

RACE, RELIGION, AND POPULAR CULTURE IN THE 1960s: THE ACTUALITY OF THOMAS BERGER AND ISHMAEL REED'S POST-WESTERNS

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ABSTRACT

The New Western and/or Post-Western of the 1960s¹ parodied the patterns of characterization of the classic western beyond recognition to serve a double purpose. It breathed fresh air into the 'exhausted' genre by providing more intriguing western histories (lower case), on the one hand, and revitalised novel writing at a time when the novel was pronounced 'dead',² on the other hand. Likewise, Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969) and Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1964) contribute immensely to the afore-mentioned 'mission' and beyond. What's more, written at the height of the 'counter-culture revolution', they both undertake to question and uproot preconceived absolutes and media-based realities regarding race, religion, and indigenous cultures by reviving the resourcefulness of Afro-American and Indian heritage.

To serve this purpose, they respectively focus on Hoodoo aesthetics³ and the Plains Indians' 'cosmology',⁴ the Cheyenne, as the best embodiments of these two age-old cultures which are revived and analysed from the 'high ground' of 1960s which are best known for their aftermath than for what was achieved during those years. Furthermore, these particular experimental novels undermine the pre-eminence of popular culture and pave the way towards a better representation of indigenous cultures be it Afro-American or Indian. The main purpose of this paper regards the actuality of these two exemplary works at a time when the multicultural experiment initiated in the 1960s faces certain and similar challenges.

KEYWORDS: Hoodoo Aesthetics, Multiculturalism, 1960s, Post-Western, The Cheyenne

INTRODUCTION

Blackening the Western: Neo-Hoodoo Aesthetics in *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*

Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* represents the best example of the Post-Western written in the 1960s for various reasons. It parodies the classic Western clichés of larger-than-life-heroes and virginal schoolmarm through Reed's Neo-Hoodoo aesthetics and highlights the emerging images of the 1960s, on the one hand, and it establishes a new paradigm regarding the writing of the 'new fiction', often referred to as 'the broke-down' technique, on the other hand. Furthermore, Reed's fiction and nonfiction tends to synthesize and synchronize apparently unrelated elements such as African mythology, Egyptology, history, music, painting, technology, religion, film, video, popular culture, to name a few, into a comprehensive and revealing pastiche labelled 'new fiction'.⁵

Above all, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* depicts the emergence of the American Neo-Hoodoo as an embodiment of the African/Yoruba myths and loas interchangeably named Eshu, Elegbara or Signifying Monkey. Furthermore, the novel establishes Neo-Hoodoo as part of the Wild West, that is, America itself, and highlights its appeal to America's cultural amalgamation and multiculturalism by depicting the main character, Loop Garoo Kid, not simply as a cowboy or gunslinger but as a houngan, a conjure man, and trickster.

Thus, even though the events happen to take place in the Far West, an analogy between Hoodoo/Voodoo aesthetics and pop and techno culture of the 1960s is clearly made. As such, the 'flower-power' children's uprising and their eventual massacre before setting off for the techno-anarchical paradise of The Seven Cities of Cibola acts as a reminiscence of the counter-culture riots of the 1960s.⁶ In addition, the children's uprising is mainly directed against the corruption of their 'yellow-fevered', materialistic and media brainwashed parents. However, the turning point and the revolving force of the novel remains the introduction of a neo-Hoodoo trickster and houngan: Loop Garoo Kid, who undermines the establishment and avenges the massacred children: 'A fundamental source of Reed's subversive imagery is hoodoo, with its rituals, conjure men and women, and its spirits, or loas, of whom chief examples are the trickster deities Legba, Guede, and Erzulie'.⁷

In addition, the circus-like nature of Voodoo dominates the novel as Reed 'embraces the circus, not the museum' arguing in his Hoodoo manifesto that, 'Neo-hoodoo is a Dance and Music closing in on its words ... the centre of Neo-Hoodoo is the drum, the ankh and the Dance'.⁸ Finally, language and literature in Voodoo turns into magic: 'I [Reed] consider myself a fetish-maker. I see my books as amulets, and in ancient African cultures words were considered in this way. Words were considered to have magical meanings and were considered to be charms'.⁹

In fact, the novel traces the initiation of Loop Garoo Kid from an innocent bullwhacker at first, who dresses 'like Mortimer Snerd', spills 'French fries on his lap' and moves 'from town to town quoting Thomas Jefferson' into a typical hoodoo trickster and houngan.¹⁰ In addition, Loop Garoo Kid performs his Voodoo tricks empowered by the presence of a snake, the representation of Damballah, in fact, the most powerful god in Haiti as Zora Neale Hurston argues in her intriguing work *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*.¹¹

