Chapter- IV
Native Perspectives of Life

The philosophical opposition between “heterosexual” and “homosexual” like so many other conventional binaries has always been constructed on the foundation of another related opposition: the couple “inside and outside.” The metaphysics of identity that has governed discussion of sexual behavior and libidinal object choice has until now depended on the structural symmetry of these seemingly fundamental distinctions and the inevitability of a symbolic order based on logic of limits, margins, borders and boundaries… Inside/ outside functions as the very figure for significance and the mechanisms of meaning production, It has everything to do with the structures of alienation, splitting and identification, which together products a self and an other, a subject and an object , an unconscious and a conscious, an interiority and an exteriority. (Diane Fuss. Inside/ out: Lesbian theories, Gay Theories. 1-2)

Post Colonial literary perspectives while dismantling the conventional issues paved the way for the centrality of Native literatures. Crossing the classifications, Native literatures have circumscribed the marginalized literatures. Reframing the very foundations of the general framework of literature, Native American, Native Canadian, Australian Aboriginal, Maori of New Zealand and Indian Dalit Literature have
acquired the unavoidable potential subjectivity. They ushered in the era of Fourth World literature. Noel Dyck in *Indigenous People and The Nation-State: ‘Fourth World’ Politics in Canada, Australia and Norway* (1985) has initiated the political consolidation and circumscription of the Native across the world. George Manuel and M. Poslums in *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974) has consolidated Native identity at a universal level. Contemporary theoretical discourses like post Modernism, Post Colonialism, Post Structuralism, and New Historicism & Cultural Materialism have become the added epistemological advantages in further consolidating Native literatures. Besides the consolidation, Post Colonial perspectives have initiated the required critical probe into the definitions of the Native positions in the third world. The term ‘Native’ which carried the pejorative meaning for a long time has begun to describe and represent the long chequered history of the Indigenous people. The critical usage of the term ‘Native’ has unfurled the glorious and inglorious past history of many of the Nations that experienced internal and external colonialism. This has paved the way for a different connotation of ‘Native’ and ushered in a distinctive Nativism. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffths and Hélène Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies* (1999) defines Nativism as an aspiration to return to the pre colonial glorious cultures. The spate of the scholarly explorations like Louis Owens *Other Destines* (1992), Terry
Goldie’s Fear and Temptation (1989) etc., have consolidated the contemporary Native perspectives.

It is in the light of this Native social & literary evolution Native Canadian literature has to be perceived. Native Canadian literature has crossed the general Canadian characteristics. Hugh Maclenan’s “Two Solitudes”, Michael Greenstein’s “Third Solitudes”, Gabriel Roy’s “Universal solitude”, ‘Women’s Solitude’ & ‘South Asian solitude’ failed to represent the Native Canadianness. It is from this perspective Native Canadian Drama is perceived as the deconstructive discourse.

The uninhibited dramatization of postmodern super realistic theatrical elements of violence, scatology and sex by Highway, in both the plays The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing has aroused controversial issues. Highway has been accused of misogyny. In the latter play the trickster’s corporal incarnation i.e. grotesque male sexual fantasy representations of the women in the play strongly suggest misogyny. The women with their prosthetic breasts, buttocks and belly, the bizarre rape of Patsy Pegahmagabow with a crucifix by the disoriented Dickie Bird, Big Joey’s monstrous passivity with regard to the vicious rape and (when questioned about it) his vengeful to the outburst against the women, the rape, the blame, the fear, all seem to add up to misogyny. Covering the play by the Royal Alex production for the Globe and Mail,
Robert Cushaman estimated it to be: “the most powerful play I have seen about misogyny.” *(Globe and Mail).* Several commentators including a number of women felt that the play was misogynist. First Nations women have expressed their displeasure with the depiction of Indian womanhood in Highway’s plays. However, Highway has expressed regret that he had been misunderstood. Talking to Toronto Life, he explained: “I wrote it [*Dry Lips*] as a hymn –of pain yes- but a hymn to the beauty of women and the feminine energy that needs to come back into its own if this world is going to survive. To me Dry Lips is about the return of God as a woman.” *(Tomson Highway: Modern Canadian Plays Vol. II. 185)* The dramatic enactment of the horrific rape of Patsy Pegahmagahbow with a crucifix [the symbolic phallic weapon indicating the ravage of Native cultures by White cultures] by a disoriented Dickie Bird, assumes a physical reality which is profoundly disturbing. A Similar vicious rape in *The Rez Sisters* that of Zhaboonigan with a screwdriver by a gang of white boys, though unsettling, is only narrated as a flashback. In an interview with Susannah Schmidt of the Writers Workshop, Montreal, in 1998, Highway explained: “When you want healing you have to talk about men talking about women. Most heterosexual men, most straight men do talk about tits and ass, and that’s what I was portraying [in *Dry Lips*]. What is the real source of misogyny? How do we explain the origin? To me, I see [misogyny] is directly related to the origin of God as a man. That’s where misogyny
Narasimha Rao

