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**The Trickster Figures in Thomas King and
Tomson Highway**

B.A. Major Thesis

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I declare that I have worked independently on this thesis using only the materials listed in the Bibliography.

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Introduction

Our cultural and historical background is something we can never lose. We learn from our ancestors; from their narratives and from their behavior and this vast knowledge goes with us for the rest of our life to be only shared by our future offspring. We experience this ancient technique of transferring information although we live in a modern era. These old stories possess certain magic in them; they hide an old wisdom that can help us even in this world of ultra-modern.

Mythology has a peculiar quality; it can not be seen and pointed directly and yet it affects our everyday life in the way we think and we imagine things. And even more important is mythology in the life of the Natives, although they live the same life as we do in these days. The narrating of stories has greater tradition and therefore importance in the lives of the Natives than it has in ours because the Natives were predominantly dependent on oral history and mythology. This influence of oral narratives can be traced in many contemporary literatures. Mythological figures still offer a mighty short cut, a key to the life of these days, because people's needs, desires, joys and worries have remained largely the same.

The Native literature has one more specialty—in almost all cultural backgrounds the Native culture has to fight with the culture of majority. This fight is difficult and can be compared to mythological fight between small and strong hero. It is not always clear who is going to win. Although the major culture is everywhere, pushing and overwhelming, the minority is able to find a way through it. Consequently, we can follow the blending of styles and forms. And also characters, because the Native writers use their mythological figures in their narratives. Sometimes explicitly and sometimes not, but we are able to trace them in the story. One of such inextinguishable characters is trickster. Small and certainly not the strongest one, he carries his point. To say, that this figure is just popular would

make him too narrow. He is certainly more than that—he lives the life of his own within our minds. As Hyde said in the title of one of his books, “trickster makes this world.” He shapes us so much that he becomes a part of us and his features can not be overlooked in our behavior and so it pays for the great mirror of our souls—literature. We need him to explain our world.

In my thesis I try to prove that trickster figures indeed appear in the in the contemporary prose and drama of Native writers. For a comparative analysis I have chosen Thomas King and Thomson Highway. They are both Native writers (although of different origin) and both are very popular with Native and non-Native audience. Their work is comical, but the comicality is a double-edged sword, because it reveals many current problems that Native societies have to face with. Trickster figures that appear in their stories are faithful to their mythological counterpart—although they act foolishly sometimes, they try to help the people to live a better life.

In the first part, the thesis deals with the theoretical approach to the character of a trickster. We learn who trickster is and in what form he usually appears in world mythologies. His functions and features are discussed. It is no easy task to perform, as trickster is a constantly changing character. Besides that, there are at least two different ways of looking at him, the one where he appears as a clown and a buffoon and the other, more seriously minded, a culture hero. It is specific of the Native tricksters that they merge these two traits together.

In the second part, the proposed features are confronted with characters of the work by two contemporary Canadian writers; in a novel *Medicine River* by Thomas King and in two plays by Tomson Highway: *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing*.

1 Who is trickster

As we can assume from the etymological founding of the word, TRICK+STER it is someone who tricks or cheats the others. The very origin of the lexeme TRICK lies in Latin word TRICCARE (to make trouble) which comes from Indo-European base TER, to turn.ⁱ

This is the etymology of the word used in English. But the native tale from which this character comes from have no common name across cultures. It is therefore sincere to say in the very beginning that trickster as a notion is in fact an abstraction, deduced by the scholars in the 19th century. There is no other common denominator for all these characters, who possess the features similar enough to be examined together. The reason simply being the fact, that there exist special names in all trickster narratives.

Nevertheless, Trickster remains one of the most fascinating characters ever. Although he can be found in virtually every culture, he is still shrouded in mystery. Despite the scholarly debates whether this character is diverse or rather universal phenomenon and what types can we possibly distinguish, we can for sure find common traces of tricksters in many world mythologies. Originally, the scholars thought that a home land for this figure is Northern America and the tales of its Native inhabitants, but then it was found that the typical trickster features can be seen also elsewhere. Among these features are ambiguity, trickery, shape-shifting, border crossing and other, they will be thoroughly discussed later.

The most known examples are Ananse, Eshu and Legba in Africa, in Western culture (of mainly European origin) tricksters such as Hermes, Saint Peter and Herschel (Jewish trickster), and Norse trickster Loki, then Asian tricksters such as Susa-no-no (Japanese), Sun Wuk'ung (The Chinese Monkey King), Agu Tampa (Tibetan), Krishna in India, and Horangi in Korea. (Hynes 2)

Apart from that, in the North America, we can differentiate several areas, with similar characters serving as trickster figures. These are Arctic and sub-Arctic where the trickster is usually called Raven, then there is Coyote, the trickster figure for the area of California, Oregon, the inland plateau, the Great Basin, the Southwest, and the southern plains; it is Rabbit or Hare in the Southeast; Spider in the northern plains and Wolverine and Jay in the parts of Canada. (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 121) These are the animal species that represent the trickster most often.

1.1 The form of tricksters

The form of figures with trickster features can be either zoomorphic or anthropomorphic or of unknown shape. It is true that tricksters shift their shape quite often, but this is not the case; each of them has a primary form in which he appears for most of the time. Åke Hultkrantz admits that trickster is often zoomorphic, but the form differs in Africa, Europe or North America. He offers an explanation based on extensive research presented by Harry Tegnaeus:

[in Africa]the steppe hunters mostly have theriomorphic [i.e. zoomorphic] heroes, whereas in other cultures ancestors, smiths and dead kings (in Kingdoms of course) play the role of culture heroes.

Hultkrantz continues,

[in] comparison in North America only Californian and Southwestern Indians know ancestors and chiefs (Montezuma) who appear as culture heroes. It seems that the strength of the hunting cultures in aboriginal North America has contributed to the zoomorphic culture heroes in North America. African divinities often have trickster qualities, whether they are human or animal-like.

Of course, there are some anthropomorphous tricksters, such as Wakdjunkagaⁱⁱ (Winnebago) who is sometimes referred to as the Old manⁱⁱⁱ. Then there are some tricksters of unknown form, e.g. Manabozo (Ojibway), Glooskap^{iv} (Maine) and also tricksters whose form is rather tricky—for example Iktomi which means Spider, but the character itself is not a spider. (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 121)

Alvarsson, who studied the Weenhayek in South America, brings an interesting attachment on the form of 'Ahutsetajwaj. This anthropomorphous 'Ahusetawaj has an animal parallel, a bird called 'Ahutsaj. The bird itself is said to be "beautiful, smart and fearless carrion eater" and is admired for his ability to survive in changing environment, because he lives in the forest as well as in towns. The 'Weenhayek's culture hero is also sometimes called 'Ahutsaj too. He is usually described as a "young man' who is 'beautiful' and 'sturdy'. He is not a shaman (a *hiyawu*), but he has certain divinatory powers and he uses the drum (one of the shaman's accessories) to 'see' the evil forces in action in distant places." (Alvarsson 2) We can follow the same pattern, when we translate the word 'Ahutsaj. It means "someone who does something to the dead" and yet another sense of this word is taken into account, which is "a ceremonial dance used to expel evil spirits, ahut, danced in a circle" we can think of 'Ahutsaj as someone "who expels [or exterminates] the evil," a description fitting for the character of a culture hero. Here we can see that anthropomorphous form is more appropriate for the hero, as there are more meanings joined in him than just those attached to the bird.