Loop Garoo Kid's Voodoo ceremony also matches Reginald Martin's description of major Yoruban elements in a Voodoo practice, that is, '(1) the fetish, a physical icon, (2) trance, (3) Voodoo gods and their spiritual essences (loas), (4) sacrifice, (5) offerings, (6) magic, and (7) an absence of a clear hierarchy in its gods'.¹² However, Loop Garoo Kid's initiation in Voodoo or Hoodoo is brought about mainly by the unexpected death at the hands of Atonists, that is, 'Christians, whites, the oppressive-minded'¹³ of the New Orleans Hoodoo priestess and conjure woman called Marie Laveau alias Zozo Labrique allegedly, 'a charter member of the American Hoodoo Church'.¹⁴ As a result, the subsequent plague over Yellow Back Radio: 'Me [Drag] getting sick and the cattle dying like that'¹⁵, the spell on Mustache Sal, that is, Drag Gibson's mail-order alluring and adulterous wife and even the radio channel's transmission problem: 'The Kid put some kind of a cross on her, had some kind of gris gris dolls placed in her transmitter and the Woman had to sign off and get out of town'¹⁶ count for the hoodoo presence and its undermining tendency both on the established order and the novel writing process.

Thus, contrary to the linear concept of time, Pope Innocent VIII of the 15-th century riding on a red bull arrives at Yellow Back Radio to deal with the Hoodoo trickster and remove the plague. Despite the Pope's success in overpowering Loop's 'connoissance' by removing the mad dog's tooth, his affinity with Loop and his acceptance of Voodoo religion prevents him from taking any further steps as his reaction against Drag Gibson's lynching proposal clearly reveals: 'You idiot slob, I didn't come here to kill the Loop Garoo Kid, I came to draw him out, to talk to him'.¹⁷ In fact, from that moment on, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* 'turns into a book about Neo-Hoodooism'¹⁸ uplifting Reed's aim 'to humble Judeo-Christian culture'¹⁹ for being 'a warped, antilife, antihuman force ... [and stressing that] blacks and the spirit of their culture are central rather than marginal to human culture and to the continued survival of the human race'.²⁰ Nevertheless, Reed's intention remains the introduction of Hoodoo as an innovative, pagan and artistic philosophy fit enough to rival the undeserved supremacy of Christianity as Pope himself observes. To serve this purpose, Reed depicts Loop as the other

twin son of God and a former lover of the 'Haitian *loa* Erzulie/Yemaya, or ...the Virgin Mary alias Black Diane'²¹ as his conversation with the Pope reveals:

You're his Son too, Loop.

Yes, the eldest according to what they call apocrypha. You know how his propagandists are-anything they disapprove of they ascribe to hearsay, apocrypha or superstition. But I've never cashed in on it like he did. I knew very early that he wasn't the only one, there were others-but his arrogance and selfishness finally got the best of him and he drove them all underground. Now they're making a strong comeback.²²

Such a claim, in fact, links Loop Garoo Kid with the African trickster and the artistic 'bohemian type' who ridicules the prevailing origin myths of Christianity and demands a comeback of Hoodoo, as well as the establishment of the New Western. As such, Loop Garoo Kid remains an ever-present historical jester, a trickster figure 'cheated out of martyrdom'²³ whose subversive nature needs to be acknowledged. However, his presence shouldn't be misunderstood with the Christian version of the Devil or Satan as he represents the Devil's qualities in an African constructive way.²⁴

The novel, in fact, argues that Voodoo lies at the base of all religions as it means pure paganism. In fact, such a quality makes it a unifying force in a multi-cultural society rather than a dividing one. Therefore, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* can only be understood and appreciated only through an insightful analysis of the African loas turned into Neo-Hoodoo by Reed. As Reed argues in his nonfiction work *19 Necromancers*, 'The Afro-American artist is similar to the necromancer (a word whose etymology is relieving in itself!). He is a conjurer who works Juju upon its oppressors; a witch doctor who frees his fellow victims from the psychic attack lunched by demons of the outer and inner world'.²⁵