comes from. I remember hearing about the fourteen women who were killed in Montreal. December 6th, that’s my birthday, I’ll never be able to forget it.” (Interview with Susannah Schmidt. 3) Late in the afternoon of December 6th, 1989, Mark Lepine a twenty five year old unemployed semi-recluse, armed with a rifle, shot fourteen Native Women to death and injuring thirteen others who were attending a lecture at the University of Montreal, accusing them as feminists before taking his own life. The gruesome incident shocked the nation. However (white) Canadian women across the country termed Lepine’s inhuman act as only an extreme oppression of widespread pattern of male violence against women. (Colliers Year book 1997). Highway has explained that: “All my plays are about it in some way, the terrible way misogyny has split the world…Why are women treated like this? God is a man, Jesus was a man. Until we conceive of God as female, women will not have that power to be treated with respect. And that’s why in [Dry Lips] you see the birth of the goddess as a little girl [Zachary and Hera’s little daughter].” (Interview with Susannah Schmidt. 3) In his widely acclaimed semi-autobiographical novel Kiss Of The Fur Queen, through the counterparts Jeremiah and Gabriel, Highway expostulates that gender and sexuality had always been fraught with pain and complication for both him and his brother Rene as both were subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse and forced assimilation by the priests at the Guy Hill Indian Residential school a Roman Catholic
boarding school in The Pas, Mamitoba. Joyce Gonzales explains: “The federally sanctioned boarding school experiences, which began in the 19th century, removed Indian children from their homes and placed in boarding schools where many were sexually assaulted on molested by caretakers.” (Sexual Assault in Indian Country Confronting Sexual Violence: NSVRC).

Writing about the indoctrination by the power of white European Christian patriarchal institutions, Native Canadian writer Acoose states that they have: “long been a source of ideological confusion, economic oppression, social disparity and political confusion with in my family, community and nations. One generation after another... was exposed to cruelty, manipulative controls, segregation through the reserve system and the Half-breed [colonies]… dehumanization, despiritualization through the Christian residential school and other less over but just as genocidal assimilative programs. “(Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws. 10). Jeremiah/Highway troubled by guilty for failing to protect his younger brother Gabriel/Rene, says he has confided to Susannah Schmidt he has not been able to rid his mind of the overpowering guilt to the repeated brutal killings of Native women in Winnipeg/Montreal. To Jeremiah / Highway the deaths linked heterosexual sex with violent brutality. Highway explains: “The difference between Indian people and white people is that one is patriarchal in structure...In the Cree language,
there is no gender. The world Isn’t divided into that kind of gendered hierarchy. But along with road in history, God as man met God as woman and raped her. And that’s where that line comes from in [Dry Lips] the one that so many people reacted so strongly against, that they couldn’t stomach: “Because I hate them, them fucking bitches. They took the power, the ones with the power.” That’s Big Joey’s line. He can’t stand being important in the face of women, and he blames women. But people don’t want to hear what’s true all the time.” (Interview with Susannah Schmidt.3) In both the plays Highway incorporated rape of Native women by both white and Native men and domestic violence and physical abuse in Indian Country. Allen asserts that the overrunning of the tribes by Anglo-Europeans was followed by “the conquests and degradation of Indian women by men, Indian and otherwise”. (Violence and the American Indian Woman NSVRC. 4) Melissa Farlay and Jacqueline Lynne point out, “Men’s assumption of the right to rape indigenous women is not a new idea-whether that right is institutionalized in prostitution or not.” (Fourth World Journal Vol.6.2) The colonial stigma of the Native women as an exotic sexual commodity still persists in the postmodernist era. Similar is the case with regard to their Dalit sisters in rural India. Sharmila Rege explains that “in several instance the rape of Dalit women may not be considered as rape at all because of the customary access that the upper caste men have had to Dalit women’s sexuality.” (Dalit Women in India:
Highway’s plays dramatize rape, domestic violence and physical abuse to reflect the present social atrocities against native women in Canada. Dalit women in rural India too face a similar ordeal. Their pathetic circumstances of suffering and abuse at the hands of both upper cast and lower cast patriarchies has been strikingly described by Tersamma a lower case activist in a person.

We go to work for we are poor,
But the same silken beds mock us;
While we are ravished in broad daylight,
Ill starred our horoscopes are,
Even our tottering husbands hiss and shout for revenge
If we cannot stand their touch:

(Quoted by Dietrich, 1990)

A multi-county study by Melissa Farley and Jacqueline Lynne to determine the sexual and physical abuse perpetrated against Native women in Canada revealed that prostitution is higher among them than other race/ethnic groups in Canada. Drug abuse and alcoholism is high among Native women. Allen states that the introduction of alcohol by white colonizers was a major contributing factor to ‘the abuse of both Indian women and children by Indian men’ (Violence and the American Indian Woman NSVRC. 5). It is worst of childhood sexual abuse by an average of
four perpetrators, sexual assault and rape of women (particularly between the ages of 18-24) and an excess of sexual and physical violence against prostituted Native women i.e., stabbings, beatings’ broken jaws, ribs collar bones, figures, spinal injuries and fractured skull etc. The effect of the sexual aggression against them is summed up by a woman. “It is internally damaging. You become in your own mind what these people do and say with you. You wonder how could you left yourself do this and why do these people want to do this to you.” (Fourth World Journal Vol. 6, 7). A bitter echo is found in the words of the Cree, Buffy Saint-Marie: “Scream the bloody truth and how we have been raped in every possible way, and then rise up and dig the beauty of our people. Rejoice in our survival and our ways.” (Sexual Assault In Indian Country: Confronting Sexual Violence NSVRC. 6)

