to be told again (107, 250, 361, 468). So the storytelling goes on, an eternal “And here’s how it happened” (469).

4.2 Other Findings and New Research Suggestions

In the course of this research, background reading of both literary and cultural studies and re-reading the novel several times proved to be important assets: at times, the new revelations and connections took some time to become apparent. It was like doing a puzzle, realizing how many things are connected to others and what their relations are to one another, and seeing the picture gradually forming before my eyes, which was very rewarding. No doubt there are still many areas left to consider, and further research avenues suggest themselves constantly. To begin with, I would like to dwell on the novel even more as it is such a complex, fascinating work. Had I had an opportunity, I would have liked to trace circles found in other human protagonists’ lives, as now I focused only on Lionel’s life and somewhat that of Eli’s, as an example or foreshadowing of Lionel’s story. I believe I provided enough evidence of circularity by using Lionel’s story as an example but nevertheless, it would be interesting to trace other circles as well, such as those relating to Alberta, Latisha and other human characters, and maybe draw diagrams of those circles and their connections with Lionel’s story as well as their relations with one another.

Constructing the diagrams showed me how conceptualizing something in a drawing can help with the thinking and writing process as well. Ideally, I would have preferred to use colorful 3D models to better illustrate the interconnectedness and functions of different circles, but nevertheless, I believe I managed to draw them in a manner that highlights and supports my arguments. One additional set of diagrams could chart circles in other Native American novels in order to show which characteristics are shared and which are different, and if there are several levels of

circles, how they are interrelated. Furthermore, I feel there are many research possibilities considering different time concepts, such as looking at implications of cyclic time concept in literature. My thesis proved that cyclic time concept affects ways of thinking much more than just on the view one has of time: for instance, Native American cyclic view of time directs one's attention towards connections and interrelatedness of people and events, towards "all my relations" which brings one the responsibility to "mind one's relations". This affects the way one looks at other human beings, animals, ecological issues, the whole universe and one's place in it. In addition, as certain events are seen as repetitive, the focus is in what we can learn from the past, from the old stories. This in turn indicates that old people are often appreciated as a source of knowledge, and so the time concept may lead to certain values being upheld in those communities. I did not have an opportunity to study such things in this thesis, but this line of enquiry suggests many research possibilities: looking at how different time concepts, with their consequent values and focuses, are manifested in different works of literature.

4.3 Learning from the Other

When I began writing the thesis, my aim was to learn to understand better this novel, and also, by extension, certain aspects of Native American cultures. While writing it, the reasons why this kind of research is important grew in my mind. To illustrate, the analysis taught me to question my bias more readily. If something is hard to understand or accept, it should not be dismissed as unimportant or as "a cultural thing so it does not concern me" which is what I sometimes hear people saying about some aspects they do not understand in different cultures. Rather, if it is possible, it is better to find out why something is the way it is and try to understand it from that starting point. In my analysis, this was evident when I tried to understand how the Native deities can travel in time and how the creation seems to be happening at the same time as the other events in Blossom. For someone with traditional Western, linear time concept it seems incomprehensible but the more I read about the Native American time concept, the better I understood it until finally it made perfect sense, I felt that of course it has to be this way in this context. This brought me great deal of joy, but it also enabled me to look at other Native American novels from different point of view, greatly enriching my reading of them, which is what I hope the

reader of this thesis might experience. This attitude in turn, I hope, will be useful also when meeting people with different backgrounds and cultures, when one tries to understand different ways of thinking. I feel that this kind of research is important not only for the obvious reasons, in this case concerning understanding the specific novel, but also in a wider context, for learning to question one's bias, to become more aware of one's own background and its effect, to deconstruct and reconstruct old and new models of thinking and refine one's attitudes. This is especially important in the current world of globality and different cultural encounters.

In the introduction, I mentioned the art of "cross-reading" and the importance of learning to "read across the lines of cultural identity around us and within us" (Owens: *Mixedblood Messages* 11). Only by learning to see, understand and appreciate different ways of thinking we can move from one form of "-centric" thinking to another, namely from "egocentrism to ecocentrism", that is to say from prevailing non-Native worldviews to traditional Native worldviews (11). Considering the state of the world, Owens (whose notion this is) regards that type of paradigm shift to be essential so that "the community we call life will survive" (11).