In fact, Reed's Neo-Hoodoo aesthetics is best manifested in the deconstruction of the Western genre²⁶ where the cliché-free Loop Garoo Kid faces the Western trio, that is, the Marshal, the Reverend and unexpectedly, the rancher, Drag Gibson. Thus, it matches one of Reed's primary goals set before writing the novel, that is, the parodic deconstruction of an already redundant genre through the utilization of Afro-American images and the juxtaposition of formulaic tales. As a matter of fact, the novel depicts an apparently typical frontier town far in the Wild West sometime in the nineteenth century: 'The wooden buildings stood in the shadows. The Jail house, the Hat and Boot store, the Hardware store, the Hotel, and Big Lizzy's Rabid Black Cougar Saloon'.²⁷ However, contrary to the classic readers' expectations, a black circus consisting of Loop Garoo Kid, the bullwhacker, 'a Juggler a dancing Bear a fast talking Barker and Zozo Labrique, charter member of the American Hoo-Doo Church'²⁸ appear to tour in the Wild West. Furthermore, as the troupe approaches the remote town of Yellow Back Radio where they are invited to end their Western tour, they are unexpectedly surrounded by children 'dressed in the attire of the Plains Indians'²⁹ who have driven the adults out of town. Such a discrepancy of characterizations is soon restored when three classic authorities on horseback: the Banker, the Marshal and the Doctor, strike a deal with the wealthy rancher Drag Gibson who promises to drive the 'flower power' children out of town in exchange of a 'stiffycate',³⁰ which would verify his legal ownership of the whole town.

Thus, since the very beginning, Reed depicts an atypical West where neither the Indian nor the Western trio seems to act according to the clichés of the genre. In addition, the eventual ambush of the troupe, which brings death to almost all the children and the circus members but Loop Garoo Kid, reverses the classic pattern of the villain and highlights Loop Garoo Kid as a hero who survives even a metaphoric desert on an atypical Indian's helicopter, the only survivor of his race, before finally settling in a hideout on the Peak of No Mo Snow mountain and delivering Hoodoo spells, curses and mockery on the villainous Drag, his cowhands, and 'the establishment'.

That is, in fact, how Reed sets the scene and his priorities. To begin with, *Yellow Back* marks the glorious return of the marginalized races; in this case, the return of 'the vanishing American' as Leslie Fiedler³¹ labelled it in the 1960s. As such, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* depicts an only Indian survivor, Showcase, in fact, a showpiece of his vanished race. However, he is the one who frees and rescues Loop on his self-invented helicopter called The Flying Brush Beeve thus reviving the old relationship between the two ancient cultures: 'Besides, Indians and black people have been roaming the plains of America together for hundreds of years'.³² Moreover, Chief Showcase (in reality, Chief Conchise's cousin) is portrayed not as an underdog, neither as a villain or a noble savage,³³ but as a sophisticated and resourceful person. In fact, he acts as a double agent for both Drag and the Field Marshal Theda Doomussy Blackwell and is depicted as a creative thinker and a person who undermines the established authority from within. In addition, he leads a life full of comforts: 'imported hookahs, Pierre Cardin originals, moccasins decorated with rhinestones, aqua-blue dress, world-wide airplane credit',³⁴ luxuries unknown to the shabby, uncouth cowpokes and the stinking rancher, Drag Gibson.

In addition, Showcase's well-disguised, apparently militant poetry at Drag's wedding, presents a sarcastic depiction of the conquest of the West and the extermination of his race. In fact, through his camouflaged poetry, he delivers curses, similar to Loop's Hoodoo spells, on 'the paleface'. According to Fabre, Showcase represents the cultural shift, from 'genocide to ethnocide' by performing

as a mythological trickster through his use of double entendre. He dissembles and plays several parts, employing language as a tool against white power ... He is the embodiment of Promethean spirit and also of Apollonian forces, a harmonious blend of mind and body, superior even to the black superlover'.³⁵

However, the 'posthumous' appraisal of the Indian in the novel is accompanied with the satiric depiction of a host of historical figures known either as legendary explorers such as Meriwether Lewis and William Clark or founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin for their apparent racist and exploitative practices. Reed also makes quick references to Turner's thesis³⁶ and includes other sarcastic fictional characters like the Field Marshal Theda Doomussy Blackwell and the Congressman Pete the Peek who seem to be plotting against Jefferson about the West.

Thus, while Showcase's subtlety and intelligence are highlighted as natural and representative of his vanished race, Jefferson's versatility and practicality are reduced to buffoonery. In various conversations between Theda, the field Marshal, and Pete the Peek, the Congressman, for example, Jefferson is further portrayed as impractical: 'Gossip has it that he spent most of his time learning the process by which parmesan cheese was made and learning how to make macaroni',³⁷ egotistical: 'He looks down his nose at us Congressmen, I see him, just because he can do folde rol, calculate an eclipse, tie an artery, plan an edifice, break a horse, do a mean minuet and play da fiddle',³⁸ to name a few.