Confronted by the large scale debilitating effects of alcohol and poverty among Native peoples in Canadian cities, Highway gave up a career in music and worked for seven years with cultural programmers, for inmates in prison, children’s recreational programmers at the Native people’s Resource Centre in London and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centre in Toronto. Exposure to heterosexual violence against women could have been a critical factor in Highway’s open confirmation of his gayness and his uncompromisingly idealistic hope for an improved
life in the next generation of children which he express at the end of “Dry Lips” the baby’s laughing voice, magnified on tape to fill the entire theatre,” *(Dry Lips. 130).*

As stated: “The number one issue we have to deal with, is violence against women and children, because as long as we destroy ourselves from within, we don’t have to worry about anyone else. Sexual violence…causes so much shame for survivors and communities… Nevertheless, because sexual violence has been one of the most successful avenues of colonization, Native communities cannot prosper until we find a way to eradicate sexual violence and heal from the shame and self-hatred it has instilled in us …” *(INCITE, 2001).* Emily Dictionary in *The Rez Sisters*, Jeremiah and Gabriel in *The Kiss of The Fur Queen* deal with their self hatred. They come to understand that their self-hatred and self-alienation as a form of oppression and refuse to be defined by the atrocities against them. The residential schools might have victimized Jeremiah and Gabriel but they refuse to internalize their status as victims. Highway and his fictional counterpart, Jeremiah, become classically trained pianists and playwrights and Rene and Gabriel become well-known dancers before early dealing with the position of their collective self-hatred they internalize it becoming impotent and taking out their anger and frustration against the women. Native Canadian writer Maria Campbell too deals
with her self-hatred in her semi autobiographical novel] *The Half-breed.* She comes to grips with the idea that Native people have the same choice available to others and therefore are accountable for their problems. Campbell suggests that the severity of domestic violence and physical abuse and abandonment by her white husband and by a society that labeled her as a worthless non-entity drives her to prostitution. She says, the writing of “*Half-breed,* helped me to go through a healing process, to understand where I was coming from. It helped me to stop blaming the victim, and start blaming the criminal. It helped me to realize that it wasn’t my fault, that racism was real, that you could reach out and touch it, and that a lot of what happened in my life was a result of racism,” (Kelley, 7) Beatrice Culleton’s semi-autobiographical novel *In Search of April Rain tree* is similar to that a Campbell’s *Halfbreed._Culleton began writing the novel after “the second suicide of a member of my family. I have two sisters and a brother. Both of my sisters committed suicide at differed times…so it was after the second suicide that I really thought, “why are my family members alcoholics?” And “why do we have so many problems?” (Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors. 97-98).

Culleton tries to answer these questions in her novel: “If I write it, maybe I can figure out some of the answers, or something. At least rethink
the way I’ve been living. Kind of blind, with my head in the sand, or some this. And eventually it came out as a book. As I wrote, it wasn’t going to be about a search for identity. But while I was writing that’s what I realized about myself: that I had accepted my identity…” (Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors. 98)

Heterosexual violence led Highway to prefer gayness in his identity and it is obvious in his declaration: “It’s also a special place for me to be gay: that’s very important in my outlook.” (Interview with Susannah Schmidt. 3) Moreover Highway claims that gayness in contrast to heterosexuality had kept him from spiritual disintegration where he says: “In traditional native societies there was a special place for people who are gay. We are seen as part of some kind of buffer zone…like mediators and peacemakers.”(Interview with Susannah Schmidt. 3). However in white patriarchal societies like Canada, First Nations gay men suffer extreme marginalization. As Heath verifies:”First Nations gay men, like First Nations women are in double jeopardy. Comparing Canadian aboriginal and non-aboriginal gay men, researchers found that aboriginal gay men were significantly more likely to be poor, unstably housed, more depressed, to have been sexually abused as children, to have had nonconsensual sex and to have been prostituted.” (International journal of STD & AIDS. 582-587).
Like Highway, Native Canadian writer Beth Brant fixes her identity in lesbian sexuality and refuses to be marginalized. She asserts her identity like Highway when she declares: “I will not prove myself to anyone. I am a mother—a lesbian mother. I am a grandmother—a lesbian grandmother. I am the lesbian daughter of my mother and father. I am the lesbian lover of women. I am the lesbian who prays with words, heart and body. I am a Two-Spirits who guide men. I am Two-Spirit who walks this path my ancestors cleared for us… For I feel that we also make tradition in our various and varied communities and Nations. This tradition is generous and welcoming. It is a tradition of wholeness and honour. It is a tradition of remembrance and fidelity.” *(Writing As Witness, 65-66).* Reduced to a commodity meant for the sexual gratification of her alcoholic, abusive and sexist husband, Brant claims to have found freedom and satisfaction in her lesbian relationship with a white woman Denise Dorz. Like Highway, Brant also links heterosexual sex with violence and brutality.

