UCLA
American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title
Babo's Great-Great Granddaughter: The Presence of Benito Cereno in Green Grass, Running Water

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7jw5j0cf

Journal
American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 25(3)

ISSN
0161-6463

Author
Fast, Robin Riley

Publication Date
2001-06-01

DOI
10.17953

Copyright Information
This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, availalbe at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE AND RESEARCH JOURNAL 25:3 (2001) 27–46

Babo's Great-Great Granddaughter: The Presence of *Benito Cereno* in *Green Grass, Running Water*

ROBIN RILEY FAST

In Canadian (Cherokee-Greek-German) writer Thomas King's 1993 novel *Green Grass, Running Water* several intertwined "realistic" plots involving contemporary Canadian Blackfoot characters parallel and then intersect with a mythically based "supernatural" plot which itself includes at least four parallel stories. Lionel Red Dog approaches his fortieth birthday uncertain of his purpose in life. Alberta Frank tries to figure out how to have a child while avoiding a relationship with either Lionel or the ambitious, successful Charlie Looking Bear. Lionel's uncle, Eli Stands Alone, blocks the opening of a dam that would submerge his mother's house. Each of these realistic characters has a complex history, which is also told. Simultaneously, four old Indians set out to "fix the world," and arrive near the Blackfoot Reserve in time to celebrate Lionel's birthday and attend the annual Sun Dance. They are occasionally accompanied by Coyote, who moves back and forth between their real-world adventures and another space in which an unnamed narrating "I" comments on storytelling, the events told, and Coyote's behavior. Simultaneously, Doctor Joseph Hovaugh and Babo Jones, a janitor, set out to find the old Indians and return them to the hospital where they have been held, under treatment, according to Hovaugh, for depression. Most of these characters and their stories converge near the novel's end for one or more of its climactic moments. The convergence of plots and the interactions not only among characters but also among their distinct planes of being demonstrate the interpenetration of the mythic and the mundane that is an essential element of traditional American Indian understandings of myth. While these convergences and interactions, particularly given their often parodic impact,

Robin Riley Fast teaches literature at Emerson College in Boston. She is the author of *The Heart as a Drum: Continuance and Resistance in American Indian Poetry* (University of Michigan Press, 1999) and numerous articles on Native literature.

suggest a postmodernist critique, the novel's dialogic double emphasis on the oral and the literate suggests a critical approach congruent with its multiple stories, sources, and effects.

Criticism of the novel has so far emphasized the book's disruption of Euro-American and Euro-Canadian pretensions to dominance over Native peoples and cultures. Critics have focused, for example, on how the four old Indians, who turn out to be the mythic First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman masquerading as the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye, expose the dangerous limitations of Old and New Testament origin stories, the patriarchal religion that derives from them, and secular scriptures of colonization and white dominance such as those represented by their assumed names. However, this focus on King's often-comic overturning of oppressive texts and the cultural habits they shape, reflect, and sustain, deflects critical attention from King's quite different revision of another text, Herman Melville's 1855 novella *Benito Cereno.*[1] King undeniably pokes serious fun at Melville's Captain Ahab. But there is good reason also to see King acknowledging Melville as a precursor, for rather than parodically revising *Benito Cereno,* he honors and elaborates on its subversive possibilities, in the first instance by integrating a descendant of the novella's most powerful character, the rebellious enslaved African Babo, into his own novel. King's extended allusion to *Benito Cereno* foregrounds the questions of whose stories will be heard and believed, and what are the conditions that grant credibility, while adding suggestive resonance to issues of language and authority. At the same time the allusion to Melville's novella keeps present the potential for terrible, if liberatory, violence against oppression. Perhaps most importantly, the active presence of Babo Jones invites us to read King's and Melville's texts in a dialogue that illuminates many other aspects of *Green Grass, Running Water.*

As a now-canonized Euro-American writer who in his time was marginalized for his resistance to received pieties and prejudices, and whose most famous book resists the expected form(s) of fiction, Melville certainly seems a sympathetic predecessor to King's projects, both thematic/political and generic/structural.[2] Equally to the point, *Benito Cereno* is a work written in resistance to the dominant culture's canonical beliefs about race, culture, and nation and their legal impositions; it is not only about racial violence and oppression, but also, simultaneously, about perception and the multiplicity of truth. It is a novella, further, that both veils its projects, and finally overturns itself, as it denies the beliefs of its "central intelligence" figure and rejects the assumptions that shape his perspective. Even when Melville acknowledges the power of colonialism and racism legally to reclaim hegemony, the effect of that revolutionary turnover is the novella's most enduring reality.[3] Similarly, in *Green Grass, Running Water,* though the temporary defeat of government and corporate interests, accomplished by an earthquake, causes the death of the novel's most persistent opponent of domestic colonialism, we know that his sister and niece will rebuild his house and that the story of resistance will continue.

In Melville's novella, which takes place in 1799, Amasa Delano, a Massachusetts sea captain, comes upon a becalmed and "slovenly" Spanish ship, carrying a load of "negro slaves, amongst other valuable freight."[4] Boarding the ship, Delano, whose perspective dominates the third-person narration, learns from its captain, Benito Cereno, that his crew has been devastated by disease and his ship almost wrecked. Though his nationalist and religious prejudices make him suspicious of Cereno, the American spends a day on board the Spanish ship. Delano half accepts the Spaniard's explanations, corroborated by Cereno's black servant, Babo, that he has been debilitated by the horrors of epidemic and bad weather. Though increasingly perturbed by the behavior of the ship's large "cargo" of Africans, and nervous lest they be insufficiently controlled, Delano cannot see beyond his racist assumptions because the blacks are, to him, less than fully human. All that seems uncommon aboard the Spanish ship he explains to himself as evidence of Cereno's perhaps treacherous failure to impose his rightful authority as a captain and a white man.

Delano is partially awakened when the true story of Cereno's ship is exposed: as the two captains set out for the American's ship, Babo, who has shown only "docile" solicitousness and "bland attachment" to his "master," attempts to kill Cereno. At last we learn that the ship's disaster was a successful slave revolt, masterminded by Babo, frustrated only by a lack of drinking water and wind, and the arrival of Delano. Delano, of course, takes control, the rebellion is stamped out, and Babo is eventually punished. In the novella's last paragraph Babo's head, on display in a plaza in Lima, meets, "unabashed, the gaze of the whites."[5] His baleful power is confirmed by the novella's final fact, the death of the Spanish captain. Despite his defeat, Babo overturns the whites' claims to hegemonic power, first by masterminding a violent rebellion and then by directing the masquerade that preserves the revolt until he is overwhelmed by the force of European and American religion and law. Both the rebellion and the masquerade expose the delusory nature of the whites' pretensions to superiority. And Babo's "unabashed" countenance still exerts mockingly subversive power.