Yellow Back's parodic and deconstructive formula Western, in fact, is best revealed in the depiction of an atypical hero and villain. The hero, Loop Garou Kid, for instance, is a black hoodoo cowboy, possessor of charms and practitioner of Hoodoo rituals as well as a super lover of insane proportions who fights via a white python, an extension of his phallus, and prefers to whip and mock his enemies rather than face them in a breathtaking, classic showdown. Furthermore, Loop's virtues and vices are deeply rooted in the Afro-American culture rather than the Western tradition initiated with Boone³⁹ as an archetype. Therefore, the creation of Loop Garou Kid, as Reed argues, was 'inspired by Loop Garou legend of Haiti and the Louisiana Bayou' and 'a cowboy icon of my youth, Lash Larue, who disciplined his enemies with a whip'.⁴⁰

As far as the villain, Drag Gibson, is concerned, he is depicted as a hopeless homosexual who marries to secure some future to his obnoxious genes as a serial killer. In fact, he has already killed six of his wives and is about to do away with his seventh, not mentioning the deal with the ousted adults for mere personal gain. Drag, though, is helped in his

shameful, greedy and his ill-fated attempts by a bunch of skinny (the foreman is called Skinny McCullough), coward, bowlegged and materialistic cowpokes who are stripped off their mythological qualities beyond recognition and act as Drag's marionettes. In addition, the cowpokes, in *Yellow Back*, are often observed with 'their heads buried in magazines' thus hinting at the idea of 'real life imitating fiction'.⁴¹

As for the classic shoot-out, it takes place in a reversed mode and becomes memorable for its sarcasm and irony than for heroism or bravery. In fact, the opponents are implausible as well. Above all, there is nothing heroic about the deed at all, not even a heroic failure either. Drag, faces the head of the governmental troops (The Field Marshal called Theda Doompussy Blackwell, another white homosexual), not the Loop Garoo Kid, as the latter's medium seems to be non-Western and non-violent. Ironically enough, no shots have to be fired as the Cavalry use ray guns and Drag seems to have dug his own grave and anticipated his own Hoodoo death by feeding human flesh to his ferocious hogs.

Yellow Back's ironic depiction does not leave unscathed even the classic agents of civilization, that is, the preacher, the marshal and the schoolmarm. To start with, the Preacher Reverend Boyd is depicted as a total failure as he has lost his congregation and his Protestant Church is likely to lose the battle with the Catholic Church.⁴² He even drinks his troubles away, frequents Big Lizzy's Rabid Black Cougar Saloon and anticipates punishment by writing a 'volume of hip pastorate poetry . . . *Stomp Me O Lord*',⁴³ which lacks the sophistication of Chief Showcase's poetry and verges on masochism. As Reverend Boyd himself had prophesied, his religion's end comes sooner than expected. Loop Garoo Kid, in one of his raids, lashes the crucifix from his breast: 'The crucifix dropped to the floor and the little figure attached to it scrambled into the nearest mouse hole'⁴⁴ and whips him for preaching false dogmas. Finally, it is the Pope who gets rid of him for good with a bug spray. The Marshal, too, is mocked for being a bully and is eventually driven out of town by Loop Garoo Kid who expertly deprives him of his symbols of authority and usurpation, that is, the gun and the star and eventually drives him away.

The Marshal's substitute, in fact, the legendary gunman, John Wesley Hardin: 'the baddest coon skinner of them all'⁴⁵ who represents 'the white society personified',⁴⁶ proves a failure too and reveals even stronger racist tendencies towards the blacks whom he has always tried to exterminate. As expected, via his phallic python, Loop overpowers Hardin and establishes his authority in the Western genre as a potential hero.

As far as the depiction of the classic schoolmarm is concerned, there seems to be no woman morally fit for her place as Mustache Sal, Drag's mail-order bride and the most detailed female in the novel, apart from being the black super lover's former lover, 'indulge[s] in frenzied nymphomania with his employees and guests' and above all 'breaks racial taboos by trying Chief Showcase's "little-man-in-the-canoe" erotic technique'.⁴⁷

To conclude, through the use of free naratology, that is, collage, manipulation of time and space as well as the utilization of discontinuity and indeterminacy and an abundance of anti-realistic tricks, Reed succeeds in envisioning a new type of novel operating in the recently created fictional freedom and governed by the principles of Hoodoo. As such, the novel represents a unique example of the resourcefulness of Afro-American tradition in novel writing.