Thus a ‘crossing’ of borders of white authored and dictated social boundaries, is resorted to by Native writers like Highway and Brant, to deconstruct both subversive white stereotype images and First Nations women and their forced appropriation of the identity of a domestic and marital commodity in Native communities. A fixation of identity then
stimulates a ‘transgressing of race and community. To the extreme marginalized, like Highway and Brant the ‘crossing over’ from heterosexuality to homosexuality has resulted in the fixation of their identities and subsequently the ‘recrossing’ into a meaningful existence. The ‘Rez’ sister Emily Dictionary’s heterosexual ordeal, her lesbian relationship, the fixation of her identity as a bisexual in her brief heterosexual encounter with Big Joey, and her status as a single mother indicates a ‘crossing and recrossing’ of contemporary social boundaries dividing the hyphenated Native communities in a white multi-cultural Canadian society, a modified trope of embodying the continual movement as defined by Foucauldian transgression. In a radical digression from the native relativist fourth world ideology, Highway, a progressive humanist, envisions Native resurgence in the crossing and recrossing of cultural boundaries. He explains: “I think that every society is constantly in a state of change, of transformation of metamorphosis. I think it is very important that it continue to be so to prevent the stagnation of our imaginations, our spirits, our soul… what I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people, the life of my fellow Canadians is the searching for this new voice, this new identity, this new tradition, this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent. It is the combination of both the worlds.. Combining them and coming up with something new (Cultural Collision and Magical Transformation. 2). As Anne Nothof
point out, “Highway rejects nothing in his experience of both Native and on-native society, the negative as well as the positive consequences of cultural collision and cultural bridging to fuel the transformation.” *(Cultural Collision and Magical Transformation. 2).* This suggests, that Highway envisions a solution to the cultural conflict among Native and non-natives in the crossing and recrossing of social and cultural borders, resulting in their deconstruction and subsequent erasure. In his essay “Preface to Transgression” Foucault argues that: “Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes.” *(Preface to Transgression. Language, Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and interviews. 29-52).* It is through transgressing through both physically and culture, that borders are exposed and deconstructed. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar envisioned the same in Nagara Swaraj deconstructing Gandhiji’s concept of Grama Swaraj. A progressive Dalit leader Ambedkar envisioned a transgressing of both self and casteist segregation through educating themselves, furthering and bettering their economic prospects and standards of living by relocating themselves in cities. This was in diametric opposition to Gandhiji’s concept of Grama Swaraj, which advocated taking economic development into the confines of Dalit habitations. Focusing on Dalit women Ambedkar has said: “Malnutrition would make a person weak in body and would result in a premature death; likewise if she is not educated, she is reduced to slavery.
Due to lack of education women have become living corpses. Mentally they are slaves…. The real problem of the backward castes is to get rid of the inferiority complex arising out of their arrested development and resultant slavery. It is also to conscientize them to prevalent social practice which exploits them and makes them aware of the implications of the exploitation to themselves and to the nation. This task can be addressed only by higher education.” *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives. 171*. A conscientized Dalit woman can help substantially to the upliftment of untouchables. She can fight against social evils and exploitation that ravage Dalit communities. She can work for the betterment of women like her. Education fosters freedom of thought which results in freedom and life. Inferiority complex bred by the Casteist Self versus-Other consciousness is detrimental to their development and that of their men and children.

Highway felicitated transgression in *The Rez Sisters* focusing on a: “positive indicator of survival and empowerment, regardless of its origins” *(Cultural Collision and Magical Transformation Studies in Canadian Literature. 1)* i.e., the bingo game and their adventure to the city. Highway has a strategic purpose to further a positive cultural accommodation and a positive integration into mainstream culture and the one hand and to shatter the notion that their identity lies in the mimicking of white
materialistic lifestyle on the other. This ‘crossing and recrossing’ would create awareness about the significance of their precontact Native identity and relevance of their primordial culture in the modern context. In *The Kiss of The Fur Queen* Highway’s counterpart Jeremiah finally does not accept that his training as a classical pianist makes him less Indian, resulting in forced appropriation and assimilation into white culture. Rather than interpret it as a conflict between his Eurocentric education and exposure and his reclaimed Cree world view, trickster-like he combines the beat of the two, to transform what it means to be an aboriginal person and artist. Even his trickster figure, Nanabush, transgresses race and community, representing the fusion of cultures in the making, to bring about a healing through magical transformation between cultures. Highway’s trickster is a deliberately westernized…perhaps profane…version of a figure related only remotely to Native mythology.”

(*The Places of Aboriginal Writing 2000 in Canada: The Novel.* 3) High way presents a contemporary trickster who presides over the life of a very contemporary Native man. Or could it be that Highway is suggesting that the trickster belongs to all cultures, native, white even gay? Or is Paul Radin right when he labels, the trickster as a Jungian archetype that belongs to the collective human consciousness? Highway decolonizes and also denativizes his trickster, deconstructing her/him Colonial and Native
literary identities, facilitating the appropriation of the trickster figure by both contemporary Native and non-Native Canadians.