* * *

As King writes of Gerald Vizenor's postmodern fictions, *Green Grass, Running Water* cannot be "comfortably contained[ed]" by critical and theoretical terminology because it "cross[es] the lines that definitions—no matter how loose—create."[6] This statement comes at the end of an essay in which King, resisting application of postcolonial theory to contemporary Native literature, proposes some alternative terms and elucidates their usefulness, but concludes by acknowledging their limitations. His resistance to designating Native literature as postcolonial is instructive:

> While post-colonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the colonized and the

> colonizer, the term itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America. At the same time the term organizes the literature progressively, suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. . . . And worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions . . . and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression.[7]

Green Grass, Running Water rebuts such assumptions, but more generally we see King's misgivings as representative of a wariness, shared by many Indian writers of criticism, that seeks to apply theory devised in other contexts, in a replay of colonialist impositions and appropriations.

Kimberly Blaeser has also voiced such concerns: "A full understanding of Native literary traditions cannot flourish when the interpretive theories, the tools of literary analysis, all stem from an other/another cultural and literary aesthetic."[8] She thus encourages critics to attend to "the inherent critical dynamics of Native American literature," to recognize that "contemporary texts contain the critical context needed for their own interpretation."[9] *Green Grass, Running Water* does indeed offer (and model) an approach for illuminating its own meanings and effects and for seeing how juxtaposing it with *Benito Cereno* sheds light on both.

The orally inspired structure and style of *Green Grass, Running Water* are built on dialogue and storytelling, involving question and response, repetition, and revision. Blanca Chester, who reads the novel as "a dialogue between oral and written, between Native and Christian creation stories, and between literary and historical discourses," finds that King's written dialogues "suggest a dialogism that reflects oral tradition and First Nations and Native American perspectives on the world."[10] The novel's dialogic modes and methods, including its humor, suggest that we consider the relationship between *Benito Cereno* and *Green Grass, Running Water*, too, as one of dialogue. This dialogue, which is in part about narrative and language, is facilitated by the presence of Babo Jones in King's novel.

Conceiving the relationship between the two works in this way makes for a reading of *Green Grass, Running Water* as a partly ironic response to *Benito Cereno*, for Melville's novella both thematically and stylistically stymies and subverts dialogue: communication among the key characters is blocked or distorted, and even after the revelation of the mutiny Delano cannot understand Cereno, let alone Babo. At the same time the novella engages the perplexed reader in a kind of counter-dialogue that, depending on the reader, may subvert what the narration would ostensibly lead us to believe. However, we need not read King's response to Melville as exclusively ironic. Indeed, I argue that King's adoption of Babo Jones reflects a collaborative engagement with the earlier text, a relationship that honors Melville's perceptions and his art while it critically reimagines their possibilities.[11]

* * *

A number of parallels between Native and African-American historical experiences suggest some reasons why King might find a story that examines "New World" African slavery a usable precursor. First, both Indians and Africans were enslaved by Europeans in the Americas; second, "savagery" was attributed to Indians and Africans alike by white Europeans and their descendants. Further, if, as Toni Morrison persuasively argues, American whites' concept of freedom has relied on the unfree condition of blacks, even more obviously whites' wealth and power in the Americas was based on the dispossession and destruction of Indians.[12] Thus there are historical reasons, as well as indications within *Green Grass, Running Water* itself for considering *Benito Cereno* a true predecessor text, and the presence of Babo Jones as much more than another literary joke among the many in King's novel.

Benito Cereno is a highly ambiguous novella which can also be read as highly ambivalent. The question we must ask, in judging whether, or to what effects, it is ambivalent is: Does Melville (or his narrative voice, or his text) support the rebellious Africans, or the Spanish and white American upholders of slavery? Posing the question in these terms does not necessarily imply a correspondingly simple answer. While earlier readers tended to see the text as favoring Delano and Cereno, many recent studies conclude that our sympathies are directed toward the Africans.[13]

My own view is that while Melville may not have extricated his text entirely from complicity with the assumptions it so devastatingly criticizes, the novella's final image, of Babo's severed head, constitutes a powerful rebuke to those who have enslaved and punished him, and those who would complacently deny responsibility. Up until his capture Babo is the novella's most skillful speaker. Thus his head's now-silent stare must imply what he might have said, but chose not to say, once captured. Part of King's own project, I argue, is to restore Babo's voice, to extricate the novella's implied politics from Melville's ambivalence, and, by making Babo's voice, Melville's awareness, and the politics they engender part of his book's ongoing story, to honor their best possibilities—to join them unambiguously to a multifaceted liberatory resistance that need not end, *Green Grass, Running Water* insists, in silence and death.

* * *

Green Grass, Running Water is at least as multidimensional as *Benito Cereno,* though it is neither ambiguous nor ambivalent. The two fictions have a number of similar structural or stylistic characteristics, as well as some telling differences. Both are highly and variously allusive. *Benito Cereno* is composed of densely embedded stories, with inner realities disguised or hidden under outer layers; *Green Grass, Running Water,* too, is composed of multiple stories, but they parallel and intersect (one might think of lines on a great circle), and though connections may be revealed gradually, even—seemingly—serendipitously or capriciously, nothing is hidden. Unlike *Benito Cereno,* King's is not a suspenseful fiction. But in both each story affects how we read the others, and if Delano's perspective is given to us embedded in a contrary, critical perspective, we first see—and hear—King's Babo Jones in the company of someone who disparages her, Sergeant Cereno.[14]

Three issues central to both works contribute significantly to my reading of the relationship between Melville's and King's fictions: historical knowledge and responsibility (or ahistoricist resistance to both); language; and authority and control.