1.1.1 Some animals are more frequent than the others

Speaking about the animal forms most often considered to be tricksters, there are some striking resemblances across the cultures. The animals which often serve as tricksters have something in common; there is a special notion in the culture. It is their behavior, what makes them so special. But it is not necessarily their behavior which makes the base for the stories. People projected their qualities on the animals to make them more vivid. In this feature, there is a strong simile with fables. The most important are the ascribed qualities not the animal form itself, as Radin explains:

Trickster himself is, not infrequently, identified with specific animals, such as raven, coyote, hare, spider, but these animals are only secondarily to be equated with concrete forms. Basically he possesses no well-defined and fixed form. (Radin xxiii-xxiv)

However, the most common animal depicted is for sure Coyote or his relatives—foxes, where there are no coyotes. In Europe, fox is a symbol of cunningness, since Sumerian culture. It often appears in fables, in the classic Greek ones by Aesop and also in more modern ones such as Renart the Fox in France or Czech Cunning Little Vixen^v, not mentioning the various proverbs dealing with cunningness of this animal.^{vi} Fox has a special position also in the East, e.g. in Japan, the fox, or Kitsune is a messenger connected with supernatural powers, doing both good and wrong, and with unconsciousness.^{vii} People chose these animal because their behavior as they observed it since time immemorial.

French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss does not make any difference between symbolic animal and its concrete individual. He assumed that these animals must possess a special position within the structure of animal species, but it does not seem to be true, because some animals do not follow this pattern. In his book, *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss argued that the Natives deal with the natural environment surrounding them according to certain key based on the system of opposites that reflects their apprehension of the universe. The first division is binary (the earth and the sky, the dark and the light) and then they divide the world further. That is why, he argues, the number four possesses such magic values. They diversify the world known to him into spheres (the earth, water, underwater, sky) and according to this pattern they arrange their society into clan and phratries. In the same manner they diversify the flora and fauna. The scientific scheme is useless for them, because they build the system on the signs they can approach. The animals are thus divided into skyey, earthly and water animals or according the way they get the food as herbivores, carnivores and carrion eaters. The latter was of main interest for Lévi-Strauss, as he claimed that the most common tricksters are Raven and Coyote, both carrion-eaters, because this feature is striking for the Natives. Carrion-eaters eat meat as carnivores but do not hunt their prey as herbivores. This makes them transcend the

boundaries that majority of animals follow. But as this is true for Raven and Coyote, it certainly does not apply to Hare or Spider and the other non-animal figures.

The fact, that tricksters are depicted as animals, and largely the same animals, does need to tell something. If we look at the typical behavior of ravens, coyotes, foxes, spiders and hares, we might follow certain behavioral patterns. All these animals live near to human settlements so they can be observed in detail and they behave in a significant way. They are very resourceful, able to survive in changing environment and they are also cunning in a way, not easy to catch.

When I was at the Museum of American Indian in Washington D.C., I asked Ken Cortiz a native guide in the museum why are these animals, such as coyote, hare and raven, very often associated with the trickster figure. He told me, that it is because their behavior, that can teach the people something. It might have been just a layman's view, but this guide was a descendant of Navaho and Pueblo people and grew up among these traditional, witty and at the same time educative, tales.

The relation of the trickster character and the animal itself is explained by Barre Toelken, speaking about a Navajo Coyote:

There is no possible distinction between Ma'i, the *animal* we recognize as a coyote in the fields, and Ma'i the personification of Coyote power in all coyotes, and Ma'i the *character* (trickster, creator, buffoon) in legends and tales, and Ma'i, the symbolic disorder in the myths. Ma'i is not a composite, but a complex; a Navajo would see no reason to distinguish separate aspects. (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 121)

By no means, coyote is a special animal in the American West and it is no wonder he got into a lot of folklore tales. Hyde excerpts a story about coyotes which avoided carcasses poisoned with strychnine. (Hyde, 20-21) Wolves ate them and died but coyotes wised up. The experience that a coyote gets rarely caught in the trap is presented by Leyden:

it is difficult to escape the conclusion that coyotes...have a sense of humor. How else to explain, for instance, the well-known propensity of experienced coyotes to dig up traps, turn them over, and urinate or defecate on them? (Hyde 21)

Although they are never the same, all the tricksters share certain important features and these will be discussed later.

1.2 A trickster or a culture hero; the problem of a function

Reading and analyzing the trickster stories the reader quickly arrives at the problem of a complexity of trickster character and the functions he might supply. He does not appear only as a buffoon (trickster playing tricks) but also as someone called a culture hero who benefits the humankind and is in a sense a creator.

However, the American Indians reckon another being as a creator; the Earthmaker. This can be seen in many foundation myths. For example in *The Medicine Rite Foundation Myth*^{viii}, which Paul Radin mentions in his *Trickster*. (Radin 60, 145) Here the Earthmaker created world and then he made Trickster to show people how to live. Trickster, possessing the qualities for which he is so famous, failed. The Earthmaker additionally created other beings (Turtle, Bladder, and Him, who has human heads as ear-rings) to fulfill the same purpose, but they failed too. Only Hare, the last created being was able to perform this task and therefore it was him who showed the people the right way of living.

In Winnebago trickster cycle (presented by Radin) the situation gets more complicated because there is a trickster Wakdjunkaga (who in the end reforms himself and becomes a benefactor for the mankind) and then Hare, who is more a culture hero (benefices from the very beginning) with some trickster features. It is precisely blending of these traits, which confuses the whole problem and consequently the scholarly debate.

As the possible functions of this figure are concerned, there are many patterns which can be followed. First of all, the stories discussed here are part of oral literal heritage, and their primary function is therefore historic. These cultures never put their

history down and used more or less sacred tales to convey the tradition on, although not everyone had the right to tell the story. (Radin 111)

The trickster stories are largely satirical, so the main function is the entertaining one. (Radin 151) Associated with this one, the “instructive” function is always close by. (Hynes 7) Similarly, Tomson Highway, a Cree writer, considers Trickster to be a “pivotal figure” of North American Indian Mythology, and his role “to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth.” (Highway 1989 12).

That is also one of the reasons, in my opinion, why the overcome association with Christian devil must be wrong. This role of a ridiculous and as well ridiculing teacher is the most important one, because without the strengthening morals, the merely jocular stories would be rubbed away. It is the educative part that keeps them remembered. Barre J. Toelken offers the relationship of serious and funny matters present in Navajo Coyote stories. There is a short exchange between Toelken and Navajo raconteur Yellowman:

Why...if Coyote is such an important character...., does Yellowman tell such funny stories about him? Yellowman's answer: “They are not funny stories.” Why does everybody laugh, then? “They are laughing at the way Ma'i [the Navaho Coyote trickster] does things and the way the story is told. Many things about the story are funny, but the story is not funny.” Why tell stories? “If my children hear the stories, they will grow up to be good people; if they don't hear them, they will turn out to be bad.” Why tell them to adults? “Through the stories everything is made possible.” (Doty, Hynes 29)

Trickster, living down his mishaps, also reminds us of our human nature and abilities, to know our proportions and not to try to exceed them. In contrast to shaman who is able to perform the supranatural deeds more or less successfully, trickster always fails because he does not follow the rules carefully. It is part of the instructive function of the character as are the following functions connected with learning social abilities.

Specific interconnected functions are shown by Hynes (206-14) in relation to the ridiculousness of trickster. He suggests that trickster myths serve as “ritual vents for social frustrations.” Through ridiculing the sacred and overturning the rules of social order, the

society can avert possible disruptions. Swiss psychologist Jung considers this function to be a necessity, having pointed to the example of parodying the sacred rites in the Middle Ages.