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning
At once I’m, walking simple
Paths with no innovations
Then I hear a wailing piano
Solo speaking of complex ways
In tear-furrowed concerto;
Of far-away lands
and new horizons with
c coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
Crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
of a phrase at a dagger point.
And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.
Discovering his passion for music and the piano, in an otherwise rigid whit colonial public school system, Highway a cree Native of Canada, went on to enroll at the University of Manitoba, to study classical Piano under his Music professor William Aide. He spent a year in England and Europe, immersing himself in European culture and civilization. Returning to Canada, he earned an honours degree in music from the University of Western Ontario, London. Pursuing a career as a concert pianist, touring Canadian cities playing Bartok and Chopin, Highway was confronted by the plight of his people due to poverty, alcoholism, and substance abuse. He gave up his career, in music and began working with Native social service agencies in London and Toronto. He also becomes involved with the Theatre. Inspired by James Reaney’s application of myth, folklore, music, poetry and his evocation of community, Highway commenced writing theatre pieces from the 1980’s, in an attempt to combine Native life and spirituality. He then worked with aboriginal theatre companies like the Native Earth Performing Arts, writing, directing, music, acting, consolidating theatrical ideas and techniques. In 1986, his play “The Rez Sisters” went on to win the Dora Maver Moore Award. Further, exploring the condition of Native women, he wrote a played piano for “Aria”, a solo show, for Greenland Inuit
actress Makka Kleist. In 1988, he performed on piano for “New Song… New Dance”, a multi-media theatrical piece, depicting the traumas suffered by Natives displaced from their families and cultures. His next play, “The Sage, the Dance and the Fool” was staged in 1989, which he termed as a combination of Cirque du Soleil, dance theatre and Powwow. Highway’s “Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing” staged at the Theatre Passe Muraille at Toronto in 1989, won the Dora and Chalmers awards and the Wang Festival Prize.

Highway’s creation of a ‘sound collage’ comprising particular genres of popular western music, Native percussion music and multimedia sounds, to form the “sound-scape” for his play (the effect similar to the one produced when one fiddles with the radio) is an artistic underscore for his philosophy, “I think that every society is constantly in a state of change, of transformation of metamorphosis. I think it is very important that it continue to be so, to prevent the stagnation of our imaginations, our spirits, our soul…what I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people, the life of my fellow Canadian is the searching for this new voice, this new identity, this new tradition, this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent. It is combination of the best of both the worlds……combining them and coming up with something new.”

*Cultural collision and Magical Transformation: Studies in Canadian
Art forms especially music can be a motivating factor in cultural and social change towards fulfillment of the envisioned transformation. According to Don Heckman, this is clearly evident, in the long and turbulence history of the Afro-American where “infact, a combination of historical circumstances and cultural accident has given the arts just a role….” (Don Heckman, “Black Music White America”. Black Americans p. 171) A native by birth, yet growing up in and interacting with an Eurocentric culture and civilization, Highway according to Anne Nothaf, “rejects nothing in his experience of both Naïve and non-Native society – the negative as well as the positive consequences of cultural collision and cultural bridging fuel the transformation” (Cultural Collision and Magical Transformation: studies in Canadian Literature. 2). His two acclaimed plays, The Rez Sisters and its sequel “Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing” are dramatically structured as Broadway Musical’ the former, a breezy melodramatic comedy, the latter, a surrealistic and superrealistic tragic-comedy reflecting Highway’s passionate belief in the curative power of music. Unlike its predecessors, The Rez Sisters is offbeat as it incorporates western country music in parallel to Native percussion music as part of Highway’s overall design to depict life on the reserve as “cool” and to “show what funky folk Canda’s Indian people really are” (The Rez Sisters. 9). Native writers Daniel David Moses comments. “He structures his theatre pieces according to models of
musical composition.” (“The Trickster Theatre of Tomson Highway”. Canadian Fiction Magazine. 60.1:83-85] Renate Usminai elaborates, “In the best (Native plays to emerge so far, the authors have successfully grafted the techniques of Euro-American postmodern theatre into this traditional matrix of ritual and storytelling. The result is a theatre which shares all the surface aspects of western postmodernism but differs essentially in spirit.” (Les Belles-Sours Vs The Rez Sisters”. 126).