The Plains Indians Revisited: The Cheyenne at the Centre of the Earth

Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*, even though written early in his literary career, tackles the typical question raised in the 1960s, that is, the legacy of fiction and narrative vs. reality. Therefore, the novel, like Berger's later fiction which, 'swells with paradoxes, seeming to embrace what it exposes as delusions, to celebrate what it seems to parody, absolutely refusing to subscribe to any codified philosophy, whether romantic, existential, or absurd',⁴⁸ is mainly

distinguished for its subtle narrative techniques and original approaches regarding the combination of both fact and fiction in the novel writing process.

Thus, *Little Big Man*, initially intended as ‘the Western to end all Westerns’,⁴⁹ fits well into Berger’s fictional experiments and deserves to be considered a milestone of fictional experiments of the 1960s. As a matter of fact, the events consist of tape-recorded then transcribed reminiscences of a 111-year-old fictional Jack Crabb, often compared to the Southern hero Huck Finn and the traditional figure of the picaresque,⁵⁰ who claims to be part of the Western heritage through his first-hand experience among the Cheyenne and his friendship with two widely mythologized Western figures: Wild Bill Hickok and General George A. Custer. In addition, Crabb presents revealing references to a host of other Western figures including Kit Carson, Wyatt Earp, Calamity Jane, Black Kettle, to name a few. However, Crabb’s claim to be part of the Western history through his participation at the Battle of Little Big Horn or Custer’s Last Stand, which he, contrary to the historical records, survives, strongly questions the history recording itself. As for the rest of the events, they all prove to be historically accurate, as Berger is often quoted to have checked as many as seventy Western sources before writing the novel.⁵¹ In addition, Crabb’s ability to be faithful to both historical and anthropological records, regarding both major and minor events as well as the cultural features of the Cheyenne convince Leo F. Oliva to raise the issue of the construction of the novel arguing that, ‘[*Little Big Man* presents] good history as well as good literature’.⁵²

Firstly, according to Oliva, all characters and events but one fit into a chronology and ‘are easily tabulated’. Secondly, Berger’s insights into the Cheyenne culture match anthropological findings of George B. Grinnell, whose works he accepts to have used as references. Thirdly, the critical depictions of Hickok and Custer have borrowed heavily and selectively from the popular myths surrounding these controversial figures. Finally, the depiction of Indian warfare corresponds to the historical facts and provides insightful commentary.

Therefore, it can be argued that *Little Big Man* presents an exceptional ‘historiographic metafiction’, that is, a combination of sound historical records and unconventional narrative structures, which questions the validity of recorded history and the verity of the narrative, thus getting close to Linda Hutcheon’s argument that, ‘What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of significations by which we make sense of the past’⁵³ (Hutcheon *Poetics* 89).

In fact, the narrative structure of the novel sheds light on the construction of both fiction and history. Thus, on the one hand, there is Jack Crabb, a purely fictional character, and on the other hand, his absurd claim of being the sole survivor of the most mythologized battle in the history of the United States. However, Crabb, as the main and most reliable narrator, turns out to be a self-proclaimed and self-styled trans-cultural narrator of western tall-tales who analyzes primarily the linguistic manipulations of cultural myths rather than their plausible historical verity, thus leading the reader towards a pastiche of fact and fantasy, of literary myths and received truths regarding the legacy of the westward expansion, the truth about the Last Stand and cultural mythology itself.

Primarily, Crabb’s narrative tends to deconstruct the legacy of western experience, not simply by enumerating and repackaging historical facts about the conquest of the Plains, but by making use of intertextuality, reversal and the futility of the operating system on which cultural myths are based. Thus, Berger makes use of intertextuality while describing the Battle of Solomon’s Fork, 29 July 1857, won by a saber charge, or the particularities of the Battle of Washita, November 27, 1868, such as the dogs barking, the rise of the morning star and the newborn baby’s cries, to name a few.⁵⁴

Despite the incredulity towards the History of the West (Capital Letter) and narrative itself, *Little Big Man* marks the return of the ‘vanishing American’. However, unlike the classic Western, Berger, through the first-hand experience of

Jack Crabb, presents a profound and balanced view of both cultures mythology, that is, the Indian and the white. As anthropologist and folklorist Frederick W. Turner argues, thanks to Berger's transcultural work, 'for the first time really in American letters, *both* cultures are seen from the inside out'.⁵⁵

Viewed historically, the Plains with their vast flatness and dry climate have many times proven disastrous to both the conquered and the conqueror. In fact, the Spanish conquistadores led by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado during 1540-42 explored the Southern Plains in search of Gran Quivira or the Seven Cities of Cibola. Their disappointment at what they encountered: 'no wealth, no cities, a tiny handful of humans lost in the immensity of grass', revealed a topography which changed little until 1700.⁵⁶ Then, it was the post-1700 era of intertribal hostilities that forced the displacement of the Indian tribes further west towards the vast grasslands and fostered the emergence of unique cultures known for their heroism and their close bondage with the land. In fact, such a sudden rise of mobility and cultural values at the heart of the Great Plains had its own reasons. The introduction of the horse, originally from the Spanish through the Southern tribes, irrevocably changed the lifestyle of the Plains Indians, reinforced the intertribal conflicts over territory claims, increased the mobility of the Plains Indian and improved his life-sustenance which was based on an abundance of bison commonly acclaimed as a cultural icon.