His ideology of white superiority and American exceptionalism blinds Melville's Delano to history: he cannot or will not see the influence of the past on the present, or his personal (and national) implication in practices he prefers to attribute only to the Spaniards, representatives of decaying European power; nor can he recognize a historical basis for the actions of the Africans.[15] Blind as well to the possibility that his own assumptions are only assumptions, his interpretive ability limited by the narratives that justify his sense of superiority, he cannot read the situation he finds on the San Dominick. Of a piece with his imperviousness to the history that would challenge his assumptions is his disavowal of responsibility for his own racism and the slave system that he abets and from which, as an American, he profits. King draws attention to a similarly antihistorical bias in the beneficiaries of white historical verities; this is most obvious in dam engineer Clifford Sifton, who simultaneously disclaims responsibility for the dam and asserts control: "'Not my dam, Eli. And you know it. . . . I just build them, Eli. I just build them.'" By the time this conversation ends, he has shown his true colors in his proprietary claim to privileged ability and power: "'We know our business. . . . We know our business,' said Sifton."[16] Lionel's employer, Bill Bursum, and Latisha's "clueless" white husband, George Morningstar, likewise resist acknowledging the history of appropriation by mapping and massacre with which they are associated: owner of the best lot at the dam-made Parliament Lake (purchased as mapped, before it actually existed), Bursum is proud of the "Map" of North America he's built with a pile of televisions for a display in his store; Marlene Goldman and Florence Stratton discuss in depth the significance of maps and "the Map" as tools and symbols of colonial power.[17] George is related by name to General George A. Custer, known to some of his Indian allies as "Son of the Morning Star." Sadly, Charlie Looking Bear, hired as a token Indian to represent the dam builders against Eli, also denies responsibility. To Alberta's indignant objection ("'You know that the tribe isn't going to make any money off the entire deal'") he responds, "'Then some of us should, don't you think? . . . You can't just make [the dam and lake] go away'" (*GGRW* 126). But King does not stop by showing us willful blindness. He confronts us with history. In Alberta's first scene, she lectures to her university students about the removal of Apaches, Kiowas, and others to Fort Marion. Her emphasis on the "ledger art" these Indians produced is the novel's first clear signal that alternative histories are available for those who will look or listen. Goldman argues that the novel "underscores how" the Fort Marion ledger art "affirmed Native people's solidarity in the face of exile . . . and recalls how it revised the status of the 'book' in Native culture."[18] In fact, while *Benito Cereno* remains, finally, trapped in the conviction that history is written by the victors, *Green Grass, Running Water* aims to show that even this given is subject to change:

> "Your ancestors were slaves, were they not?" said Dr. Hovaugh.
> "Nope," said Babo. "But some of my folks were enslaved." (*GGRW* 348)

We see comic evidence that history can be revised when the old Indians alter the ending of the Western movie. We know at the novel's close that Eli's resistance has changed the history that will be written (and the stories that will be told) from the narrative the dam's defenders anticipated. And we have seen how, without belittling his tragedy, King has forced us to revise our initial reading of Alberta's father, Amos.

Babo's rejoinder to Hovaugh illustrates her awareness of the power of language—an awareness shared by her ancestor on Melville's San Dominick. Throughout *Benito Cereno,* Melville draws our attention to this power, especially the power of authoritative language. Such power is most evident in Cereno's deposition to the court in Lima. Sworn, signed, and sealed, it gives in apparently objective legal language the Spanish captain's version of the rebellion, emphasizing the Africans' "betrayal" of their owner's trust, their horrifying violence, and the virtually demonic machinations of "the negro Babo," without considering the Africans' perspectives or any motives for their actions other than an apparently inborn savagery. The power of such discourse, so presented, is evident in the reaction of numerous first-time readers: "Finally, we know what really happened."

King, too, shows us authoritative language in action; as in Melville's deposition, it is often the language of the state. Thus one of Lionel's youthful "mistakes" becomes enshrined in a police record that identifies him as a leader of an American Indian Movement (AIM) action that never actually happened. Thus Sifton, by court order, daily asks Eli to concede "that title to this property be properly vested with the province of Alberta" (*GGRW* 154). Thus Amos has no recourse when confronted by a Customs officer whose view of Indians and their sacred objects is encapsulated in two statements: "'Guess we're the ones to say what's right and what's not right'" and "'I can always put you in jail'" (*GGRW* 284).

King, however, also imagines effective resistance to authoritative language in at least some circumstances. In the world of the realistic characters, Babo corrects Hovaugh and disrupts Sergeant Cereno's efforts to impose his authority by interrogating her. And Eli's repeated "no" is effective, backed as it is by his ability to use the whites' system to get injunctions against the dam. On other planes, the novel's resistance is infused, and ultimately complicated, by a conviction about language unavailable to Melville. This is the understanding, common in traditional Native cultures, of language as efficacious, as infused with spirit, and hence with power.[19]

On the storytelling plane, where "I" and the four old Indians retell the adventures of Changing Woman and the others, King makes transparent the deconstruction of linguistic imposition that Melville renders more covertly. This is most humorously obvious when Ahdamn, in the garden, names the animals—"You are a microwave oven, Ahdamn tells the Elk. . . . You are a garage sale," he tells the Bear (*GGRW* 41)—and when Changing Woman sights "Moby-Jane, the Great Black [and lesbian] Whale" (*GGRW* 220). King's

extended allusion to Melville's resistant novella, of course, is also a part of his novel's resistance. King works his revisions on the mythic plane, too, where language's efficacious power is traditionally validated. As the John Wayne Western plays on Bursum's "Map," the four old Indians' singing transforms the whites' generically necessary victory into a victory for the expected victims, the Indians. But the long-range effect of such subversion is unclear. And when Coyote's irrepressible dancing causes the earthquake that destroys the dam and kills Eli, we recognize that mythic powers may not be controllable and, by extension, that using language appropriately—getting the story right—is crucial. This is why the story needs to be told and retold.

Authoritative (or authoritarian) language, as the above examples remind us, is one important means by which, in a system based on inequality, the powerful retain control over those less powerful and over the meanings of history and experience. A primary concern for Melville's Delano is proper command and control; "loss of control" is what most disturbs him.[20] In *Green Grass, Running Water,* too, we see white men discomfited by erosions of their ("rightful") authority—authority derived from the "Christian rules" pronounced successively by "that GOD," Noah, A. A. Gabriel, and Young Man Walking On Water.

To defend their positions of authority, the powerful in both *Benito Cereno* and *Green Grass, Running Water* rely on language and on the scripts that validate their claims. Thus King's Sergeant Cereno and Doctor Hovaugh both search for the old Indians by the book. Cereno evidently has a script into which he tries to fit the Indians' "escape": "Are they dangerous?" he asks repeatedly, and King implies that he is ready to use his gun, if they are. Hovaugh is obsessed with a book that seems to support his "scientific" calculations regarding disasters that have coincided with the old Indians' earlier escapes—and these give him the illusion of control. Thus he "knows" the dam is important and is eager to see it. But to his surprise he finds his car, the Kharman Ghia/Santa Maria (along with Babo's Pinto and Alberta's Nissan) floating on the dammed waters, well beyond his control. "'That's my car!'" he shouts, "'That's my car'" (*GGRW* 447). King's Columbian punning, together with Hovaugh's futile self-assertion, suggests an ironic echo of the terrible, multi-valenced refrain of *Benito Cereno*: "follow your leader."[21]