A musician, Highway keeps pace with the varied musical styles of popular music and their influence on contemporary Native psyche, by the trends and lifestyles they generate. Typically’ all the Rez Sisters are musical, particularly Annie Cook and Emily Dictionary. Annie Cook aspires to become a country singer, her idol being the famous American female country singer of the 1960’s, Pasty Cline. Killed in an aircrash in 1963 which abruptly ended her brief but commercially successful career, her hit songs include “I Fall To Pieces” (1960), “Crazy” (1961), “So Wrong” (1962) etc. cultivating a far less domestic image than her predecessors in her professional life’ Pasty Cline was known for her freewheeling lifestyle. Infact Annie Cook’s ‘dream’ of what winning the Bingo jackpot narrows down, is to get enough money to “buy every single one of Patsy Cline’s records” and “go to all the taverns and nightclubs in Toronto and listen to the live music”. (Dry Lips. 35) But is doesn’t stop
there. Annie Cook, disoriented by the culture that popular music propogates, is infatuated with and desires sexual relations with Fritz, a country musician at a Toronto nightclub. She plans to leave the reserve and live in the city with Fritz. Country music in its varied styles such as Honky Tonk, Western or Western Swing, Hillbilly, Rockabilly’ The Nashville sound, Country Pop, Country Rock and Outlaw Country and New Country besides its influence on other nears’ has had a tremendous impact on White, Naïve, non-white and ethnic communities in white capitalist societies. American radio and T.V. broadcasting stations and record industry gave impetus to the spread of popular western music event to the Soviet Union. Country music made celebrities of singers like Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Hank Williams. Roy Rodgers, Gene Autry’ Jim Reeves, Nat King Cole, Kitty Wells, Patsy Cline, Buddy Holly, Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, John Denver, Faith Hill, Shania Twain just to mention a few. Musically speaking country music is simple in its musical form, which is a basic three chord progression repeated in 4/4 time with emphasis in the first and third beats. Importance is given to the lyrical content than the musical content. Often poetic and evocative, the lyrics generally parallel the lives of the ordinary working class of the white society, covering introspective subjects life, love and relationship, loneliness, religion, poverty, work, life on the western frontier particularly the romanticized life of the cowboy, the hardships of city life’ infidelity,
divorce and the breakdown of family, tradition and religious beliefs. At
times country music has fostered a spirit of rebellion against everything
institutionalized. Cult figures like Elvis Presley and Johny Cash
showcased their unconventional lifestyles for the young to emulate,
lifestyles which promoted alcoholism, drug abuse, free wheelingness and
hippiehood. Frank Garlock music is about triangular relationships. In
addition, lost loves, broken homes and the glorification of liquor frequently
pervade the lyrics of the songs. (Frank Garlock, Kurt Woetzel, “Music in
Peterson. “There is a suggestive correspondence between the lyrical
themes in country music and the life situation expressed by most of its
fans. Taking the date already reported and framing a composite, country
music fans are urban-living, white adults with rural roots who are
established in home, family, and job, but are content with none of these.
There is some evidence for the assertion that country music fans are
discontented. (The Sounds of Social Change. 50). Controversy by raising
troubling issues such as the treatment in women. Accordingly to John
Lomax III music consultant and freelance writer, “Perhaps the most
essential quality of country music and the source of its lasting appeal are
its simplicity and direct commentary on the everyday problems of its
use of this genre suggests giving expression to the functional emotional
mindframe of displaced women such as Emily Dictionary in the Rez Sisters. Country music seems to function as an emotional safety valve for the Native Rez women like Annie Cook and Emily Dictionary who have been mentally, emotionally and physically displaced by the negative consequences of cultural collision. Emily is a classic case study of triply marginalized Native bisexual women. The country song that Emily and Annie sing’ which Emily writes in memory of her lover Rosabella Baez, a biker, titled’ “I’m Thinking of you” which the production notes indicates is “country to the hilt, is performed by them at Anchor Inn, Little Current, to raise funds for the trip to Biggest Bingo Game in the city. The lyrics of the song reflect Emily’s abusive ten years marriage, the pain of the loss and estrangement from her lover Rose who committed suicide and her immense need to be accepted, to love and to be loved, which are typical subjects of country songs.

    I’m thinkin’ of you every moment’
    As though you were here by my side;
    I’ll always remember the good times,
    So darlin’ please come back to me.
    I’m dreamin’ of you every night,
    That we were together again;
    If time can heal up our partin’
    Then love can remove all his pain.
If live is the secret of livin.
Then give that love, shinin’ light;
When you are again by my side’
Then livin’ will once more by right.

(The Rez Sisters.75)

Within a musical context, the women reveal and share their innermost desires and dreams, both realistic and fantasy, during the drive to the city. Annie Cook’s fantasy involving her and her idol Fritz, is underlined by the country song, “Crazy.. Crazy for feeling so lonely” by country singer Patsy Cline which is sung by Emily in the scene. However there is a darker side to Annie’s ‘White’ musical fantasy. Her preoccupation with Fritz the Jewish musician and city culture would only lead to a ‘burn out’ or self destruction like Emily or Philomena who had lived with a white man in the city and whose child had been forcibly taken away from her. Highway argues that it is in their ‘Nativeness’ that lies their truest identity, the meaning and purpose of their existence hat Simon Starblanket in “Dry Lips” passionately tries to reclaim. As Jerry Wassesman states, “Simon seeks nothing less than the return of traditional native spirituality; the resurrection of old dance and rum rituals”(Tomson Highway. Modern Canadian Plays Vol II. 185). The acute awareness of the dichotomy of her own self experience; the pull in two directions, the
Native way and the White way prompts Emily to gently try and divert Annie back to the realities of Native life and sisterhood as experienced on the Native reserve.

David Redwolf described the adverse impact of the city on the Natives’ “When we move to the city we all change, because the values of urbanized cultures are at odds with our Native values. Only a really strong and balanced person is able to make the transition and still hold on to their Native values. The result for most Native people is that they have to give their traditional Native values for urban values, which can be a very painful and emotionally disturbing surrender.” (Native Transitional Problems: Steal My Rage: New Native Voice. 34-36).