Another function alluded by Hynes is “reaffirming the belief system.” (207) Trickster’s negative example are ridiculed and thus eliminated. Hynes introduces the term “metaplay” by which he means trickster’s different approach to life, his alternative behavior. This alternative is important, since it can grow into plausible alternative for the future. Although trickster ridicules the very basic elements of human behavior, he still reminds us that every social and religious concept may be subject to change. (212) Through his creativity trickster breaks taboos; but taboos can be only broken when the time is ripe for it—when the society no longer considers breaking the taboos harmful. This happens only when the group is socially coherent enough to allow someone to play with its norms. (cf. Makarius 230)

The last function of “a psychic explorer” mentioned by Hynes is what Radin called “*speculum menti*”, the mirror of the mind, “within which the central unreasonable human struggles are played out.” (Radin xxiv, Hynes 208)

Kerényi adds one more reason why the archaic society should have needed a trickster:

His function in an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology ... is to add disorder to order and so make a whole ... Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of disorder is the trickster. (185)

The function of a culture hero can also be traced by various explanatory motifs in the stories. As the styles of the stories are often mixed, there are no pure tricksters or culture heroes. Nevertheless, we can see quite clearly where the trickster acts as a culture hero, because of the different style and a more serious message. As a culture hero, he is the

positive and inventive, his deeds explain the people origin of the things. This conception is rather mythological and covers the need to explain the unknown.

Alvarsson offers yet another function of the trickster; in case of 'Ahutsetajwaj—the 'Weenhayek's culture hero plays a certain role in “formation and fortification of a 'modern' (or even 'post-modern') 'Weenhayek ethnic identity.” The 'Weenhayek identify their wrong decisions with his and refer to him as “a true 'Weenhayek—in its worst configuration.” (Alvarsson 1, 4)^{ix} Similarly, Highway considers trickster to play a certain role in cultural identification: “Without him—and without the spiritual health of this figure—the core of Indian culture would be gone forever.” (Highway 1988 xii)

1.3 The main theoretical approaches on the tricksters of the North America

The main problem discussed among the scholars is the question of divinity of the trickster and what he stands for. It is difficult to answer this question as there is plethora of myths, each of them being slightly different. Then there are shifts of thinking in time, such as the theory of evolution brings and the difference between field and non field research. Then there is also a methodological discrepancy sketched out by Hynes and Doty that deals with general and particular approach. (2) The former idea of one trickster figure with features common to all seems to be overcome in favor of the particular tricksters with specific tasks and cultural background. In my opinion, diverse and complex as this character is, he still possesses the qualities for which he is called trickster; and with these the second part of this thesis is going to deal.

The first contact with Indian myths gave rise to misconception, as Åke Hulkrantz quotes from Paul de Jeune's *Relation of What Occurred in New France in the Year 1634*: “they have burdened this truth [about the flood] with a great many irrelevant fables.” The

Jesuit fathers among whom de Jeune belonged found in the myths a lot of similes with the story of the Bible. The whole religious environment was different. Europe lived in the monotheistic religion and therefore the first Europeans could not abandon this scheme of mind when they got into polytheistic system. According to Lewis Hyde the polytheism is one of factors for creating trickster myths. (11) Naturally, the Christian mind of the time was not prepared for the markedly ambiguous type of character and for all that the first Europeans associated the mischievous traits in trickster with the Devil. This misapprehension might be also the reason, why some of the Natives were reluctant to reveal the stories, not speaking about the sacred character some of them posses.

The American scholars were the first to meet the Native myths. In the second half of the nineteenth century, they reckoned trickster mainly as a religious figure. (Hultkrantz)^x Such pre-evolutionary view took into account only the idea of degeneration of divine being into a culture hero. Evolutionistic view sees a culture hero to be developed from a buffoon and leading up to divine being.

The possibility of progress from lower to higher than became the leading idea of the time. Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung refers to trickster as of “archetypal structure of extreme antiquity” (Jung 1972, 200)^{xi}. He did not think about him in the relation trickster or culture hero, rather focused on the essence of this character, a “shadow” conception of the trickster, e.g. hidden trait, but present in everybody in the form of a shadow (Jung 1972, 202). Jung based his theory on his term ‘collective unconsciousness;’ the image common to all humankind. The archetypes are types of images revealing from the unconsciousness. When there is a suitable situation, people follow the archetype that suits it, even though they have not been in the situation before. Although Jung studied mentally defective patients who had strikingly similar visions, his conclusion are useful also in the life of mentally sound people. He proves that trickster is an archetype common to all by

offering a historic comparison to medieval Fools' Holiday in Europe, shameful plays which brought the balance to the rigid world of rite by parodying it. These plays were performed in a sacred space until the beginning of the sixteen century when they were banned by and from the church. Later they continued in the profane theatre. The fact that this trickster-like plays are present for so long, suggest according to Jung that we need them: "it because of a therapeutic effect" (Jung 1972, 205), and later he sums up his theory:

Trickster is a collective shadow figure, an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the character is never absent as a component of a personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually. (Jung 1972, 209)

Another view published provides Franz Boas. He alludes the term "transformer," suggesting that a culture hero did not create the world, only transformed already the existing. From Boas, the founder of American anthropology continues the tradition of pragmatist scholars who let the "folkloristic interpretation widely overshadow all the others." (Hultkrantz)

In Europe, on the other hand, more theosophical research was done. The figure of Heilbringer was broadly discussed with the emphasis to the spirituality and not the folklore. The relation of the Creator and a culture hero was the main issue as Kurt Breysig glosses:

Heilbringer is on the way to acquire the qualities of a higher spirit and he finally becomes God. Raven and other culture heroes are still close to the animals whose names they carry, Glooskap is more human and thus represents the road to God (and is as we know almost devoid of a tricky character). (Hultkrantz)

Another incentive scholar, Werner Müller, sees the division between high god and a culture hero. The former creates a universe and cosmic dimensions, whether the latter one "acts for the individual human beings, smooths out the earth, introduces the religious and secular institutions that help mankind to live on." (Hultkrantz)

A more recent American research emphasizes the combination of trickster a culture hero features (opposed to Radin that considers divinity to be a secondary trait), or directly considers the divine features to be predominant. Combination of these traits is important for Mac Linscott Ricketts and also Weston La Barre.

These scholars support the idea of trickster not as a creator or a deity but as a shaman. For Ricketts all the jocular features of a trickster are merely a parody on shaman rituals and his cult. By his failures trickster shows people they are merely humans and their abilities are therefore restricted. Trickster thus stands for man himself, and “is the symbol of the self-transcending mind of the humankind and of the human quest for knowledge and the power that knowledge brings.” (Ricketts 87) Although Radin did not support this idea directly, he draws from time to time the same conclusions (152). Hultkrantz concludes his survey with his own opinion; trickster is a supernatural mystic being (can not be deity because he is not worshipped within a cult) and he considers him to be the “less successful double of a Supreme being” (Hultkrantz). Although he recognizes the necessity to combine the features of a transformer and a culture hero, the religious frame is primary for him and the trickster aspect is merely more visible but not more important.

1.4 *The trickster features*

Understanding the full meaning of the trickster figure in its tale needs detailed study of the environment it grows from. However, spread as trickster figures are, they always fulfill the same functions and possess more or less the same characteristics. The term trickster is coined from outside not inside of studied societies, but to handle him for the purpose of literature, it is perhaps useful to use the denomination as a shortcut, as T. O. Beidelman admits. (Hynes 210) This shortcut is not far away from truth, because the typical trickster traits do not vary too among the scholars. It is important to notice that this chapter deals with trickster in slightly different approach than functional. This chapter is

not about what a trickster has an impact on, but rather how he is seen in the tales. When trying to abstract his most common features, we will get the material for further study.