However, the post-1700 era witnessed the rise of the Cheyenne, the nomadic hunter-warriors of the Great Plains, who excelled among the other tribes in ferocity against their enemies, unique cultural myths and their fondness for horses. In fact, the Cheyenne had left their original homeland on the upper Mississippi River around 1680, forced by the intertribal warfare with the Chippewa and Sioux and the outbreak of small pox and measles among the Indian tribes. As a result, their 'exodus' took a westward turn chasing the depleting herds of buffalo/bison.⁵⁷ Eventually, their horseback pilgrimage was finalized once they occupied the green area around the Black Hills, South Dakota, where their modern mythology and scriptures were sanctioned. In fact, it was there where their prophet, Sweet Medicine was called and instructed by Maheo, the All Being, on tribal law and morality and provided with four protective sacred arrows and a promise of an abundance of bison. Moreover, the Cheyenne have regarded themselves as *Tsistsistas*, that is, 'The Called Out People' or the chosen people ever since.⁵⁸

Yet, the Cheyennes' modern history of survival had, in fact, just started. Eventually, their outstanding heroic character would be forged through countless battles with the surrounding tribes such as Arapahoes, Lakotas, Comanches, Kiowas, Plains Apaches, and Pawnees for dominance over the Plains and acquisition of horses. Gradually, the Cheyenne would move away from their traditional lifestyle toward a total reliance on the shrinking herds of buffalo and the trade with the white man. Small wonder, the second half of the 19-th century would prove disastrous for both the Cheyenne and the Plains Indian alike. E. Adamson Hoebel, an anthropologist, whose studies parallel those of Grinnell's, characterizes the Cheyenne 'high culture' of 1800-1850 as highly well-organized and adaptive.⁵⁹ In fact, that is the time when *Little Big Man* intersects by depicting the most tumultuous period in the history of the Cheyenne, precisely, the period between 1852-1876 when their mythology, cultural heritage and even their survival was at risk due to the settlement of the Plains, the discovery of gold in the Black Hills and eventually the armed engagements with the Federal Cavalry and the Homestead Act⁶⁰. Nevertheless, Berger's main concern lies in humanizing the Cheyenne, stripping them off any unmerited savagery, highlighting their heroic deeds and scrutinizing their cultural myths through a constant contrast with the myth-making process of their white counterparts. Therefore, Berger's aim matches Grinnell's observations that, 'The Indian is a man, just like one of us ... Like us he loves his wife and children; like us, he hates his enemies.'⁶¹ Furthermore, Berger manages to utilize, for different ends, both intertextual and anthropological viewpoints thus presenting profound and truthful insights into their cosmology.⁶²

To begin with, a Cheyenne's life consists of an endless list of dos and don'ts. As Crabb argues, 'If you are a human being, you can't get away from obligations'⁶³ or 'You've got to do things right when you are a Cheyenne'.⁶⁴ Grinnell, too, argues about the Cheyennes' cultural dependency and self-confinement with similar terms.⁶⁵

Therefore, in order to scrutinize their culturally sustained myths, Berger focuses on many aspects of their social and cultural traits including their exceptional pride, honesty, legends, religion, tribal organization, bondage with nature, superstitions and rituals, their hunting and war techniques, the role of sexes, childrearing practices, courting and marriage, homicide, hospitality, to name a few, and contrasts such traits with the white man's notions before hinting at both cultures' shortcomings and human nature's weaknesses. The backbone of a Cheyenne's life, in fact, consists of two main principles, that is, honour and warfare. Warfare to a Cheyenne was a unique opportunity to show one's courage and to count coups rather than to annihilate the opponent. In Grinnell's words, the Cheyenne turned to fighting due to 'a desire for glory, a wish to add to their possessions, or eagerness for revenge, but the chief motive was the love of fight'.⁶⁶ Crabb too, argues on similar terms: 'If you had to reduce the quality of Cheyenne life to a handy phrase you might describe it as the constant taking of risks'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, child rearing among the Cheyenne is based on oral storytelling and self-awareness rather than on physical beating, as might have been the case among the whites: 'It ain't bad to be a boy among the Cheyenne. You never get whipped for doing wrong, but rather told: "That is not the way of the Human Beings"'.⁶⁸

Yet, there exists a vulnerable spot in the cultural cosmology of the Cheyenne, that is, homicide, a crime committed even in the novel by Old Lodge Skins, which has eventually brought about his personal and his followers' exile from the Burnt Artery, the main Cheyenne band. In fact, the Cheyenne community strongly disapproves of homicide and considers the killing of a kin a 'deadly sin', for such a horrible deed would bring misfortune upon the whole community at large, pollute the Four Sacred Arrows, shun the game away and undermine the natural harmony. As a result, banishment is required for the wrongdoer.