The production notes at the beginning of the play “Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing” indicates that the principal theatrical devices in the Set is an old Jukebox of the late 60’s or early 70’s which with its colourful blinking lights and blaring country music, hanging high above the Wasaychigan reserve, symbolizes the “haunting and persistent memory of an ever present omniscient and omnipotent presence like’ white capitalistic culture’ a sort of “Uncle Sam”-“ the magical jukebox hanging in the nightair, like a haunting and persistent memory, high up ever the village of Wasachigan Hill” (Dry Lips.10). The Jukebox of the 60’s was a coin operated phonograph that automatically played records selected from its
The times in America saw the establishment of Jukejoints, highly popular jaunts for teenagers with the jukebox blaring out popular musical hits. The culture quickly spread to white capitalistic societies like Canada, England etc. The Jukebox thus aptly represents this tumultuous period of cultural and social change profoundly influencing not only White but also Native, non-Native and ethnic communities in the U.S.A and Canada. However in the play “Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing” the persuasion to rethink reality is more pronounced than in “The Rez Sisters”. The dominant white capitalistic culture with its assorted accessories’ a significant one being popular western music’ disorients the Native peoples distracting them from realizing Native reality and spirituality fuelling their self destruction. A popular country artist Jacob Aranza was quoted as saying, “I’m not proud of a lot of things in my field. There is no doubt in my mind that we are contributing to the moral decline in America” (more Rock Country, 29). The negativity of western music and the lifestyle and philosophy it propagates is strikingly evident in Pierre St. Pieerre’s bitter recollection of the pathetic circumstances surrounding Dickie Bird’s birth in a nightclub, who in a sense represents the future Native dilemma, “It’s not good for the people of this world…It’s not good for ‘em to have the first thing they see when they come into the world is a goddamn jukebox” (Dry Lips.58). The pathos pervading the bizarre’ surrealistic nightmarish memory of an alcoholic go-go girl Back Lady Halked giving birth to her
illegitimate handicapped child, Dickie Bird, in a night club in Toronto is underlined by American country singer Kity Wells famous song “It wasn’t God who made Honky Tonk Angels” glaring out of the juke box. The song’s lyrics epitomize the lives of many native women like Black Lady Halked’ Philomena and Emily Dictionary who are victims of double colonization and cultural collision.

As I sit here tonight, the Juke box Playing
That tune about the wild side of life,
As I listen to the words you are saying,
It brings memories when I was a trusting wife
It was’nt God who made honky tonk angels;
As you said in the words of your song,
Too many times married men think they are still single
That has caused many a good girl go wrong
It’s a shame that all blame is on us women,
It’s not true that only you men feel the same,
From the start most every heart that’s ever broken,
Was because there always was a man to blame.
It wasn’t god who made honky tonk angels;
As you said in the words of your song;
Too many times married men think they’re single.
That has cost many a good girl go wrong. (Dry Lips. 77, 78)
Kitty wells who paved the way for country music legends such as Patsy Cline is best known for her song, “It wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels” (1952) was instrumental in inventing a female style of country music that took cheating, drinking, honky tonk lifestyle idealized by male singers and depicted it from an assertive, mistreated housewife’s point of view. Pierre’ recollects the heartbreaking memory of the jukebox blaring out a popular song “Rim of Fire” by country music legend Johnny Cash as Black lady Halked in an alcoholic stuper sat alone in a dark corner of the nightclub drinking herself to oblivion-“Three weeks black Lady Halked was sitting there drinkin’ beer. They say she got the money by winning the jackpot at the Espanola bingo just three blocks down the street… three weeks she sat there in that dark corner by herself. They say the only light you could see her by was the light from the jukebox playin’ Rim to Fire” by Johnny Cash” (Dry Lips. 29). The use of the song has special relevance as Johnny Cash nearly destroyed himself due to alcohol and drug abuse, however rehabilitating himself through religion. Along with singer John Dylan he recorded concept albums which used traditional folk songs to explore subjects like the lives of working men and the plight of Native Americans. In the play the juke box along with country music also plays music for the lurid strip tease scene reenacted by the Trickster Nanabush in the form of Gazella Nataways who is the object of the rez
mens’ sexual fantasies. Usually a strip tease is performed to the accompaniment of a version of Rock music along with psychedelic lighting which serves to heighten the erotic effect of the dance. “One of the most persistent allegations about Rock music is that it has strong sexual connotations” propogating “adultery, fornication, Lesbianism, homosexuality or some other form of sexual deviation a way of life” (Pop Goes The Gospel. 26). Richard Taylor elaborates, “We cannot foster an erotic type and music and expect to succeed in a voiding the erosion of standards and ideals. Rock music has a message and it is the message of sexual permissiveness. As music affects your body you instinctively want to put motions to it… basically sensual motions” (A Return to Christian Culture. 37). Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones observes, “We can become drunk on music-there is no question about that. Music can have the effect of creating an emotional state in which the mind is no longer functioning as it should be, and no longer discriminating…the element of relentless beat is Rock music increases the danger of a shallow, emotional unthinking response, made at the wrong level and for the wrong reasons.” (Preaching and Preachers: Pop Goes The Gospel. 17) David Winter openly admits, “An incessant beat does erode a sense of responsibility in much the same way as alcohol does. You fell in the grip of relentless stream of sound to which something very basic and primitive in the human nature responds” (New Singer, New Song: Pop Goes The Gospel. 17). Rock music legend
Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones describes his experience of Rock music, “You can feel the adrenalin flowing through your body. It’s sort of sexual. I entice my audience. What I do is very much the same as a girl’s strip tease dance.” *(The Newsweek, 4.1.71)*