Owens also notes the importance of learning to "acknowledge differing epistemologies" (*Mixedblood Messages* 11). In the same spirit, further work could be done by applying Boaventura de Sousa Santos's notion of the ecology of knowledge. He argues that "modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking[:]" social reality is divided into the realm of "this side of the line" and the realm of "the other side of the line[.]" the latter vanishing as excluded and "non-existent" (Sousa Santos np). An example of this abyssal thinking is looking at modern science and by extension, Western knowledge, as the only truth and standard while dismissing other knowledges, such as Indigenous knowledges, merely as beliefs, opinions or subjective understanding. Instead, "As an ecology of knowledges, post-abyssal thinking is premised upon the idea of the epistemological diversity of the world, the recognition of the existence of a plurality of knowledges beyond scientific knowledge" (Sousa Santos np). Naturally, it does not aim to discredit scientific knowledge but "simply implies its counter-hegemonic use" (Sousa Santos np).

This relates to my thesis when considering different worldviews presented in the novel. As an example, I would like to continue using the cyclic concept of time.

People all over the world have different understandings of time, which affect their actions. Instead of trying to impose one view upon others, such as imposing the linear time concept to *Green Grass, Running Water*, which simply does not make sense, it is better to try to understand where these differences arise and accept “the existence of a plurality of knowledges” (Sousa Santos np). In this way one can attempt to understand other people and their behavior, just like learning about cyclic view of time makes certain aspects of the novel more understandable. It does not mean necessarily adopting the other view or even agreeing with it but recognizing it and hopefully understanding the reasoning behind it may lead to more fruitful communication and solutions when dealing with other people from different backgrounds. Understanding that “One of the basic premises of the ecology of knowledges is that all knowledges have ... limits” (Sousa Santos np) may make us more willing to learn from and appreciate different cultures. For instance, many Indigenous cultures have different understanding of ecological issues and connections in the natural world, including the Native American responsibility to “mind your relations” i.e. take care of all the living things. In this time of ecological crisis, we should be willing to learn from one another as much as we can to make changes for the better. I hope that my thesis highlights the fact that learning from different cultures and ways of thinking can broaden our view and enrichen our lives, if we are willing to let it happen. In *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* King writes: “the truth about the stories is that that’s all we are” (2). Stories affect the way we look at each other, as individuals and as cultures, and this in turn has an impact on our willingness to learn from one another. By giving others a chance to tell their story and listening with an open heart, we can learn a lot from different stories of “And here’s how it happened.” This is the benevolent circle of storytelling.