The most fitting description of a trickster is movement, appetite and his ambiguous principle of behaving. This basic pattern can be more specified to a few closely following schemes. It is virtually impossible to describe trickster at all points, because as he is always contextually defined, it is therefore mainly the principle we can compare. Laura Makarius speaks about the shared characteristics serving as a matrix to survey the trickster figures and then “judge their degree of ‘tricksterness’.” (Hynes 34) And it is this general pattern that we will follow in the comparative part rather than single features.

The most important traits of a trickster thus may be rounded up as following:

1.4.1 Boundary crossing

From the point of the location, trickster does not belong anywhere. He moves constantly and therefore he is never situated at the centre. His position is always marginal, although he influences the whole society. This marginal position is closely connected to being at or rather behind a boundary and it results in trickster’s anomalous position in the community. He always seems to be outlandish. (Hynes 34) No social rules apply to him or rather he does not follow them. Trickster crosses and merges the boundaries and therefore he is a symbol of gates and intersections. Lévi-Strauss thought trickster to be connected with carrion-eaters because of this obvious merging of categories.

Not only his presence at the outskirts and boundaries is significant, but also the ability to cross on the other side. This notion of movement is one of characteristics of a trickster. He is referred to be an “aimless wanderer,” because this is how most of stories begin. The aimlessness of the movement alludes the way how trickster moves; without any plan or restriction driven only by his lust or appetite. The movement itself stands for something uncontrollable and thus negative. Through movement trickster is connected

with a journey; both spiritual (as a messenger and guider of the souls, attached to the death) and also physical. By changing their places, things get new meaning and trickster is also known as the revealer of the hidden, (the hermeneutics after Hermes, being the discipline dealing with interpreting). (Doty, Hynes 31) One of the most powerful boundaries is that between the world of the living and the dead. Trickster is often referred to as a messenger of death and guider of the souls. In this he is closely connected with the sphere of the divine and acts rather as a culture hero.

1.4.2 Ambiguity

Another noticeable feature is trickster's ambiguity. Paul Radin put it as clearly as possible:

Trickster is at on at same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped himself ... He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He posses no values, moral or social ... yet through his actions all values come into being. (Radin xxiii)

Hynes calls trickster a "situation invertor," because he "can turn a bad situation into good one, and then back into a bad one." (37) This is also the reason why the Christian thinking of the past could not cope with the concept of trickster figure and simplified it into a figure equal to devil. As a situation invertor he can transform gnawed off pieces of his penis into various plants and food good for people, as Wakdjunkaga does. (Radin 38-39) Trickster's ambiguity is projected into his balancing (and also entering into, because he crosses the boundaries) diverse spheres; he mingles sacred and lewd and morality with mischievousness.

1.4.3 Shape-shifting

Trickster's ambiguity can indicate that he only vaguely knows who he is or what he is task in the world. As an ambiguity of a special kind, trickster often disguises and even changes sexes. He is able to transform himself into whatever creature to be successful in

his intention because he always transforms himself in order to get something. So, the Navaho Coyote trickster becomes a dish in order to obtain food or in a tree to capture birds. (Hynes 36) The Winnebago Wakdjunkaga disguises in woman in order to marry chief's daughter; precisely to scorn the chief, to have sex and to feast in the wedding ceremony. (Radin 22-23, episode 20)

The role of trickster gender is an interesting one; because there are said (by European male scholars) to be almost exquisitely male tricksters. Hyde proves there are a few female tricksters, operating always in matrilineal societies only and where there is always more significant male trickster beside the female one. The female tricksters possess almost the same characteristics, except for the lust. Hyde presents his opinion that in the matrilineal societies (e.g. Hopi) they might "protect women's powers from fundamental change." (340)

If there are some matrilineal societies with male tricksters, it is not the case at all times. Why is it so that female tricksters are less important? Is the prevailing patriarchal system (because even matrilineal societies are patriarchal) the reason? The most plausible answer can be found in Hyde as well. Trickster in his role of a buffoon has something male in him and therefore he is not associated with females, except for temporarily disguises. It is his sexual behavior which would have had much more serious consequences for woman as a trickster and also the theme of trickster stories that aims to something else than childbearing:

[T]hese might be stories about non-procreative creativity and so get attached to the sex that doesn't give birth. It should be noted that trickster's fabled sex drive rarely leads to any offspring. Tricksters do not make new life, they rearrange what is already at hand. (Hyde 341)

Strikingly enough, the only Native writer to enter this debate, Tomson Highway, hold completely different view. (Highway 12-13) He maintains there is no real gender ascribed to trickster, because most Indian languages do not differ among genders in terms

of language. It thus may be only the view influenced by our gender perception. If a mythological figure behaves rather as a male, there is an assumption to consider him to be a male.

Hyde proclaims that trickster is a great shape-shifter which means that he not only “he shifts the shape of his own body but also that, given the materials of this world, he demonstrates the degree to which the way we shaped them may be altered.” (91) He challenges the arrangement of this world, he turns order into disorder and “undo[es] the hierarchy of the world ... disorder[s] the cosmos.” (260). Hyde, speaking specifically about Loki, calls this quality “cataclysmic change-agent.” (101)

1.4.4 Appetite

Why is trickster doing all this? Trickster is interested only in himself and in supplying all his needs. This is an animal trait in him. He is always hungry and driven by his lust. In Winnebago trickster cycle (and not only there) hunger and lust is associated with trickster’s intestines and phallus. Surviving (thereupon eating) and reproduction are the strongest motifs of animals and humans alike. Food seems to be trickster’s main impetus. As Hyde brilliantly remarked, it is his insatiable hunger that drives trickster into his cunningness and lying. (57, 65) Also his sexual desires drive trickster into forbidden places (Uncle Tompa breaking into nunnery; Hynes 42), or homosexual intercourses. “Takwjwaj tries out everything, not just one thing.” (Alvarsson)

In some stories the trickster is not hungry, but soon after beginning he violates an important rule because he forgets or because he is much more curious than careful and he becomes hungry immediately (Tsimshian Raven Cycle). (Hyde 23-25)

1.4.5 Cunningness

This feature is most strikingly common with trickster animal similes. None of the animals depicted (coyote, hare, raven, spider) are strong and powerful in a sense of a

typical hero. Wakdjunkaga is not given detail physical description; yet we can assume he is not typical hero of a tale, someone who is supposed to be followed. He suffers from an insatiable hunger and lust. Despite the fact he often presents himself as numbskull, he can swindle the others to get what he wants. There are a few episodes in Wakdjunkaga cycle that shows trickster cheating creatively the others (mainly episodes 4, 12, 20, 27 and 29) in which Wakdjunkaga tricks buffalo, dances and kills the ducks pretending that he is great singer, marries chief's daughter, and eats the children and their mothers who believed him. Hyde supplies an interesting comment on "the bungling host" stories in the Winnebago cycle, where trickster hosts four animals (muskrat, snipe, woodpecker and a pole-cat; Radin 41-49). Because trickster "has the ability to copy the other, but no ability of his own" (Hyde 43), he pretends to try hunting for the feast. He is unsuccessful, of course, both for being very clumsy and relying on his friends helping him. Despite his friends are reluctant to do this, because they foreboded what would happen, they help him in the end. In this view he is poorer than the animals because he lacks an inborn knowledge.

1.4.6 Unconsciousness

In the beginning, it is perhaps useful to mention, in order to see Wakdjunkaga's adventures in proper context that the Winnebago use cycles to narrate their trickster story. That is why it is possible to see a certain development of the main character, but not all the Native narratives are presented in cycles.