Is J. Hovaugh/Jehovah looking for a scripturally validated apocalypse that will bring about the restoration of his own absolute power? In *Green Grass, Running Water,* those who go by the book are the dangerous ones, including Bursum who, like Eli, loves Westerns and, unlike Eli, believes them. Like Amasa Delano, Bursum and Hovaugh see their texts as natural and commonsensical, without recognizing—again unlike Eli—that these are merely culturally constructed fictions that happen to empower them but that could be rewritten. Likewise, in *Benito Cereno,* Delano imposes a script that deludes him: he imagines a plot against himself and his ship by Cereno and the few surviving white sailors. And the deposition is understood as valid by the colonial government and Delano, we may be sure, largely because only the slaveholders' points of view and interpretations are given. But whereas Melville concedes that the victors have kept control of the book, King invites our

participation in "unlawful" disruptions of authoritative texts as he celebrates the disruptive and recreative potential of narrative. In this we can see both his affinity with postmodernism and his indebtedness and allegiance to the dynamics of oral culture—both of which challenge textual orthodoxy.[22]

Melville's Babo and his great-great granddaughter, Babo Jones, have in common, as Joyce Sparer Adler says of Babo, "a strong sense of [their] blackness and an intense resentment of the whites' attitude of superiority, as well as an appreciation of its humor."[23] That Babo Jones may not feel as intensely or constantly resentful is a relatively minor point, given their different circumstances. We can be sure that the people with whom she must deal give her ample reason for resentment; like her ancestor, she is capable of masking her feelings, but at home after a big day she thinks with amusement that "even Dr. Joseph God Almighty Hovaugh himself had come down to the lounge to talk to her" (*GGRW* 245). These characters are linked by their ability to take revolutionary (Babo) or subversive (Babo Jones) control over narrative, to challenge and revise the texts on which the presumptions of those in power depend.

Among the most compelling images in *Benito Cereno* are that of Babo shaving Cereno and that of his impaled head with its implacable gaze. The former is an image of a man in control of his own and others' speech and actions; the latter, an image of immobilized accusatory silence, a silence that paradoxically challenges the narrative of white superiority that has imposed it. As an African in control of his own and others' words and movements, Babo is revolutionary, terrifyingly so to Cereno, Delano, and the racial/economic/legal system to which they belong. Thus the violence of Delano's language and of his surrogates' actions in retaking the San Dominick; thus Cereno's paralysis, his escape into unconsciousness, and his conversion of Babo into an abstraction of dread, "the negro"; and thus the vindictive torment of Babo's living and dead body by the Lima authorities. But as an African in control, Babo is also an artist who may as such be considered an apt forebear for Babo Jones, listener and teller of stories. Adler argues that "Melville shares with Babo . . . his own kind of poetic imagination, his own way of seeing the implications beneath the surface of a situation, and his own way of creating a scene on different levels."[24] Juxtaposing *Benito Cereno,* with this reading of Babo, to *Green Grass, Running Water* draws attention to the texts' shared interest in fiction as such—thus illuminating another way in which *Benito Cereno* is a congenial precursor to King's novel.

It is because Babo has been so active and so powerful that his final silence—and apparent loss of control—is so stunning. Though for some readers, Babo's silence, too, functions as a kind of communication, many find it disturbing.[25] Even if we see Babo's silence after being (re)captured by Delano as an active choice, this choice reminds us that we never hear his or any African's voice apart from the roles they play in the masquerade.

If Melville gives us silence while failing to imagine Babo's own story and his mind, King might be said to do both in *Green Grass, Running Water.* Amos silently disappears, having experienced the refusal of the reigning communication system, as represented by the police, to grant him any authority by

acknowledging his voice. Even so King makes sure that we know Amos's story. As for Babo's namesake, she both has a life story and speaks. We don't know as many details about her life, ironically, as we know about Amos's, but we know them in her own voice, by her own account. She is the great-great granddaughter of a barber who worked on ships, the single mother of four, a caretaker accustomed to cleaning up messes left by others. She has self-possession, self-respect, and a sense of humor. We have some idea of how important these traits are, and can easily guess at the reactions of those who consider themselves her betters. Indeed, Dana D. Nelson's comments on Amasa Delano could surely apply to Hovaugh's or Sergeant Cereno's reactions to Babo Jones:

> Delano, upon first boarding the . . . [San Dominick], notes the "noisy indocility" of the slaves: whenever the Object speaks without the command of the Subject, she/he speaks out of turn . . . Even Babo's "conversational familiarities," ostensibly in service to Don Benito, begin to annoy Delano. . . . Conversely . . . Atufal's muteness marks him [in Delano's view] as a good slave.[26]

While in *Benito Cereno* the exclusive control of narrative power by the perspectives of Delano and Cereno arguably has the effect of objectifying Babo, the diverse voices of *Green Grass, Running Water* prevent any such exclusivity. Rather, characters talk back to the authorities. Babo Jones is the first we hear speaking in this mode. As such, and as one who, in part by her talk, bridges the boundary between the realistic and the mythic, she is especially important.

Babo Jones makes her appearance early in *Green Grass, Running Water* when she is questioned by Sergeant Ben Cereno (*GGRW* 20–26, 51–57), a self-important, nose-picking racist looking for an opportunity to deal with a "dangerous" situation. When Babo resists his efforts to impose his version of a story he does not really understand, he leaves her with his mild-mannered, rather simple sidekick, Patrolman Jimmy Delano. King soon dismisses both Delano and Cereno from the novel, in effect confirming the premise that Melville's conclusion ironically signaled: Babo, the despised black, is central and powerful. At the same time, King reverses the conditions of Melville's ending: Babo Jones, the enslaved African's great-great granddaughter (*GGRW* 348), is alive, and she is anything but silent. She is also very knowledgeable, though the representatives of the dominant ideology with whom she interacts, Cereno and Doctor Hovaugh, do not really want to be told what she knows, for to be told, and to take her knowledge seriously, would undermine their own power.[27] (Jimmy Delano is willing to listen, but not empowered to act on—or perhaps even to comprehend—what he hears.) Likewise, in *Benito Cereno,* Amasa Delano does not actually want to know what Cereno and Babo know, though he thinks he does.

King's Babo knows a great deal, in fact, more than any other contemporary characters in the novel, about the four old Indians. She knows they are women, and evidently knows their names, because she, apparently alone among the hospital staff, has taken the time to talk with them: "'We used to talk, you know, life, kids, fixing the world. Stuff like that. We'd trade stories

too, the Indians and me'" (*GGRW* 55–56). Her knowledge thus crosses cultural boundaries, including that between the positively "real" and the mythic, and makes her a participant in the vital tradition of oral storytelling. We might even wonder whether, having listened to the old Indians and traded stories with them, she is somehow related to "I." After all, she's telling the same story that "I" tells, a combination of the earthdiver and woman-falling-from-the-sky stories, and filling in some more details from the traditional versions (*GGRW* 97–100). And she certainly shares "I"'s understanding of the importance (and the difficulty) of "getting it right." She might indeed represent the human storytellers whose acts of attention are essential to the survival of oral tradition—a survival that in our present time seems, by definition, in part oppositional.