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Appendixes

The Whole Novel As a Circle
With Symbols

Hirvensalo
Figure 1

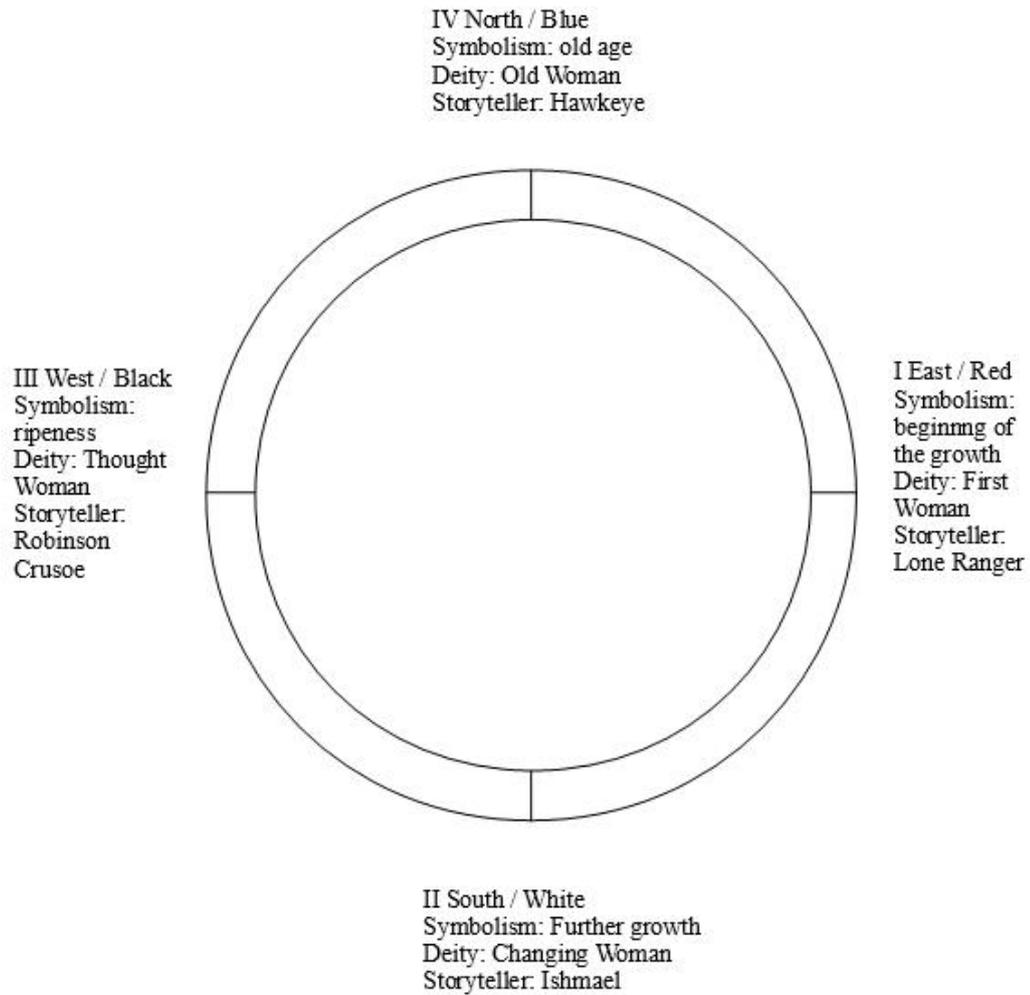


Figure 1: *The Whole Novel As a Circle With Symbols*

This chart indicates

- the Cherokee words in the beginning of each chapter (direction and color)
- the ceremonial meaning of the aforementioned direction in the Medicine Lodge
- the Native deity whose version of the creation story is told in the chapter
- the adopted name of the old Indian / Native deity telling the story