In Winnebago cycle, the lack of inborn knowledge makes trickster absolutely naïve in the beginning of the story. He is thrown in the world with hunger and left alone. In the beginning, Wakdjunkaga is so much ignorant that he is not aware of his body and his functions. He act unconsciously and follows only his instincts. For various reasons, he is never able to follow the rules given. His hands are fighting and he even hurts himself because he does not expect that this would happen. He can not predict what would happen,

because he does not know it. When he cuts his hands (Radin: episode 5), burns his anus (episode 14), and starts defecating after eating laxative bulbs (very common episode, here nr. 23) he slowly begins to perceive that his deeds affect his body. He starts to call himself “The Foolish One” (Radin 12) and since he has got a name he begins to be an individualized being. He even admits that the people are right, calling him like that. He then starts to define his body more precisely and adjusts the length of his intestines and penis to the normal.

In the beginning of trickster acts foolishly and is ridiculed for it but according to Hyde trickster is eventually able to learn things in the same manner as young coyote, the animal, has to learn from his parents. (45) Ricketts shares this opinion when he states trickster to be the symbol of humankind. (cf. Ricketts 87 above) However, most of trickster stories do not occur in cycles but in freely arranged stories, so the development of the figure is hard to observe. On the contrary in the end of the Winnebago cycle, trickster is fully socialized, acts consciously, and remembers what his task on earth is and then he proceeds to heaven.

1.4.7 Attraction for dirt

Trickster’s attraction of dirt of all kinds is a marked feature. Hynes uses Lévi-Strauss’s expression and calls trickster “sacred and lewd bricoleur.” (Hynes 42) It is his ambiguous position that allows trickster to be divine and obscene at the same time. Indeed for trickster no “taboo is too sacred.” (37) Trickster violates the rules and especially the taboos which are connected with sexual, scatological or gastronomical matters. Because of his lust he commits incest and breaks other blood taboos; because of his foolishness is from time to time soiled from feces; and because of his insatiable hunger eats his own intestines. (Makarius 68, Radin 27, 18 respectively)

Hyde turns attention to what all can dirt stand for; not only forbidden things and taboos, but also as a symbol of revivification, dirt can serve as something nurturing new life and offering the missing part to over purified society. (181)

1.4.8 Culture hero traits

Another possible meaning of dirt can be trickster attraction to thieving and lying which is closer to culture hero traits of trickster figures. Hyde proposes that by stealing trickster challenges the arrangement of the world and offers a new one, because he is often born in poor conditions and acquires not much strength, he has limited possibilities to accomplish it.

For example, Krishna (but not only him) “steals because the objects of his desires are abundant but human order reduced their circulation.” (292) Ricketts pursues further Joseph Campbell’s idea, that trickster stole all the humans needed from divinities, because otherwise he could not acquire them and they would have to do without them:

All that humans have gained from the unseen powers beyond—fire, fish, game, fresh water, and so forth—have been obtained, by necessity, through trickery or theft. Trickster stole them for the humans, but trickster here stands for the humans alone—they had to wrest them from the owners ‘in the beginning’. (Ricketts 91-92).

These achievements are examples of intentional beneficencing the humankind, but sometimes the trickster’s gifts comes from his adventures and are only secondarily doomed to help people. These are the cases where the role of a trickster and a culture hero merge. Wakdjunkaga turn his penis into useful plants and gives the people medicine after they release his head from an elk’s skull. (Radin 39, 35)

There are often examples of trickster acting as a culture hero, but still following his instincts; he has the opportunity to save work for people (Hare; Radin 85-6) or retrieve the dead from the land of dead (Coyote; Hyde 86-87 and Manabozho; Makarius 76) and he

almost achieves the aim but always fails before completing the task and so the humankind is doomed to work hard and die forever.

1.5 Conclusion of the theoretical part

We could have seen that the stories about the beings we can as a shorthand call tricksters share certain important features that repeat again and again in various parts of the world, although each figure comes from the different background. Their popularity is enormous which proves that people need their ancient wisdom even in this modern time.

And yet it seems unlikely that trickster stories would have disappeared entirely from the traditions of the American Indians ... the trickster enabled the people to endure what even gods cannot cure ultimately, the absurdity of human existence. (Ricketts 105)

2 Trickster figures in contemporary Native literature

2.1 *Thomas King's Medicine River*

Thomas King is a contemporary Native writer living in Canada. He was born in 1943. His father was Cherokee and mother was of Greek and German descent and although King grew up in Northern California, now he lives in Guelph, Canada and is a Canadian citizen. He is an awarded novelist, short-story writer, scriptwriter and photographer. *Medicine River* is his first novel, published in 1989. Then he published a book for children called *A Coyote Columbus Story* (1990) and in the same year he wrote *All My Relation, An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Prose*. In 1993 he was nominated for Governor General's Award for a novel *Green Grass, Running Water*. His so far last book *Truth and Bright Water* was published in 1997. King was a head of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota for a several years and now he teaches Native Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Guelph. He also works for Canadian Broadcast.

Medicine River is a collection of short stories following two main lines. In the main line, Will, the narrator, describes characters he meets in Medicine River, a small town bordering with a Blackfoot reserve. The second line consists of Will's childhood memories. Will returns to Medicine River for his mother funeral and then after few months back in Toronto, he moves to Medicine River for good.

It can not be assumed that in contemporary literature a trickster figure would be always seen openly as it was in the myths and stories of the past. However, trickster is alive and his influence is present. In King's *Medicine River* a reference to traditions can be seen in the emphasis on story telling, because a lot of characters narrate stories to the others and one of the elders wonders why the white people always want him to tell stories

about the past as if there were no new stories with same wise message. (King 165) This is the same with trickster stories today. There are the old traditional tales, but there are also new tales that incorporate the knowledge of today. Or as Paul Radin put it: “Every generation occupies itself with interpreting Trickster anew....” (Hyde 3)

Therefore, we have to bear in mind that “degree of ‘tricksterness’” as Makarius above indicated. In *Medicine River* there is one character, which strongly resembles some of trickster features. His name is Harlen Bigbear. We encounter him already on the first page and he keeps being Will’s (and everybody else’s) companion at all times. He does not possess all typical trickster features, though we can interpret many of them from his behavior.

Will introduces Harlen with a comparison to the prairie wind when he describes the weather of Medicine River:

Then there was the wind. I generally try to keep my mouth shut about the wind. Harlen Bigbear was like the prairie wind ... You never knew when he was coming or when he was going to leave. (King 1)

We can connote something rather negative connected with the prairie wind, strong and unpleasant when it blows too long. Wind is mentioned also later in the book with exactly this meaning. Will compares Harlen to symbol of an unrestrained movement. And indeed, Harlen moves unexpectedly and is present everywhere.

Harlen went to everything. He went to all that powwows. He went to all that funerals. He went to all the weddings, births and most of court cases. Any time there was a gathering of two or more Indians in a hundred-mile radius around Medicine River, chances were one of them was Harlen. (86)

Will makes yet another comparison which is connected with Harlen’s mental abilities rather than physical movement. Will declares: “[Harlen]’d sort of float around a subject for a while like ... buzzards,” because Harlen was never able (or perhaps not willing) to get to the point directly (51-52). He actually “wanders” or floats around the topic, asking questions that can not be answered.