Accompanying Doctor Hovaugh to Canada in search of the Indians, Babo finds north of the border, just like south of it, ample opportunity to resist patriarchal and racist impositions. As a resistant black woman, Babo can also be linked to the feminism of some of King's other characters. When Cereno tells Delano to "'finish up with Aunt Jemima'" he is dismissing her on the basis of both race and gender (*GGRW* 57). Babo does not hear this comment, but she undoubtedly has already recognized the Sergeant's disparagement of her as racially and sexually motivated and has responded uncooperatively not only to protect the Indians but also to maintain her self respect. Alberta, the policewoman Connie, who identifies both of them as "'progressive . . . you know . . . women's libber[s]'" (*GGRW* 341), and Bursum's other employee, Minnie, who insists on being called Ms. Smith (*GGRW* 137), share in the struggle for respect and control over their lives, as does Latisha, who has succeeded in business but still must deal with her abusive husband even after he is gone. The four old Indians represent mythic validation and support for these women's resistance and empowerment.[28]

Hovaugh's search is fruitless—they do not find the four Indians and Babo is surely not very interested in interfering with their efforts to fix the world. As a descendent of Melville's character, she could only sympathize with that goal. But due to her interest in seeing all that there is to see on her first trip to Canada, she and Hovaugh witness the breakup of the dam, at once the novel's most "realistic" disruption and a sign of the reality of mythic power. Her signature expression, "Isn't that the trick," suggests that Babo has some inkling of the old Indians' and Coyote's roles in this event. Indeed, we might suppose that she is especially well equipped for such awareness and sympathy.

As Babo's descendent and the confidante of the four old Indians, Babo Jones might be considered an ally of sorts, at least a supporter and abettor of the Indians and maybe even of Coyote. Five times she says "isn't that the trick," four of these in recognition of a mythic or supernatural occurrence. Unlike Hovaugh, Babo takes the astonishing and magical in stride. That she does so with humor and recognition is apparent in the last words we hear her speak, when the Indians, having returned voluntarily to the hospital, suggest that "next time" they could help Doctor Hovaugh with his garden: "'Wouldn't that just be the trick,'" says Babo (*GGRW* 467).

* * *

The dialogue between *Benito Cereno* and *Green Grass, Running Water*, clarified by juxtaposition and strengthened by the bridging of past, present, and future that is supported by the Babo-Babo Jones connection, allows for further illumination of both texts. Two particularly revealing topics are masquerade and mutiny.

Juxtaposing Babo's revolutionary masquerade to *Green Grass, Running Water* throws into sharper relief the serious import of the various maskings or/and masquerades that King presents more humorously. At the same time, the defeat of Babo's masquerade may serve as a caution to contemporary rebels. For First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman, masquerading as the Lone Ranger and others is an alternative to death and, occasionally, a means of escaping from prison. For Charlie's father, Portland Looking Bear, a fake nose, another kind of mask, is what certifies him as Indian in Hollywood. It is not only a matter of being able to get work, but of being forced to submit to the stereotypes of what Indians "really" look like—which in the world of two-dimensional screen imagery is equivalent to what Indians actually are. Thus the rubber nose represents the falsifications forced on Indians by whites.[29] Latisha's Dead Dog Cafe is the scene of King's most fully realized and most comic masquerade. Beef becomes dog meat to entice tourists with a "traditional" Indian meal (as Lionel reminds his aunt Norma, the Blackfoot never ate dog meat), and the costumes of the day are chosen with capricious abandon:

> Plains, Southwest, or combination?
> . . . What'd you do yesterday?
> Plains.
> Do Southwest. (*GGRW* 116–117)

As Marta Dvorak argues, Latisha is reversing the expected "dynamics of acculturation" by creatively exploiting "the stereotyped images of the Other that whites have projected onto natives," demonstrating "that the native too can play the game . . . and win."[30] If Latisha's customers are eager to be taken in, they are also deserving victims of the hoax. The Dead Dog is, as Dvorak notes, the "antithesis" of Remmington's steak house, the blatantly exploitative and racist establishment where Portland and Charlie find work when Portland tries to make a comeback in Hollywood. The contrast also reminds us of the context that makes the show at the Dead Dog a triumph of resistant creativity.

Michael Paul Rogin, who discusses Melville's trope of the masquerade in depth, indirectly suggests how the old Indians' fixing the Western is also related to masquerade: "By forcing Don Benito to play the part of master, Babo has forced him to mistrust the patriarchal, domestic relations which had constituted his identity. By overthrowing slavery and then *staging it as a play*, Babo has conventionalized the supposedly natural relations of master and slave."[31] By creating an Indian victory in a genre that relies on a white victory, the old Indians do essentially the same thing: their intervention demonstrates that the movie's white victory is merely conventional (and by implication, historical white victories were not the consequence of natural necessity or of what

Nasty/Natty Bumppo considers "white gifts"). Further, the effect of Babo's "play" on Cereno is mirrored in Bursum's reaction to the fixing of the Western: "'Well, something sure as hell got screwed up,' said Bursum, looking at the remote in his hand. 'Damn. You put your faith in good equipment and look what happens'" (*GGRW* 359). Not only is his trust in technology disturbed, but by implication so is his faith in "the unifying metaphor or the cultural impact The Map would have on customers," the "majesty" of his creation, and his own secure position of control as a white Canadian.

As the shared interest in masking and the conventions masks can support or subvert confirms, *Green Grass, Running Water,* like *Benito Cereno,* is to a considerable extent about delusion and illusion—what people, including the readers, believe is going on versus what is or may be going on. *Green Grass, Running Water,* again like *Benito Cereno,* is also about the reader's implication or complicity in the events it depicts. At the same time, through the use of masks or masquerade, both novella and novel undermine "normal" reality and offer alternative possibilities.