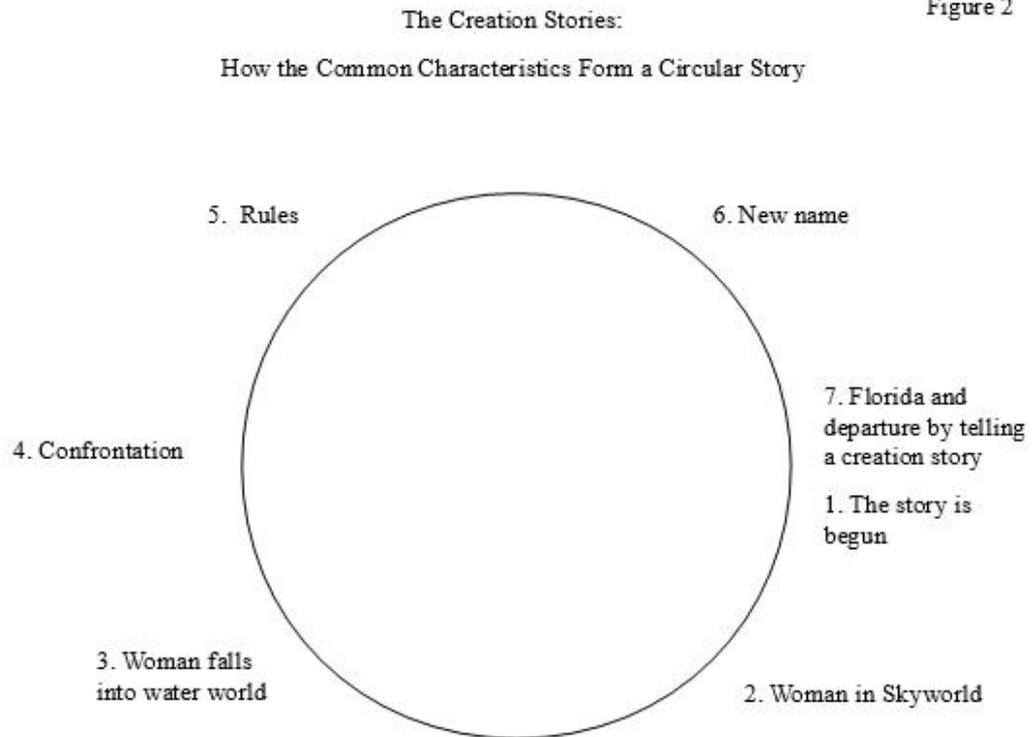


Figure 2: The Creation Stories: How the Common Characteristics Form a Circular Story

1. The story is begun ceremoniously
2. The Woman is located in Skyworld which is above water world
3. She walks off Skyworld and falls into water world
4. There is confrontation between Woman and a man from Western culture
5. Rules are brought to light and Woman will not follow
6. She appropriates the new name and departs
7. She ends up in the jail in Florida and then departs with her three companions by beginning to tell a creation story

Note: Following Native American way of thinking and the logic manifested in the novel as well as in the previous figure, the beginning is situated in the “East” point of the figure, East being a symbol of new beginnings.

For the 7-point structure of the 4 Indians’ creation stories, see the 1996 MA thesis by Doris Mary O’Brien (p.43). My diagram is a slightly modified version of her structure.