Harlen may not cross the borders literally but certainly he moves aimlessly and doing something here and there he virtually keeps the community running. That is also why Harlen is largely inconsistent creature; he has no fixed, long termed plan concerning himself to follow. He lives in a strange reality of his own; he only presumes what the others want, what they feel or what they suffer from. He decides on the matter without even asking the person and even if he did ask them he would not believe their version. Only his truth remains plausible: “You never knew just how far Harlen’s *probables* were from *actuals*, and most of the time, neither did Harlen.” (27)

He is immensely curious and he gathers information of all kinds. He does not shift shapes, but he keeps shifting the areas of his interests. “Harlen kept up on all the gossip. Nothing happened on the reserve or in town that Harlen didn’t know about.” (26)

On the other hand, Harlen does not reveal much, or rather anything about himself. Everything Will knows, he got from a co-player, Floyd, a bit talkative person. Trickster too, living the way he does, remains quite ambiguous and thus unpredictable. Will comments on unclarity of Harlen’s intentions several times. “There were dangerous curves and corners in Harlen’s mind, and none of them was marked,” (62) and “Sometimes you needed a map of Harlen’s mind to keep up with him.” (122) These allude to the trickster unpredictability that accompanies Harlen.

Harlen enters the story as a pushful, enterprising element. For instance, he looks up and comments on all photographers in Medicine River to show Will he would have here a no competition whatsoever. However, later in the story we learn that Harlen is also naïve and almost an over sensitive sort of person. He says to Will: “People are fragile. Doesn’t take much to break something,” but then he goes on comparing the advantages of starfish, which can produce missing limb much more easily. (29-30) It is precisely Harlen’s combination of well-minded but annoying and foolish ideas that drives everybody crazy.

He is also completely unaware of this feature of his; when he takes Will to Martha Oldcrow, the local marriage doctor, Will shows that his relationship to Harlen is more than ambiguous and he decides to punish him bit:

On the way back, when we crossed the river again, I was going to drown Harlen ... I was going to drown him slow. Let him up a couple of times, before I shoved his head all the way into the mud. (134)

When they crossed the river (originally because Harlen got lost), Will put his head under the water, which surprised Harlen altogether: “Damn, Will. Why’d you do that?”(136)

Pursuing his aim, Harlen can be stubborn and stiff hearted, making no allowances for the inflicted. Whether it is his basketball coaching “I don’t yell at the boys, Will.” (123) or his poking into other people’s business, “Every so often, Harlen could be blunt as a brick,” (129) it sharply contrasts with Harlen’s assertion on sensitivity—that he can feel someone’s depression, because he has an ear for it. (99)

Another important feature here is the connection with trickster appetite. Although Harlen does not suffer from hunger or uncontrollable sexual desires, he has got other strong motifs to follow. Appetite can be easily changed for eagerness, which has the gives us the advantage of a larger use with meaning preserved. The same wholehearted effort trickster put into finding enough food, Harlen (as a modern man), puts into making other people happy. Yet even in the question of food, he is rather spontaneous, and he feeds himself freely on Will’s provisions. Perhaps his eager helping other people is just a result of his unhappy past (he lost his wife in a car accident), but in my opinion, the original matter is not important. Rather than the content it is the form that is crucial. So Harlen is eager to help and moreover “indefatigable” in his effort (94). If he collects interests and gossips about all members of the community, he does it only to help them.

Helping was Harlen’s specialty. He was like a spider on a web. Every so often, someone would come along and tear off a piece of the web or poke a hole in it, and

Harlen would come scuttling along and throw out filament after filament until the damage was repaired. (King 29)

As sure as Spider on a web connotes feeling of no escape possible, so are the people Harlen wants to help treated. To make the comparison even more fitting, part of his name, “harl,” means a filament.^{xii} Predictably, Harlen views his help positively, as “general maintenance” among friends, but the inflicted speak rather about negative “meddling.” (King 29) Throughout the whole book Harlen remarks: “If you have any questions, you just call, even in the middle of the night.” and “That’s what friends are for.” (33, 98)

Another trickster like feature is Harlen’s ability to sniff out the potential unhappiness. Will comments on this in connection with Harlen’s charity: “Harlen always goes looking for the good in a person. And even if he couldn’t find it, he assumed that it was there, buried somewhere.” (145) As Wakdjunkaga needs plethora of food and is able to find it because he has a special gift for it, Harlen has got his ear for depression which leads him right to the centre of unhappiness.

His methods are quite controversial, because he is very persistent. He says: “You know, Will, I’m not one to butt into other’s people business, but you and Louise should probably get married.” (131) But that is exactly what he keeps doing. He calls Will in the middle of the night only to tell him, that local accountant, Louise, is not going to get married, although she is pregnant. And he also arrives immediately at Will’s to advise him to marry her. (28-29) Later, he uses Will as an instrument for all kinds of his plans, despite the vision of Will and Louise getting married remains his strongest aspiration. The fact that Louise freely decides to stay single, is irrelevant for Harlen, because he lives in his own made up world and from it he penetrates into our reality.

Certainly, he breaks all the unwritten rules of decent behavior, the taboos of our age, but he does not mind. Harlen is kind of obsessive. He can be seen as anomalous or

psychopathic which are also some of the trickster characteristic mentioned with Hynes and Hyde, respectively. (Hynes 35, Hyde 158) Will and the other residents just have got used to Harlen's way of living, because they have no other option. Harlen is not going to be any different. On the other hand, they like him, too, and appreciate how he cares about their wealth. And this ambivalence is the core of his entertainment. As Will says: "Harlen Bigbear was my friend, and being Harlen's friend was hard." (King 11) Harlen is seen as a good helping friend and, at the same time, a very annoying persuader. And moreover, we feel sorry for him, his wife being dead and him helping selflessly. His way of living could be what Hyde has called "agile parasite" (43), having no inner value the readers would know of, he is dependent on the others to live out his life. As a trickster, a change-agent, Harlen does not change himself but make others to be changed. His rich and changing interests—coaching basketball team, counseling for the youth Indians at jail and advising the residents in their private matters—all of them have something to do with altering the others.

Yet doing all this, Harlen marks his point; he reaffirms the community and helps people to overcome the difficulties they might have. His sheer optimism and enthusiasm (buying the old canoe, repairing it and eventually canoe the rapids just with the help of a canoe handbook; 234-236) show the people the possibility of enjoying their life. With his concern, he recommends the people that they might lead better life, with more understanding and care. As a trickster, using his pervert methods, he challenges the current world arrangement.

2.2 Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing

Tomson Highway was born on his father's trap line in northern Manitoba in 1951. Until his six years he spoke Cree and he learned English only later. As a child he was sent

to residential school where he experienced sexual abuse which he later in a way reflected in his work. He worked in various programs for the Natives, in cultural centers, in prisons and also in the streets. When he was about thirty he started to write plays about the Natives and their clash with the culture of the White majority. His main attempt is to show the life in the Native reserves in more optimistic way, although he is very much aware of the problems that occur there. He celebrates above all resourcefulness, humor and optimism and he tries to prove that with these qualities, and the positive values taught by Indian mythology the life can be lived happily in whatever place. Highway is highly awarded and very popular by both Native and non-Natives audiences and he is also well-known as a pianist. He wrote also the plays concluding the whole reserve cycle (together it is seven of them) and beside these also a novel, *The Kiss of the Fur Queen*. In all his work he uses various explicitly trickster figures (he comments on the trickster figure in general in his forewords).

In *The Rez Sisters*, a play staged since 1988, it is Nanabush, a bird like male creature. The significance of his gender is given by the play itself; for as Highway pointed out, the Indian languages do not differ in gender, so trickster is not explicitly male or female figure. The play takes place in Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve in late summer of 1986. Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve is a fictitious half Cree and half Ojibway reserve situated on Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada. The name is largely symptomatic, for in Ojibway “Wasaychigan” means “a window”.

