

# Motorcycles and sweetgrass



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the novel *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass* by Drew Hayden Taylor, a community exists that is disjointed and lacking intimate connection between members. Nanabush is called into the community and utilizes chaos to create order and an application of the Marxist concept of creative destruction presents a newly formed community of First Nations people from old Anishnawbe roots. John, who is Nanabush, enters the Anishnawbe community as a representation of disorder and chaos. Initially, the only relationship that John has within the community is with Lillian.

Maggie asks John how he knows her mother and he informs her that he knew her from "A long time ago." Maggie then questions him saying "You're younger than me. This doesn't make any sense" to which John replies "Yeah, I know. Isn't it great? Who needs sense!" (Taylor 89). A lack of sense implies a lack of order and therefore promotes chaos and John's remark that the state of lacking sense is "great" situates his character as one that is comfortable and familiar with chaos.

The various names of John are a depiction of the disorder he wishes to establish (examples of his stated names are 'Tanner,' 'Richardson,' 'Prestor,' 'Clayton,' 'Matas,' 'Frum,' 'Savage,' and 'Smith' (Austen)). By continually altering his name, John is able to create multiple reference points for his character which only furthers his ambiguity and chaotic nature. Another example of John's promotion of chaos occurs when he lies about the history of Natives in the museum (Taylor 240-41).

By lying about the Native history, John is furthering the distance that exists between Natives and their oppressors which creates turmoil, thus causing a

chaos of historical accuracy for the Anishnawbe community. Throughout the course of the novel, Virgil places importance and wonders about the significance of petroglyphs. Eventually, John tells Virgil that the drawings are not symbols or markings, to which Virgil exclaims that “ they’re all nothing but...graffiti? That’s all? Just graffiti? Left by you...” to which John replies “ Yeah, what did you think they were?

I mean who knew people would think they were important? People crack me up” (330-31). These drawings that Virgil thought were an important depiction of his mother being taken away by John on horseback were simply insignificant to Nanabush and created confusion to Virgil. Because petroglyphs generally act as a signifier of something significant, John is utilizing what most would consider an important artistic tool as a means to amuse himself thus further representing his character as a catalyst of chaos for the Anishnawbes.