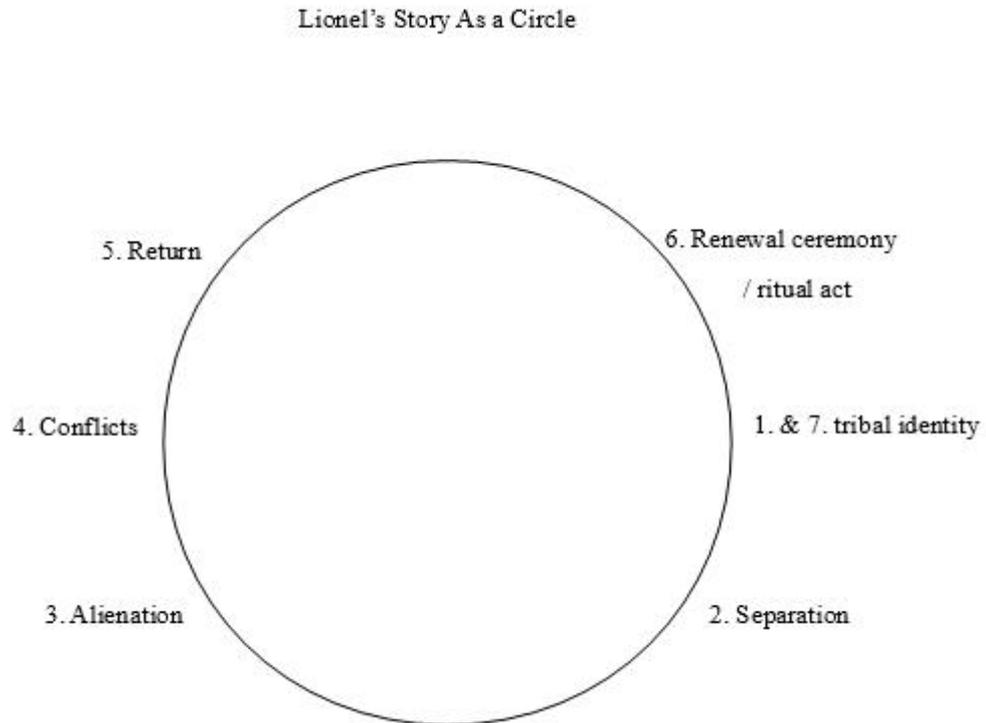


Figure 3: Lionel's Story As a Circle

1. Lionel's tribal identity is destroyed, and he dreams of being John Wayne rather than a Blackfoot
2. He is physically separated from his tribe, living in the city and not visiting home very often
3. Alienation from his tribal culture, and following misunderstandings lead to
4. Internal and external conflicts, especially with his aunt Norma who insists he needs to come home
5. He returns home, to Sun Dance, with ambivalent feelings
6. Renewal ceremony/ritual act in his case is giving away George Morningstar's jacket, a symbol of his desire to be John Wayne
7. Embracing his tribal identity, he defends tribal customs and situates himself as a Blackfoot man in the tribal circle

This figure is based on the diagram by Lutz (p.208) of his analysis of six stages of development in circular storylines in Native American fiction, discussed in section 2.2. I have only added numbers and short explanations on how his diagram applies to Lionel's story.

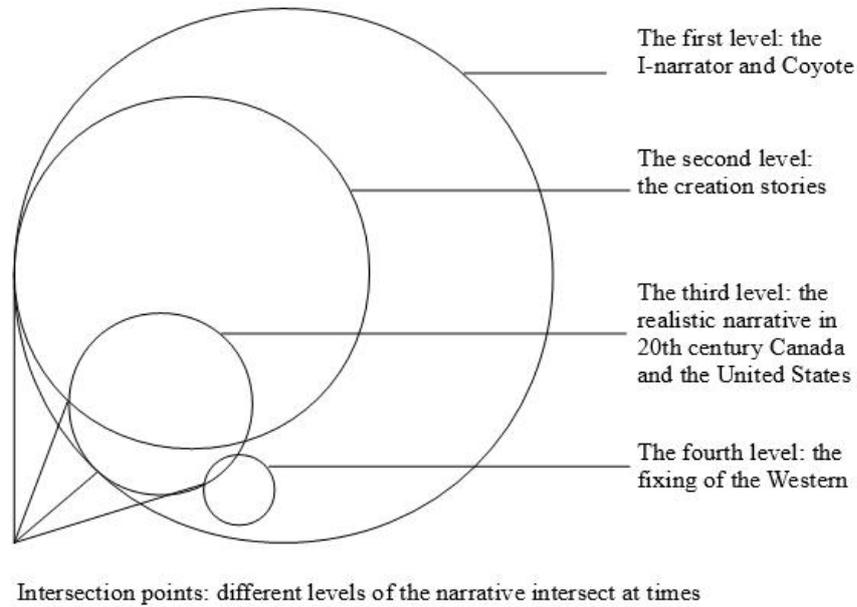
Levels of Narrative in *Green Grass, Running Water*

Figure 4: Levels of Narrative in *Green Grass, Running Water*

The first level with the I-narrator and Coyote includes storytelling, observation of all the stories, and participation in the second and third level by Coyote.

The second level consists of the creation stories of the four mythical women.

The third level, the realistic narrative of 20th century Canada and the United States, features Lionel and other human characters, but also the Native deities as four old Indians and Coyote, sometimes seen as a yellow dog, sometimes not seen nor heard at all by humans but very much participating in the story anyway.

The fourth level is the story of “fixing” the Western. It has been “fixed” already before, although that story is not told in the novel. The current “fixing” takes place in Blossom. Hence this story circle intersects with the realistic level narrative but is not fully embedded here, since part of the story has taken place elsewhere some other time.

Different levels of narratives intersect at times, but to conceptualize it well, I would need to use a mobile, three-dimensional model. My figure shows examples of two levels of the narrative intersecting, but in the novel there are times when even three levels are involved simultaneously, for instance when Coyote calls to the I-narrator on the phone to check on the events of Thought Woman’s creation story as he has been visiting Bill Bursum’s video store in the realistic level of the narrative (326-333).