Even if they recognize the invitations to uncertainty that Melville offers, first-time readers of *Benito Cereno* must assume that what is going on is what Delano's perspective reveals or implies is happening. Readers then belatedly must recognize that they have been had by the rebellious Africans and the subversively resistant author, who creates illusions of control, unity, and meaning only to destroy them violently. Melville rebels not only against Delano's assumptions, but also against our complicity in them. In *Green Grass, Running Water* King disrupts expectations of unity, control, and meaning explicitly, using humor that reminds us of the possibility of violence. This possibility is implicit in the assumed names of the Lone Ranger, and his cohorts, but it is intensified by the presence of Babo Jones, the African barber's descendant, who alludes proudly to her ancestor's expertise at his trade and knows the importance of a sharp razor, thereby evoking Melville's powerful shaving scene. Does the mutinous violence of *Benito Cereno,* juxtaposed to King's novel, promise or reveal similar violence in *Green Grass, Running Water*? Surely not directly. But the violence of *Benito Cereno,* originating as it does in earlier violence against the enslaved Africans, suggests, in King's context, a parallel with historical anti-Indian violence and its contemporary continuation in the legal system, in whites' attitudes, and in the memory of Indian people like Amos. Alberta recalls her father's anger when she observes an unknown black woman—Babo—drawing "her nails across her skin, as if she were scratching. Or shaving" (*GGRW* 314). As this passage demonstrates, the potential for justifiable Indian rebellion is reinforced by the echoes of *Benito Cereno* and the presence of Babo Jones.

Though King depicts no mutiny comparable to the full-scale rebellion on the San Dominick, *Green Grass, Running Water* does present us with numerous mutinous actions. As already noted, Babo Jones talks back, speaks out of turn, and ignores belittling commands. Not, like Melville's character, the leader of a rebellion, she can still be considered an accomplice of the four old Indians. In turn, this could imply her support of other characters' mutinous acts, all of which are moved by the same spirit that moved Changing Woman and her

companions to resist. The old Indians reject the subordinate roles assigned them, leave the fort/hospital at will, and fix the Western. Though Coyote gets the credit, it is probably Amos who burns his cousin Milford's stolen pickup when he is not allowed to remove it legally from a white-owned used-car lot. At two Sun Dances, the Indians collectively resist white imposition by forcing photographers to leave. Eli says no to Sifton and the dam. In each instance the issues are ownership, self-definition, and respect, and in each the whites have imposed the ruling definitions. In one way or another, each of the mutinies carried out by King's characters against oppressive hierarchies is successful. Significantly, however, none of them restores or changes the world as a whole.[32] As Milford says to Amos after the used-car-lot fire, "'It won't stop them, you know'" (*GGRW* 345). Each resistant act can only be part of a process that must continue.[33]

* * *

Both *Green Grass, Running Water* and *Benito Cereno* imply that the story will go on: Alberta will have a child; the women will rebuild the house; and Babo's head gazes imperturbably at the whites. At the end of King's novel the storytelling is beginning again. But while King's novel offers unambiguous, if complicated, promises, Melville's implied promise is grimly ironic. Regardless of how one reads Melville's Babo or construes his novella's sympathies, *Benito Cereno* is a bleakly disturbing fiction.

Even if we read Babo as a powerful intellect, a creative sensibility, and Melville's representative in the text, regardless of how the severed head is interpreted, the future it promises is daunting. Any vindication of Babo, and I believe the novella does vindicate him, also confirms the necessity of violence, with the shedding of victims' and oppressors' blood. In contrast, in *Green Grass, Running Water*, with the serio-comic revision of the Western and the serious affirmation of the values associated with the Sun Dance, King creates a hopeful tone, supported by the planned rebuilding of the cabin, the humor that runs like a current throughout, and the book's cyclical structure, accentuated by the return of the sun, which the Sun Dance celebrates. And yet Amos's absence from the book's last chapter—his final silence, which, in the context of this dialogue of fictions, must remind us of Babo's final silence—is a reminder, too, that as life continues so do loss, grief, and anger. Were this not so, one might object that King's ending represented only wishful thinking. The hope that King's novel offers is qualified by this recognition—a recognition reflected when "I" tells Coyote, "'There are good points and there are bad points, but there are never all good points or all bad points'" (*GGRW* 360). In turn, this statement reflects King's recognition of "a great desire," within Native communities, "to maintain a balance, to make things right if they're wrong—not to make everything good but to maintain a balance."[34]

These two works' profoundly different tones reflect their different orientations, the one entirely textual, the other filtering the textual through the oral. Sandra Zagarell observes that all of Melville's characters are "claustrally restricted by preexisting authority. Discourse within 'Benito Cereno,' with its

echoes and tautologies, reflects this entrapment."[35] *Benito Cereno*'s emphasis on the textual is most evident in the deposition, but Melville's complex syntax and literary/historical allusions also represent the discourse of a literate, privileged minority. The novella's exclusive reliance on this discourse is inseparable from, and enforces, the ultimate silencing of the Africans and the denial of their experience.

Conversely, King's reliance on oral culture with its necessary immediacy, accessibility to the oral community, and openness to retelling that must involve both continuance and change, is integral to the possibility of hope established by *Green Grass, Running Water.* Babo Jones's effort to retell the old Indians' story is a perfect example of simultaneous continuance and change; her concern to "get it right" represents the respect for a story's integrity that allows for change without loss. In short the oral grounding of King's text offers a basis for imagining a way out of the kind of impasse with which *Benito Cereno* confronts us. Up against the power represented by Cereno's deposition Babo chooses silence. Babo Jones, the old Indians, and "I" answer the power of Western/Christian colonialism with the power of oral storytelling. The different ways in which the texts themselves approach their readers reflect their contrasting orientations—toward the written or the spoken—and contribute to their differing tones.

Robert S. Levine describes Melville's narrative voice as "play[ing] fast and loose with the reader," as Melville "attempts to con" us into accepting Delano's assumptions. H. Bruce Franklin goes further, describing the novella as "a cryptic show of symbols staged to confront, perplex, hoodwink, and even pillory at least some of its readers," a text characteristic of Melville's "estranged relationship with his audience."[36] King's novel, too, might reflect a degree of estrangement, given his protective silence about the Sun Dance ritual, yet his text's humor, together with its orality, creates a much different relationship with readers. I have taught both texts many times and find that students often feel shut out by *Benito Cereno* and engaged if somewhat perplexed by *Green Grass, Running Water.* Both texts create some degree of discomfort for readers, perhaps related to the kinds of critical self-consciousness they require.