As the name of the play suggests, there are only woman heroines, although local men are often mentioned. To balance the gender of characters, Nanabush appears as male. The women here (it is seven of them; a number considered to be mystical in Ojibway: Pelajia Patchnose, Marie-Adele Starblanket, Annie Cook, Emily Dictionary who are either sisters or half-sisters, Veronique St. Pierre who is their sister-in-law and Zhaboonigan

Peterson who is adopted by Veronique) are ordinary members of the community, unsatisfied with their lives but not as helpless as their male counterparts to which is the other play devoted. One of the women, Pelajia, explains in the beginning why she does not like the life on the reserve: “Everyone here is crazy. No jobs. Nothing to do but drink and screw each other’s wives nad husbands and foget about old Nanabush.” (Highway 1988 6) It is a dreary situation on the reserve what Highway criticizes and comments on, but on the other hand, he also highlights the heroines’ activity and their ability to overcome their present situation. It happens, that the women hear about the biggest bingo in the world coming to Toronto and because they are all very keen on this game, they decide to go there and win some money to make their dreams come true. They have no money, though, necessary for the journey, so they have to earn them together. It is precisely their ability to cooperate that enables them to go to the bingo. They manage to get enough money and loan a van. Although their dreams are largely influenced by the measures of the White society (get a bright white toilet, becoming a country singer) they are not considered to be bad, because Highway “rejects nothing in his experience of both Native and non-Native society.” (Nothof) The seven women are accompanied by Nanabush on their journey, and his presence affects their lives, they are not the same before the journey and after it. Nanabush in this play differs slightly from Nanabush in *Dry Lips*, although his general role is the same.

Here, Nanabush appears as a birdlike creature, at first as a seagull (dancer in white feathers) and later as a nighthawk in dark feathers. He also appears in the role of bingo master as this is scenically connected with death of a heroine, Marie-Adele, who suffers from cancer. Nanabush here is shape-shifter and also boundary crosses, because he connects the world of living and the dead and also the Native and non-Native sphere. Indian women love playing bingo, a non-Native game, in order to get things which are

hallmarks of the white culture. The women in the reserve are dreaming of winning bingo, this bingo being not only the money but also a way out of their dull, monotonous and unhappy life. A dream indeed too pretentious to come true. But here is Nanabush, the change-agent who stands for the utter possibility of the world to be altered. Although the women do not win the bulk, their lives are changed, they have developed and are certainly happier than before. Nanabush also links the women's and men's worlds, although this idea is much more pronounced in the other play, *Dry Lips*.

Nanabush appears as a seagull only in the first part of *The Rez Sisters*, where the women are unhappy at the present state of things, and they are planning the journey. Not all of them can see him, just Marie-Adele a lethally-ill and Zhaboonigan, a 24-year-old mentally disabled. For Marie-Adele it is clear sign of her oncoming death, when she says: "I can't fly I have no wings. Yet." (19) Nanabush continues to be seen (by the audience) as a regular character through the play, having rest in the background. Through his presence on the stage and his mimicks, he comments the events on the stage. And moreover, his presence is significant, because he really accompanies the heroines for the whole time.

Nevertheless, they can not see him, and sometimes even doubt he would be present (as Pelajia comments on the social situation on the reserve), but he is there and, in fact, showing that he controls the course of events, he only waits for his time to become visible. This is a parallel to the Native vision of the world, as Highway states very clearly, "we believe he is still here among us—although—albeit a little the worse for wear and tear—having assumed other guises." (Highway 1988, xii) Disguised for the seagull he remains a peaceful and silent observer.

It is but only later in the story, when the circumstances get more severe, Nanabush appears as a nighthawk and this connotes a change in his behavior, he starts to attack Marie-Adele, as if the cancer was conquering her at last. For the last time he disguises at

the bingo show, he is the bingo master at first and dances with Marie-Adele. When he changes into the nighthawk again, Marie-Adele recognizes him and says: “don’t be afraid, it’s me come, come and get me, take me.” (104) Here he acts as a death messenger, because he escorts her into the spiritual world.

The other side of his changing spirit is what we can not see directly—the changes of the main characters. Marie-Adele only has visibly changed the substance, for we can see the funeral on the stage; a funeral being the ritual to announce the changing of the shape. Pelajia remains unsatisfied about the state of the public affairs, but she considers to run a chief, although it might not be possible because she is a woman (114), but her enthusiasm is well appreciated by Nanabush who unseen behind her “dances ... merrily and triumphantly.” (118) Philomena got her dreamt up toilet, Annie become Fritz the Katz’s singer and potentially his lover, Emily (realizing she is pregnant) established a mother—daughter relationship with Zhaboonigan, and Veronique manages to buy the biggest stove on the reserve to cook for Marie-Adele’s fourteen children. There are, of course, hints that all the problems are not solved, violence and social issues remain what they were at the beginning, yet the heroines can feel the difference in their lives.

The second play of Highway’s cycle on reserve life is *Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing*, released in 1989. Here, he looks at the matter from a more serious side. Lyle Longclaws outlines it in the introductory quotation clearly enough: “... before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed...” (Highway 1989 6) And, indeed Highway offers a lot of poison to show the painful places of the reserve life. He meets such problems as alcoholism, poverty, misogyny and even violence on women.

The core event in this play is the women’s hockey team (performed by all twenty-seven women of the reserve). These are the same women as in *The Rez Sisters*, but now they do not appear in the story, and they are only spoken of. The women’s hockey team is

a source of great turmoil among the men who do not think the women could make it and generally think their wives to be insane if playing that game. Ice hockey as a typically male game is played by women, whereas men knit, bake and discuss the childbearing. This upside down arrangement taken as a firmly set rule suggests that there is something wrong. And indeed, the men are not satisfied with the position they are on—they complain about being disempowered and useless, but at the same time, most of them is inactive and drunk.

There are seven men in this play—Zachary Jeremiah Keechigeesik, Big Joey, Creature Nataways, Dickie Bird Halket, Pierre St. Pierre, Spooky Lacroix, and Simon Starblanket—and Nanabush, now in a female form, embodying the spirits of Gazelle Nataways, Patsy Pegahmagahbow and Black Lady Halket. Nanabush here connects the male and female spheres as well as the spiritual and the profane. She appears always in the upper part of the stage, emphasizing the intangibility but also affecting a course of events on the stage. Nanabush appears in three different images, because she always conveys a different message.

As Gazelle, Nanabush is mischievous (16) and punishing, too. She kisses Zachary's bum and plays pleasurably with him and when Zachary's friends enter in the end he is also ridiculed because they can see the red lipstick.

As Patsy, Nanabush is helpful and friendly, making Zachary and Simon dream and reveal their emotions towards women and also their visions of possible help for the Indian people. Zachary dreams about his bakery and the prosperity connected with it, whereas Simon prefers a return to traditions, to the dancing rites. He says: "Something has to be done ... We've got to learn to dance again." (43) They are completely unaware of the cause of their dreaming, until Simon recognizes Nanabush, connected with his lover Patsy's medicine powers. Then Simon's vision is dimmed by noise of wailing women, "echoing like in a vast empty room ... The whole world is filled with this noise." (45)

The wailing signifies people's and especially women's unhappiness in the cruel and intolerant world. The women's hockey team is called Wasaychigan Waileretts which may allude to social problems the reserve struggles.

