UCLA
American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title
The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative. By Thomas King.

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0268s3zz

Journal
American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 29(4)

ISSN
0161-6463

Author
Snyder, Michael

Publication Date
2005-09-01

DOI
10.17953

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that hidden in this slim output there are at least a dozen dormant articles, if not chapters for a book-length work, just waiting for Gaul to write them. Her prose is elegant, her insights are pointed, and she leaves her reader wanting more. Also, although she does a good job citing the pertinent scholarship on epistolary practices, miscegenation, and Cherokee studies, she fails to make use of the scholarship on "whiteness"—the two principal works being David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) and Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998). This oversight is regrettable because a discussion of the nature and function of nineteenth-century Euro-American constructions and categories of whiteness would strengthen Gaul's analysis of the controversy over Harriett and Elias's marriage, not to mention shed light on the violence that "white" Georgians visited upon the Cherokee people. These criticisms aside, anyone interested in epistolary practices, miscegenation, or Cherokee studies will find *To Marry an Indian* a valuable read.

Benjamin L. Perez
University of California, Davis

The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative. By Thomas King. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. 172 pages. $24.95 cloth.

"The truth about stories is that that's all that we are," Thomas King writes in his new book about how people, especially Natives, create themselves, their self-understanding, and their universe through storytelling. More than an analysis of the function and nature of storytelling, both oral and written, *The Truth about Stories* is a compelling collection of thought-provoking anecdotes from King's own experience.

This brief memoir, which earned King one of Canada's highest literary honors, the Trillium Award, features engaging, humorous stories that explore his identity and self-concept as a "mixedblood" Indian. King tells how others have perceived him in the past, showing how people's ideas of Indianness are often constructions and myths drawn from popular culture, such as Western movies, TV shows, and dime novels; canonical literature like James Fennimore Cooper; the photographs of Edward Sheriff Curtis (who kept boxes of Indian paraphernalia at hand in case the Native subject didn't look "Indian" enough); and other sources producing simulacra such as Rousseau's Noble Savage, the vanishing Indian, or the whooping, savage Indian on the warpath. He explains that even Natives themselves are not immune from this influence of the "invented Indian" and relates with some irony how, in the 1970s, it was crucial to exhibit "Indian" signifiers. The focus of the book is not just King's personal experience—he considers issues of identity politics and racism relevant to North American Indians generally, as well as sexism, consumerism, and environmentalism.

In some ways *The Truth about Stories* is an odd book because of its genesis as an oral communication coupled with its grand scope. Most of the volume

comprises his 2003 Massey Lectures at Harvard University—King was the first Native North American to speak in this very prestigious series. The book's origin as a set of lectures accounts for its brevity, but many times the reader is left wanting more context and elaboration. King might have augmented his talks for the printed version; such a decision would be supported by his theory of oral and written literature. To King, they are vastly different experiences—whereas speech is public in nature, reading is a private experience.

The result is a series of thought-provoking, profound yet lighthearted, and somehow breezy mixed-blood Native narratives told in a deceptively simple style touched by a comic wisdom. Strangely enough, King often ends up sounding like Kurt Vonnegut, especially in his essays and addresses found in books such as *Palm Sunday* and *Wampeters, Foma, and Granfaloons.* A dark, cosmic humor surrounds a core of seriousness. And like Vonnegut's essays and speeches, King's book is intended for a general readership, not academic specialists. Most of the ideas, issues, and historical figures related to Native American identity and culture will be familiar to anyone who has read Gerald Vizenor, Paula Gunn Allen, or Leslie Marmon Silko. The highlights of the book, however, are King's personal and often hilarious anecdotes. Delivered in King's casual style, they will reach more people than the tricky diction and postmodern prose of Vizenor, as fine and intriguing as his critical works may be.

King's style is pithy, witty, and self-reflexive. He is constantly anticipating his audience's responses and acknowledges when he veers into potential triteness or bathos. In one memorable passage that follows a story involving ducks, he says, "You may have already leaned over to your friend and whispered, Platitude. Platitude, platitude, platitude. Thomas King the duck-billed platitude" (27). The moments when he addresses the reader and critic are interesting and postmodern in their reflexivity, but one wonders if King is a bit anxious about how this book will be received (though he needn't have worried)—it *does* occasionally become platitudinous and portentous when he laments how the world is being destroyed by greed and consumerism. While there is much encouragement elsewhere for the reader to engage and react to the material, in such passages King seems to temper the reader's response or limit the range of interpretations.

King rues that he himself has contributed to the trashing of the world as he seeks comfort, pleasure, and insulation from other human beings. Yet earlier he dismissed a Canadian journalist who had criticized him for insisting upon flying first-class (an example of his desire for pleasure and to keep to himself). Late in the book he purposefully dawdles over his dream of a luxury home and fetishizes all its plush little details in an effort to demonstrate his complicity. Yet it is not clear what King is going to do as a result of his uneasy feelings. His guilt is selective and creates pathos but does not lead to a strategy to counter these ills.

In fact, in his afterword, "Private Stories," King adopts a fatalist tone as he analyzes his own perceived failures and weeps for himself and "for the world I've helped create. A world in which I allow my intelligence and goodwill to be constantly subverted by my pursuit of comfort and pleasure" (166). He rues

that if he had the chance to do things differently, he's not sure he would have the strength to do so. So, he tells these stories to open the minds of readers, to encourage them to do something with these stories. However, even though he says that stories are all we are, King is pessimistic about the ability of stories to change even himself, much less others. He persists in what could be called a "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." This is what I mean by the darkness in the humor, but there is a glimmer of hope. Despite all this, he still refers to "saving stories" and stories that heal.

King emphasizes the ethical dimension of storytelling. For example, he compares Christian and Native American creation stories to make the point that storytellers bear a great responsibility and an ethical obligation: "So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told" (10). Manifest in his consideration of narrative ethics is a hermeneutical system informed by postmodern theory that states that the author cannot control the interpretation of a work once it is published, and the author herself and her intentions should not be posited as the ultimate source of meaning nor the ultimate "truth" of the work—indeed there is no ultimate or absolute source of meaning or truth. "For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world," King writes (10). He ends each chapter with a reference to the import of his story and a post-modern view of the author: "It's yours. Do with it what you will. Make it the topic of a discussion group at a scholarly conference. Put it on the web. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (60).

This is a clever framing device that encourages a cocreation of meaning, even though sometimes King hasn't really told the story he says he has. He certainly has made a crucial point in each chapter, something for the audience to take away, to explore, but sometimes this framing device lacks precision and depth. For example, he makes the point that Native people often don't appear as others expect; it is a challenge to define what an "Indian" is—it's not about this or that particular signifier or criterion. He raises this point through the story of seeing a small shrine to Will Rogers in a Claremore, Oklahoma, McDonalds (did he visit the museum about Rogers in Claremore too?), and he realizes that not many people recognize Rogers as an Indian (Cherokee); while Rogers was one of the most famous celebrities of the 1930s, he was not often referred to as an Indian but rather as a cowboy because of his amazing rope tricks. At the end of the chapter King tells us to take Rogers's story, but he hasn't told us anything about Rogers's relationship to his Native American heritage and identity, what he might have said about it, or what others said about it. Perhaps King's book will inspire people to investigate this further. We also are not told enough about Louis Owens and what demons he may have been facing prior to his suicide. Maybe this is an intentional tricky move by a writer associated with the trickster, a postmodern tease to drive the reader to learn more after having been tantalized with a few intriguing words.

Michael Snyder
University of Oklahoma