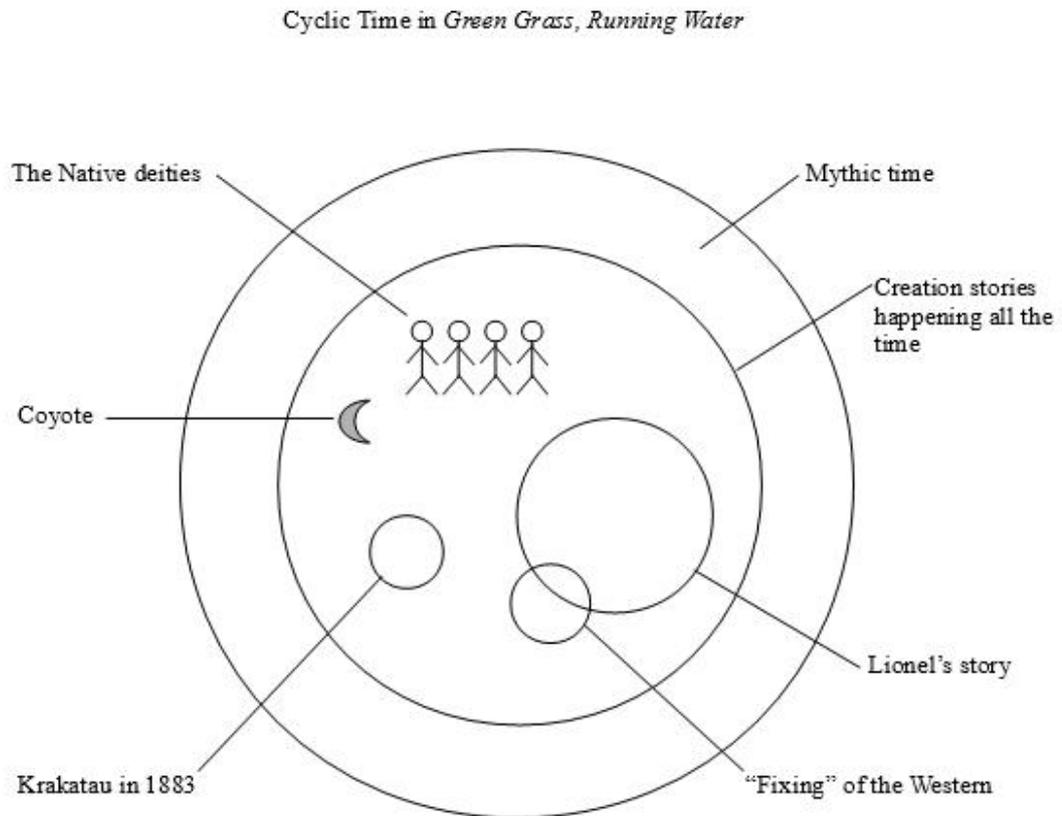


Figure 5: *Cyclic Time in Green Grass, Running Water*

This diagram provides a way of conceptualizing cyclic time in *Green Grass, Running Water*.

The largest circle signifies time, and it includes what could be called “Mythic time” – the time of creation stories. They have taken place in ancient history but continue to happen whenever the creation story is told again.

Lionel’s story in the novel takes place in late 20th century Alberta.

Lionel is present when the deities “fix” the Western at Bill Bursum’s video store. However, the first “fixing” of the film is only mentioned in the novel, and even though it is not told now, it is part of the story circle of “fixing” the Western, which has an impact on Lionel’s life.

Events revolving around Krakatau in 1883 have taken place before the deities meet Lionel, and that story is not told in the novel (p. 48). Following the Native American storytelling tradition and King’s hints in the novel, we can be sure it is a circular story, featuring the deities and Coyote, and while fixing something, they have caused something else to go wrong.

The deities and Coyote can move in time and space by the power of storytelling, as seen in the figure. Time is understood to be an endless resource, always around and never ending. The view of time resembles somewhat the Western understanding of space: it is all around us and it enables mythic characters to move in different directions, as they please. Thus, the deities and Coyote can move in time and space as easily as they move from one story to another, from the creation to Krakatau or Canada, not being limited by Western linear understanding of time.