In addition, the Cheyenne in the novel are noted for their exceptional hospitality: 'In the Indian code, if you see a stranger you either eat with him or fight him, but more often you eat with him, fighting being too important an enterprise to waste on somebody you hardly knew'.⁶⁹ As Crabb observes, '... for contrary to white opinion nobody is more sociable than a redskin when among his own'. Thus, the provision of puppy dogs to guests reveals their welcoming attitudes, noted even by Hoebel: 'Of their domesticated animals, the dog is a favorite delicacy reserved for feasts. "With us a nice fat, boiled puppy dog is just like turkey at Thanks-giving with you", High Forehead used to say to me'.⁷⁰

The Cheyenne are often portrayed as sexually repressed, take courting seriously. As such, marriage represents a serious and formal matter, as chastity is both socially and culturally revered, whereas adultery is regarded as a deadly sin analogous to homicide: 'You seldom saw a cut-nosed woman among the Human Beings'. George Bird Grinnell argues along similar lines:

The women of the Cheyennes are famous among all western tribes for their chastity. In old times it was most unusual for a girl to be seduced, and she who had yielded was disgraced forever. The matter at once became known, and she was taunted with it wherever she went. It was never forgotten. No young man would marry her'.⁷¹

Moreover, the Cheyenne, unlike their white counterparts, show a great sense of understanding and altruism towards the less fortunate members of their community who have become socially and culturally outcasts by their own consent, that is, the homosexuals or *heemaneh* and the *Contraries*. *Heemanehs*, such as Little Horse, are often valued and praised for their entertaining skills. Likewise, the *Contraries*, such as Younger Bear, whose behavior and practices run against those of the whole community, are allowed to lead their own life differently far from the communal premises. As

Hoebel argues, 'The Cheyenne male who finds the stress of life too much may find an institutionalized way open to glory and public esteem by becoming a Contrary, or more simply by getting himself hurt in a battle, dying the glorious death'.⁷²

However, despite the insightful and apparently positive observations of the Cheyenne cultural traits, Berger's main concern remains the parodic and critical observation of the cultural operating systems of the two apparently opposing world views. As such, both cultures' ethnocentric views are eventually ridiculed as equally self-centered and self-righteous, as in the paragraph where Old Lodge Skins' comic view about the role of the Indian and the white man on earth is highlighted.⁷³

Thus, both cultures demonstrate different attitudes towards each other due to their cosmology and cultural misapprehension. The Cheyenne, unlike the white man, 'hate him [the enemy] for what he is but don't want to change him into anything else'. On the contrary, the white man looks upon war as a means to dominate, not simply win, as is usually the case with the Cheyenne. Therefore, the main difference between the white and Indian culture lies in their incongruous world views: '... The Cheyenne believe in the power of the "circle," whereas the white man believes in the power of the "square"'.⁷⁴ The battle of Little Big Horn, in fact, is just a battle won for the Cheyenne but a psychological scar for the white man, which would eventually lead to the Plains Indians' dispersal and gradual extermination. As such, both cultures act in accordance with their preconceived cultural notions. That is the reason why the Cheyenne eventually lose the war, even though they win a significant battle, as it is the weakness of their cosmology that fails them, not their lack of courage or bravery. The Indian chief, Old Lodge Skins, seems to be aware of such a weakness as expressed in a talk with Little Big Man at the top of the mountain right after the infamous battle.