In both plays Highway mentions several atrocities on women. Emily is badly beaten by her husband until she breaks from him, Zhaboonigan is brutally raped by white boys with a screwdriver, sarcastically remembering her name "needle," (Highway 1988 47-48) and later in *Dry Lips* pregnant Patsy is raped by mentally impaired Dickie Bird. (100) This time a crucifix is used, a symbol of the White man's world, destroying a Native culture. Highway refers mainly to the native society in general, undoubtedly criticizing also the situation in residential schools he has experienced in his teens. And when speaking non-figuratively, he points out to the violence on native women in particular. In his lecture given to the students at the university of Regina, he linked "the loss of female gods with a legacy of violence against women." (Mendenhall)

Highway demonstrates his sympathies for women even at the scene setting. At the end of the first act, he uses a Kitty Wells's song that says in the refrain "too many times married men think they're still single ... it's shame that all the blame is on us women" to support the discrepancy between male and female worlds. (77-78)

Harsh social conditions are connected to the third image of Nanabush, Lady Black Halket. She appears above the stage nine-month pregnant, recalling the events of seventeen years ago. She was then pregnant with Big Joey, but she was drunk for most of the time and that is how Dickie Bird got his handicap. Echoing the past experience makes the men realize what happened and link then causes to the current problems. The men of the reserve have not changed too much in the seventeen years. Spooky replaced alcohol by the bible, and he repudiated the old values, yet with no real success, living the same life too wrapped up in himself, elevating the community not a bit. Here, Nanabush stands for the possibility

of getting changed. She recalls the important life moments and thus makes the men think and solve the problems. And as a progress of the society towards intrinsic values, and an example of a new thinker, there is Simon Starblanket; a name connected with the traditions of the past and also a hope of the new. However, after Patsy having been raped, he dies accidentally. Now, the others feel that something valuable has been lost. Zachary comments on:

Simon Starblanket was on his way to South Dakota where he could have learned a few things and made something of himself, same place you went and made a total asshole of yourselves seventeen years ago ... What happened to all those dreams you were so full of for your people, the same dreams this young man just died for? (118-119)

Zachary refers to the anniversary of Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. In the 1973 where the Natives organized memory reunion, they were scattered by FBI. Zachary recalls the birth of Dickie Bird, marked by the same inability and poor cooperation. Blaming women for withdrawing the men's power, Big Joey, reveals that he could not have stopped Dickie from raping Patsy, because he in fact hates women for making the men disempowered. But after Nanabush has recollected that past events, Big Joey, the formerly admired guy, is now a broken man. "They always had it," concludes Spooky Lacroix the debate on women power. (120) After this painful confession, the society begins to heal—Nanabush's aim was accomplished. Towards the end of the play, we can see men supporting their wives in ice hockey match, gossiping as they ever did, but leaving out the former hatred. The very last scene shows us the real picture after all, and we learn that Zachary has dreamt it all. He is woken up with a kiss on his bum by his wife Hera and then he plays with the child. There is no women hockey team, although Hera does not decline the idea in the future. The atmosphere is composed and easy and Hera "peals out with this magical, silvery Nanabush laugh." (130) This silver sound connects the dream world with the real one, assuring us that Nanabush and his powers are present in this world as well.

Zachary is aware of his dreamy mishaps and is in fact even afraid that they really happened. It is the child's laugh that is heard as the last sound after fade-out. The image of happy loving family sharply contrasts with the previous events in the play but at the same time it gives us hope that the reality is colorful, not only black and white and that love and understanding are the key to the satisfied life.

In both Highway plays the more active group are the women. Even in *Dry Lips* where the women are not the key characters they form and affect the course of event performed by men. They seem as Jungian *anima*, basic unconscious female feature hidden in males, but present in all their activity. Female Nanabush is more complex figure because he allows the men to look into the world of women, he allows them to cross the border of with him. Not only can they look back in time, but they have the opportunity to perceive the life from the other side. Female Nanabush plays with the men and confuses them. She uses dream, mystery and memories as her main devices and provides the spiritual background.

The two above mentioned Highway's plays are sometimes referred to as a complements, but in my view it is not so entirely. They may look at the matter through the eyes of each gender separately, but in fact they convey a message about women in both cases. The first play is deals with entirely woman issues, the men's world makes a mere background. In the second play we feel that now the men's issues are due, but later we see the men turning to the women's world again. In the ending of *Dry Lips* we see that only cooperation and mutual effort is the plausible solution.

3 Conclusion

The three works of literature analysed above are in ways different and in ways similar. They tackle various cultural problems and look at them from various angles. But it is possible to see some linking marks common to all of them. In all three of them there is a trickster figure. Although it does not possess all the single features mentioned in the theoretical part, it has some of them and above all—these trickster figures behave in the trickster pattern.

The Nanabush's gender is different in each of discussed plays, but it is only due to the course of events mentioned in the play. The male Nanabush of *The Rez Sisters* brings the life events that are necessary and will come in life, but these are only the matter of time. The female Nanabush does not deal with the matter of life and death rather with the ordinary daily matters, that are seen by women as not working. They both change shapes and do not avoid taboo matters—the current problems overlooked by the society, the drunkenness, the violence on women and inadequate care—just to mention the most striking ones. They move across the boundaries. And as a planned results, they both make the people involved happier, they let them to make their dreams come true and overcome their hatred. They help them. In this view, they both work more as culture heroes than as typical tricksters, although these features are present too.

The culture hero traits are present at King's Harlen Bigbear too, although they are almost hidden under his comicality. He is here to entertain us in the first place and then if we listen carefully enough, to teach us something. We notice his comic features, his breaking the social norms, and his eagerness—but after all it is his mere effort to help people and to lead them to a better arrangement. His trickster funny features entertain us, but it is the culture hero traits that send the message to the readers.

The situation is the same with Nanabush. Through the play he mimics other characters and his appearance and disguises (for the bingo master, for instance) may seem funny and entertain us, but it is the more serious message that is important—Nanabush's determination to improve the life of the people, to help them—the culture hero traits again.

We can also see, how infeasible are the attempts to separate the trickster and culture hero traits. This may be possible in stories of other origin, but not in the stories by the Native writers. These features are interwoven, and this makes the Trickster character to be so hard to define and understand in black-and-white scheme of thinking. Trickster's world is colorful.

Notes

ⁱ Webster's New World College Dictionary

ⁱⁱ I stick to Radin's spelling used in his *The Trickster, A study in American Indian Mythology*.

ⁱⁱⁱ He is referred to as of unknown shape in *Norton Anthology*, p. 121.

^{iv} Spelling used by Hultkrantz.

^v Liška Bystrouška

^{vi} Translated by the author from

[http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li%C5%A1ka_obecn%C3%A1_\(%C5%A1elma\)](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li%C5%A1ka_obecn%C3%A1_(%C5%A1elma)).

A broad collections of folktales on foxes and other folk characters is offered at:

<http://www.americanfolklore.net/folktales/>.

^{vii} More on <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/oinari.shtml>.

^{viii} Found for example at www.hotcakencyklopedia.com. Radin supplies other 'foundation' myths when he uses e.g. Tlingit myth about Raven. Here Raven is not the original creator too, he comes to the world already made and then he changes it or he creates it anew. The same pays for Assiniboine myth about Sitconski / Iktomi. It begins with "The earth was flooded." (Radin, 97).

^{ix} Cf. Radin p. 148.

^x Åke Hultkrantz mentions Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and his *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States I-VI*. Philadelphia: Lippincott and Co, published in 1851-1857 and Daniel G. Brinton and his *Myths of the New World*, 1868.

^{xi} More on collective unconsciousness and archetypes in Jung, C.G. *Archetypy a nevědomí*. Transl. E. Bosáková, K. Černá, J. Černý. Brno: Nakladatelství Tomáše Janečka, 1997.

^{xii} Webster's New World College Dictionary

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