James Kavanagh and Patricia Linton may help us identify a point of commonality in this respect. Kavanagh argues rightly that to extricate themselves from Delano's perspective, readers must reread *Benito Cereno,* and that this second reading must be "a reading of one's first spontaneous relation to the text." Further, "the critical reader [must] take responsibility for understanding how his or her work might help to reproduce or challenge a dominant ideology."[37] Emphasizing relationship and responsibility, Kavanagh's prescription here accords with the primary values of King's novel. Linton's discussion of the novel's relation to its readers implies a similar responsibility. On the one hand, the novel resists its non-Native readers by refusing fully to accommodate outsiders' curiosity. Linton notes further that the "barrier" to full knowledge may be "virtually invisible to outsiders because . . . the novel does accommodate the reader with every diversion except access to private space"—an "accommodation" very like what is granted to Melville's Delano on board the *San Dominick.*

At the same time Linton rightly observes that "the coherence" of King's "narrative depends fundamentally upon the reader's recognition of a Native worldview."[38] In the gap between incomplete knowledge and necessary recognition lie both the reader's potential responsibility and her/his estrangement. I note that Linton refers to "outsider" readers, and that I, too, can only claim to represent what non-Natives might experience. Again, a possible and disturbing analogy is clear: as, in *Benito Cereno,* Delano never recognizes the coherence of what he witnesses because he cannot—or will not—recognize an African worldview, so outsider readers of *Green Grass, Running Water* will not recognize the novel's coherence unless we are willing to recognize a Native worldview, with all that might imply about our own presuppositions.

Green Grass, Running Water challenges readers in numerous, related ways: shifts in narrative voice, perspective, and setting; parodies of sacred Western texts, historical narratives, and ideologies; unexplained intersections of story worlds; a relentless barrage of proper names, some no doubt recognizable to any given reader, so that those one does not recognize become persistent questions: not only, Who is Clifford Sifton? but also, How will my reading of the novel change when I know? Thus *Green Grass, Running Water,* like *Benito Cereno,* forces readers into critical self-awareness and probably into a somewhat uncomfortable sense of complicity and responsibility. Again, I am referring primarily, as Linton does, to non-Native readers. Yet there must be challenges for Native readers as well. Some of these challenges are probably the same, yet others might have to do with the diverse Blackfoot characters: Would readers want to recognize themselves in Charlie? Portland? Alberta? Lionel? Other possibilities will surely be addressed by Native readers themselves.

Not only does King offer readers partial entry into the worlds of his novel but he also invites us, more hospitably than Melville, to participate in the novel's process through his emphasis on the oral. Babo Jones, as a responsive listener and storyteller, models the possibility of such participation for non-Natives, even as she demonstrates the appropriate relationship of outsiders to the tradition.[39] As she begins to tell the story she's learned from the old Indians, "a great one, all about how things got started," she warns us: "Now you got to remember that this is their story. I'm just repeating it as a favor. You understand?" (*GGRW* 56) Somewhat distracted by Coyote's antics, she knows the importance of getting the story right: "I keep getting it wrong. I better start at the beginning again" (*GGRW* 100). Though she perceives the need to rebegin as the need to correct errors, she also, by rebeginning, joins the community in which the story is continuously restarted and retold. And when she does rebegin, she echoes the novel's first words and anticipates its last ones, all spoken by "I": "In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water" (*GGRW* 1, 100, 469).[40]

King's invitation to readers also inheres in humor that prompts recognition and reflection, and in repetition that gradually makes us familiar with the outlines of at least one layer of stories. Familiarity allows us, to some extent, to participate as story listeners—for example, we can begin to fill in some of what is not said, note differences in tellings, and thereby become more competent interpreters. What I think most directly encourages readers to

participate is the ongoing dialogue of "I" with Coyote, which we should construe as simultaneously an ongoing dialogue with us as reader-listeners.[41] The most direct evidence of the reader's assumed presence (and hence participation and responsibility) comes in the following passage:

> "Okay," says Coyote. "Tell me a story."
> "Okay," I says. "You remember Old Woman? You remember that big hole and Young Man Walking On Water? You remember any of this at all?"
> "Sure," says Coyote. "I remember all of it."
> "I wasn't talking to you," I says.
> "Who else is here?" says Coyote. (*GGRW* 432)

That "I" does not answer this question simply confirms the only possible answer: the reader.

Green Grass, Running Water appropriates stories and figures from white Western culture and assimilates them to Native purposes. This is most evident in the four old Indians, who turn out to be indigenous female mythic creators, but is also made clear as the novel assimilates the literary to oral conventions, reverses white America's stories of conquest, and assigns white characters to roles that serve the purposes of a Native story. The novel's most important non-Native character, Babo Jones, who remakes both the story of subservience assigned her and the story of *Benito Cereno,* also plays a key role in King's reversals. In her, King resurrects Melville's rebellious African and suggests the possibility of alliance among the oppressed across lines of color, ethnicity, and nationality. Through the presence of Babo Jones, he implicitly acknowledges *Benito Cereno,* along with Native oral tradition (in contrast to his use of other Western texts), as a true antecedent of his novel.

NOTES

1. Patricia Linton, "'And Here's How It Happened': Trickster Discourse in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water,*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 45, number 1 (1999): 212–234; Jane Flick, "Reading Notes for Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water,*" *Canadian Literature* 161, number 62 (1999): 140–172. Linton notes in passing King's allusion to *Benito Cereno,* and Flick identifies numerous, sometimes quite oblique, references to the novella.

2. Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville,* (New York: Knopf, 1983); Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). See Rogin for extensive discussion of Melville's relationship and responses to personal, cultural, and political issues. King acknowledges Melville's influence (Weaver, *That the People Might Live,* 147).

3. Critics have varied widely in their assessments of *Benito Cereno*; only in the past several decades has a general consensus supported reading the novella as a resistant text. For a summary of the critical history, see Robert E. Burkholder, Introduction to *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno,"* ed. Burkholder (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992), 3–13.

4. Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno,* in Melville, *"Billy Budd, Sailor" and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 164, 163.

5. Ibid., 259.

6. Thomas King, "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial," *World Literature Written in English* 30, number 2 (1990): 16.

7. Ibid., 11–12.

8. Kimberly Blaeser, "Like 'Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket': Native Women Weaving Stories," in *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color,* ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 265–266.

9. Kimberly Blaeser, "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center," in *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature,* ed. Jeannette Armstrong (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books Ltd., 1993), 54, 57.

10. Blanca Chester, "*Green Grass, Running Water.* Theorizing the World of the Novel," *Canadian Literature* 161, number 62 (1999): 45, 46.

11. David L. Moore, "Decolonizing Criticism: Reading Dialectics and Dialogics in Native American Literatures," *SAIL* 6, number 4 (1994): 7–35; Robin Ridington, "Theorizing Coyote's Cannon: Sharing Stories with Thomas King," in *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition,* eds. Lisa P. Valentine and Regna Darnell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 19–37. Moore's elucidation of dialogism as not limited to oppositional discourse is relevant here. Moore sees the dialogic as moving "toward relationality" with difference (p. 19), as "intercultural process" (p. 15), "the discourse of reciprocity" (p. 16). "Dialogism acknowledges . . . the primacy of context" and "the impossibility of textual resolution, a productive indeterminacy" (p. 19). Such an open-ended, collaborative, and creative conception fits well with what we may see in the dialogue betweeen *Benito Cereno* and *Green Grass, Running Water.* Moore's definition is also open to Ridington's observation that "Native American theorizing . . . is fundamentally dialogic . . . the product of a shared authority" (pp. 22–23); "shared authority" likewise could suggest the kind of relationship I am proposing between these two works.

12. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), especially chapter 2; on whiteness, see Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

13. See, for example, Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Dana D. Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638–1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jean Fagin Yellin, *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776–1863* (New York: New York University Press, 1972); and James Kavanagh, "That Hive of Subtlety: 'Benito Cereno' and the Liberal Hero," in *Ideology and Classic American Literature,* eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 352–383.

14. Maggie Montesinos Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and The Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 154 (on Delano).

15. Joyce Sparer Adler, "'Benito Cereno': Slavery and Violence in the Americas," in *Critical Essays* 81, ed. Robert E. Burkholder, quoted in Joyce Sparer Adler, *War in Melville's Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).

16. Thomas King, *Green Grass, Running Water* (New York: Bantam, 1994). Future citations will appear in the text as *GGRW.*

17. Marlene Goldman, "Mapping and Dreaming: Native Resistance in *Green Grass, Running Water,*" *Canadian Literature* 161, number 62 (1999): 28–29; Florence Stratton, "Cartographic Lessons: Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water,*" *Canadian Literature* 161, number 62 (1999): 95–96.

Bill Bursum is named for the Bursum Bill, introduced in the US Congress in 1922 for the purpose of settling the claims of non-Indians living on Pueblo lands in New Mexico. By turning over all conflicts to state courts, using a survey showing the location of contested lands as evidence of whites' ownership, and providing Indians no legal recourse, it threatened to leave the Pueblos essentially landless. See Barbara Tedlock, *The Beautiful and the Dangerous* (New York: Viking, 1992), 24–25.

18. Goldman, "Mapping and Dreaming," 20.

19. For traditional indigenous understandings of language, see, for example, Jeannette Armstrong, "Land Speaking," in *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing,* ed. Simon Ortiz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 174–194; Simon J. Ortiz, "Song/Poetry and Language—Expression and Perception," *Sun Tracks* 3, number 2 (1977): 9–12; and Peggy Beck, Anna Lee Walters, and Nia Francisco, *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life* (Tsaile, Arizona: Navajo Community College Press, 1990). On the implications of Melville's "loss of belief in . . . coherence and meaning in language" (p. 910), see Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," *PMLA* 94, number 5 (1979): 909–923.

20. Kavanagh, "That Hive," 365.

21. The critical discussion of this command is extensive. Most pertinent here is the reading that identifies the leader as, originally, Christopher Columbus, represented on the original figurehead of the San Dominick and replaced by the bleached bones of the mutinous Africans' owner, Aranda. See H. Bruce Franklin, "Past, Present, and Future Seemed One," in *Critical Essays,* ed. Burkholder, 231.

22. See Paul Gruchow, "King o' the Chairs," *Minnesota* (November–December, 1993): 17–18, on the importance of oral culture.

23. Adler, "Slavery and Violence," 88.

24. Ibid., 92.

25. On silence as communication, see Kavanagh, "That Hive," 376; and Adler, "Slavery and Violence," 88; for an opposing view see Nelson, *The Word,* 126.

26. Nelson, *The Word,* 121.

27. Peter Gzowski, "Peter Gzowski Interviews Thomas King on *Green Grass, Running Water,*" *Canadian Literature* 161, number 62 (1999): 65–76. King states that "Babo's always right. The sergeant's always wrong" (p. 67). Ridington, building on King's interview statement, comments that "King's Babo recalls the role played by Melville's Babo, but with a Coyote twist. . . . King's Babo . . . knows more than her master, the God-like Dr. J. Hovaugh" (Ridington, "Theorizing," 27).

28. Sandra A. Zagarell, "Revisioning America: Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 30 (1984): 245–259. Rpt. in Burkholder, ed., *Critical Essays,* 127–145. Zagarell observes that in the relationship between Cereno and Babo, Melville "dramatizes gender" as an unstable "cultural convention" (p. 134). What Melville does half surreptitiously, King does with serio-comic abandon, when he creates the four old Indians.

29. Marta Dvorak, "The World According to Thomas King," *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies* 1 (1997): 67–76. Dvorak comments at length on the rubber nose as metonymical for the fraudulence of Portland's life in California and as signifying "capitulation for natives" in "the esthetic, the ethical, the technological, and the communicational . . . domains" (pp. 70–72).

30. Ibid., 73–74.

31. Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy*, 215 (emphasis added).

32. One might ask whether the bursting of the dam is symbolic of mutiny. I do not believe so, if only because of its ambiguous intentionality. Melville's Babo is a purposeful disrupter of order who organizes the "volcanic" eruption and manages its aftermath in order to fulfill his and his fellows' desires to return home in freedom. In his communally oriented purposefulness, he is radically different from Coyote. Coyote, absolutely undisciplined, may cause the earthquake and flood with his dancing, but his only motivations seem to be an energetic impulse to play and an irrepressible desire to shake things up.

33. This necessity of continued struggle may offer at least some hope for the eventual participation of Lionel and Charlie—there will be more opportunities. Lionel is able to take part in the Sun Dance resistance only because he has been brought to the scene, virtually against his will, by Eli; at book's end, he is still waffling about his future, and where his loyalties will lie. The closest Charlie comes to a resistant act is cheering his father on in the Western.

34. Weaver, *That the People*, 148–149.

35. Zagarell, "Revisioning," 138.

36. Levine, *Conspiracy*, 206; Franklin, "Past," 238.

37. Kavanagh, "That Hive," 358, 360.

38. Linton, "And Here's How," 219, 227.

39. Melville's Babo, in contrast, can only tell the whites' story back to them—he may be deceiving Delano and torturing Cereno, but he does so by enacting their "texts," which ultimately condemn him.

40. She also anticipates Hovaugh's use of the same beginning, when Sergeant Cereno queries him about the four Indians' ages. In Hovaugh's mouth I think these words signify irony, in that the representative of "that GOD" in the garden must—probably unwittingly—begin on the Indians' terms.

41. Margery Fee and Jane Flick, "Coyote Pedagogy: Knowing Where the Borders Are in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," *Canadian Literature* 161, number 62 (1999): 131–139. Fee and Flick see in King's Babo a model for the reader: "Babo can't know what she is seeing if it is completely foreign to her, but years of oppression have taught her to try. And this is how the reader must learn to operate: to pay attention, especially in foreign territory" (p. 133).