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Analysis of Thomas King's "Borders" and "A Coyote Columbus Story"

Thomas King has written many stories that derive their premise from the Native American culture. Two of his most famous stories are "Borders" and "A Coyote Columbus Story". "Borders" tells the story of a young adolescent boy who makes plans to visit his sister who lives in Salt Lake City with his mother. The sister's name is Letitia. This name is perhaps very significant because it is the only name from this family that is mentioned as the boy and his mother are never mentioned by King in this story.

In the course of their journey, the boy, and the mother have to go through the United States border. At the border, the officer asks them where they are headed, and she replies that they are headed to Salt Lake City. The border officer then asks the mother for their citizenship to which she replies with one simple word, 'Blackfoot'. The mother is consistently asked to name her citizenship, whether Canadian or American. However, she keeps uttering the same word over and over again.

Unfortunately, the mother is informed by the border officer that she cannot go to where she wants until she ascertains her citizenship, but she will not have any of it. She keeps uttering the term "Blackfoot". The two are forced to spend up two nights in their car and soon enough; they attract the attention of the nation as medical crew start arriving to interview the mother and the son. In the end, the border officers have seemingly had enough, and they allow the mother and son to pass through even after she replies "Blackfoot" when she is asked about her citizenship for the last time (Riegel 332).

A Coyote Columbus Story' also has a native Americana premise. This story satirizes the Columbus journey to North America from the Old World (Gruber 68). In this story, Coyote us a trickster who creates the world and all the creatures that are in this world. Because of this, Coyote is essentially able to manipulate every event in the world to her advantage. This is until Columbus; a red-haired and funny looking man arrives and completely alters the plans of Coyote. When Columbus reaches the land of Coyote, he is not impressed with the enormous amount of turtles, moose and beavers that characterize this land. Alternative, he has more interests in human beings which he can capture and then take with him to Europe for sale (Grass 42).

In " Borders', the title itself is a symbol. The title plays significant roles and also helps in the development of the story. The title first symbolizes the physical divide between the United States and Canada, which is the main setting of the story. Much of the action in the story takes place at the border. This is the setting where much of the conflict in the story is developed and, therefore, the title ' borders" is very symbolic and indeed very appropriate for the short story (Gruber 45).

There is also another huge symbolism in the story, and this is personal identity. The protagonist in the story who is the mother experiences some conflict of her personal identity as she tries to cross the border between Canada and America. This conflict of personal identity can once again be tied to the title of the title for the story " borders". Here, " borders" is used to symbolize more than one aspect. The normal definition of the border is that it is a frontier area or a line that essentially separates two political regions or

two geographical regions.

In this story, the border serves two functions. The first function is the representation of the area where the story takes place. The second role is even more important. Here, the border symbolizes the divide that exists between societies and the divide that separates' an individual from other individuals. The border is symbolic of the conflict between society and man. It symbolizes a source of conflict between man and society where man is sometimes forced to fight for his personal identity in the society (Gruber 80). In this story, conflict emerges when the woman reaches the border. She is consistently asked about her citizenship, but she does not align to any side-American or Canadian. She is seemingly proud of her heritage, and she, therefore, holds her ground that she will not side with any country. This could also be taken as pride. Therefore, the border is a symbol of the conflict between man and society. Just like the woman has a hard time trying to maintain her personal identity, man is sometimes also forced to fight hard to maintain his personal identity (Gruber 83). The woman maintains that she is a Blackfoot. As she continues maintaining that she is Blackfoot, her dreams of crossing over and going to visit her daughter in Salt Lake City are seemingly crushed. This symbolizes the real situation in the society whereby unless man agrees with the rest of the society, his dreams ends up being crushed most of the time. Here, the meaning of the border is also is symbolic of the line that divides continuous belief and self-denial. The woman who is the main protagonist in the story has to come to a decision of whether she will agree with the rest of the society which deems her to be Canadian or she will hold on to her belief that she is neither Canadian nor American and that

she is Blackfoot (Riegel 335). Agreeing with the society might seem like a viable choice since she will have the opportunity to achieve her dream relatively quickly. However, in the end, she stands her ground and maintains that she is neither Canadian nor American, and she is allowed to cross the border. This is symbolic of man overcoming society in the conflict that emerges between them.

“ A Coyote Columbus Story” also has several elements of symbolism. It is symbolic of the various clashes of interest that often develops between man and the society. It is also symbolic of the various individuals in the society who uses the little power in their hands to exploit others. This is particularly in regards to the Coyote. From the onset, the Coyote is depicted as a trickster who uses several means and ways to ensure that things go her way (Kruk 120).

She uses the little power that she has to obtain favors for herself and make sure that life for her is favorable. This is symbolic of the society, whereby people who have even the little bit of power exploit this power to obtain favors for themselves. In many occasions, it does not matter if this power is legitimate or not. As long as one has some power which can be used to obtain wealth, one is willing to use it. The individual then uses this power to create things that are deemed a must in their world. Therefore, the female Coyote is symbolic of such individuals in the society.

The conflict between the Coyote and Columbus is also symbolic to another situation in the society. People in power usually have different definitions of success of wealth. For instance in this story, Columbus is not impressed at all by all the things that the Coyote has created or assembled for herself. While

most of her creations are animals, Columbus is in actual sense more interested in human beings which he hopes to sell back in Europe as slaves and therefore acquire wealth for himself and his family ((Kruk 124). Coyote has an entirely different definition of wealth, and this is once again symbolic of the real society.

In conclusion, it is clear that the literary device of symbolism features heavily in Thomas King's stories. *Borders* and *A Coyote Columbus* story are two of the story's where the element of symbolism has been splendidly used. Both stories incorporate elements that are meant to symbolize a particular situation in the society. In *Borders*, the border is used to symbolize the divide that exists between societies and the divide that separates' an individual from other individuals. The border becomes symbolic of the conflict between society and man where man is sometimes forced to fight for his personal identity in the society. In *A Coyote Columbus* Story, the Coyote is symbolic of the individuals in the society who utilize the little power that they have to obtain favors and create a seemingly perfect world for themselves.

Works Cited

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