In addition, it might also seem as if Jack Crabb or Little Big Man, a captive of the white society's mythology and standards, sides with the Indian throughout his narrative, as his favorable portrayal of the Indians, especially the mythic rise of Old Lodge Skins and the critical view of the white man's civilization, might seem to reveal. In fact, Crabb's narrative rises above such cultural limitations and undertakes to analyze the shortcomings of both cultures and eventually finds faults with both of them. Frederic W. Turner argues that Berger's novel laments the loss of the American cultural heritage: 'Berger, examining at first hand the American West, discovers a melancholy fact about our culture and character: That America is neither near-savage and vital neither civilized but rather an unhealthy amalgam of both states, an amalgam in which the virtues of each have been cancelled'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Turner argues that the clash presented in the novel involves 'an autonomous culture (white) and a group of related theonomous cultures (red)' thus hinting at the spirituality of the Cheyenne as contrasted with the vainness and materialism of the white man's world.⁷⁶

Likewise, Crabb, despite his apparent and often deceiving attachment to the Indian culture, fails to lay roots and succeed in either society thus preserving his divided self throughout his narrative as it is stated at the outset of the novel: 'As usual, the trouble lay in deciding whether I was finally white or Indian'. Brookes Landon argues on similar terms:

Jack's *achievements* are Cheyenne, his *aspirations* are white, and therein lies a kind of captivity against which his shiftiness has no power ... The moment of his great victory also signals his ultimate submission to the tyranny of self-imposed definitions, just as the Indian victory at the Little Big Horn marked the end of the Plains Indian way of life.⁷⁷

Actually, Crabb strives in vain to lay roots. He can not make it in the white society, where he goes bankrupt due to the prevalence of hypocrisy and greediness; he can not make it even among the Cheyenne either due to his white skin as revealed by Old Lodge Skins' final words: 'Take care of my son here ... and see that he does not go crazy'. In fact, only once did Crabb manage to envision the centre of the world,⁷⁸ that is, a sense of belonging among the Cheyenne, and it was

only physical and short-lived, disrupted by the violent intrusion of Custer at Washita. Thus, Berger's novel succeeds in disregarding any nostalgic depictions of a heroic, long-lost past and vanished race. In fact, it is an anthropological and historical discourse on the culturally sustained mythology and prejudices. For Berger, as for postmodernism at large, both myth and history are human constructs which privilege a particular culture's supremacy over the other. Therefore, they remain ethnocentric and egocentric.

CONCLUSIONS

Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down and *Little Big Man* despite their apparent collage of seemingly unrelated elements, exemplify typical post-westerns mainly concerned with the revival of novel writing and indigenous cultures. Thus, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* best reflects a multi-layered tall-tale where free narratology, transgression, and intertextuality reign supreme. In addition, Reed's Hoodoo Western matches Hutcheon's expectations of 'historiographic metafictional' by questioning the verity of the historic representations and dealing with 'postmodernism's 'nightmare of history'.⁷⁹ However, when viewed from the perspective of Voodoo, turned Hoodoo in Reed's fiction, the apparent pastiche turns out to be more revealing as seemingly unrelated characters and images, exist in the recently created 'new fiction' led by eclecticism of Hoodoo and its multicultural nature.

Likewise, *Little Big Man* exemplifies an exceptional Western where romantic and escapist genre expectations have been undermined through a well-researched, realistic and anthropological study of both cultures, that is, the Cheyenne and the Anglo-Saxon. As a matter of fact, the protagonist has been stripped off any romantic coverage and has been depicted as someone who suffers the most and barely survives due to his preconceived cultural expectations. Furthermore, the Cheyenne, whose mythology suffers from egocentrism and ethnocentrism, like their Anglo-Saxon counterpart, are portrayed as self-righteous and 'the chosen people'. Nevertheless, the Cheyenne way is better understood when it is measured against the power of 'the circle' and/or the Cheyenne at 'the centre of the world' rather than the power of the 'square' and/or the Anglo-Saxon way.

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22. Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, op. cit., p. 196.
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26. A good study of the dime novel legacy in particular and the Western in general remains Christine Bold's *Selling the Wild West: Popular fiction, 1980 to 1960* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987). The rise of the

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27. Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, op. cit., p. 16.
28. Ibid., p. 10.
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33. For a basic view on the American Indians and tribal distinctions in general see Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Indian in America* (N.Y, Harper & Row, 1975), whereas for an insightful view into the Plains Indians in the 19-th century see Elliot West *Contested Plains: Indians, Gold seekers, and Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1998).
34. Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, op.cit., pp. 46-47).
35. Fabre, 'Postmodernist Rhetoric in Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*', op. cit., p. 170.
36. Westward expansion would be best acclaimed for forging the American character and the democratic ideals as Fredrick Jackson Turner's thought-provoking and apparently revolutionary paper, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' (1893) expressed it.
37. Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, op. cit., p. 145.
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51. Brooks Landon, *Thomas Berger* (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1989), p. 34. Furthermore, certain episodes/stories in the novel correspond to previously written works.
52. Leo F. Oliva, 'Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man as History*'. *Western American Literature* (No. 8.1, 2, Spring/Summer 1973), p. 35-36.
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