The Srip music in the play underlines the Trickster’s “motivation” which is “neither solely altruistic nor virtuous: Trickster manifestations functions just as easily doing unkindly, suspicious and sometimes cruel deeds as she/he/it does kind and virtuous deeds’ *(Post Half Breed: Indigenous Writers As Authors of Their own Realities: Looking At the Word Of Our People. 38]*. All the above observations about popular western music have been presented to underline Highway’s indication of the destructive effects of appropriating white culture and his affirmation of the values embedded in Native tradition, culture and mythology.

In juxtaposition with white popular western genres of music, Highway presents percussive Native music to celebrate the Native spirit, rhythms of life, and reality. In the production notes of the play “The Rez Sisters”, Highway indicates that “the music for the play, in its first productions, was provided by a musician who played at least 30 different percussion instruments from drum kit, to bells to rattles etc. This is the way I find the “soundscape” and the rhythm of this piece to be most effectively under lined” *(The Rez Sisters. 11)*. From the Native African to
the Native of the western hemisphere, the First Nations peoples are a musical people. Native music chiefly vocal and percussive music expressly imitate the diverse sounds and rhythms of the universe. Though the European colonizer did a great deal to eliminate indigenous cultural expression like stories, songs and dances were preserved and passed on to posterity. They reveal how the indigenous peoples of North America and Canada lived in consonance with the rhythm and sounds of nature. T.V. Prakash elaborates, “The entire stock and potential of knowledge, wisdom and intellectual attainment of any tribal group is deposited. It is here that the essence of tribal ideas, insights, values, beliefs, theories, sentiments and the accounts of their institutions, rituals, and ceremonies can be found” (Beyond Resistance. 82) Music was an integral part of Native Indian life from birth to death. Indispensable to religion, music underlined indigenous social life, warfare, subsistence activities and recreation. Dancing with vocal and instrumental accompaniment was an important form of musical expression and music providing rhythm. Wind instruments like the Falgelot, a small fipple flute, was occasionally used while sting instruments were unknown with the probable exception of hunting bows used as rhythmic instruments. Musical instruments included the Tom Tom, a shallow double headed drum, rattles, rasps, bull roarers and clapping sticks. Generally Native Indian songs consist of a single melody. Harmony is absent. The common musical form conforms to a pentatonic
(five tone) or consist of a clavis of major and minor thirds. Rhythms range from simple beat to definite complex rhythmic designs co-ordinated with those of the melody, similar to African beat progressions. Highway’s novel use to percussive beat in both his play suggests an attempt to create an authentic Native ‘feel’ in parallel to the pseudo white cultural atmosphere that pervades the plays. In The Rez Sisters, he employs specifically designed rhythm patterns from simple beat highlighting Pelpia’s Hammering while repairing the shingles on her roof, to faster beat progressions at focal point in the play like the “Cacophonous percussion for about seven beats” (*The Rez Sisters.* 60), representing the Chief’s complacent speech at the band office, and to underline the Rez Sisters’ lively hectic efforts to raise moneys to fund their intended trip to the city to try their luck at the Biggest Bingo game in the world, “the women start their fundraising activities with a vengeance. The drive is underlined by a wild rhythmic beat from the musician, one that gets wilder and wilder (accelerates) with each successive beat, though always underpinned by this persistent, almost dance – like pulse” (*The Rez Sisters.* 70). The Bingo game scene is also underlined by wild percussion beat probably to paint the chaos generated by the materialistic attitudes and their negative consequences of white capitalistic society and its antisocial effects on the Native psyche.
As part of the native “feel”, Highway incorporates an Ojibwa funeral son which the rez sisters chant as Nanabush escorts the ailing Marie Adele to the spirit world.

Wa-Kwing, Wa-Kwing
Heaven, Heaven, heaven,

Wa-Kwing, nin wi-i-ja;
I’m going there; Heaven

Wa-Kwing, Wa kwing,
Heaven, heaven, heaven,

Wa-Kwing, nin wi-i-ja;
I’m going there.

(The Rez Sisters. 105)

In his other play “Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing”, the Native ‘feel’ is more pronounced in Simon Starblanket’s Native chants and dancing and in his passionate longing to revive Native tradition and culture, “I’m the one who has to bring the drum back…” (Dry Lips. 45). At another point in the play, Simon’s euphoric plans to marry his sweetheart Pegahmagahbow, have a child and travel to South Dakota to dance with the Sioux (Indian Tribe), are underlined by a powwow drum beat providing rhythm to Simon’s chanting and dancing. The Powwow drum was used by the Indian tribes who inhabited the Great Plains of North America, in the pre-colonial era. The Plains style of music is the best know today and influence much of the music of present day powwows i.e., intertribal social gatherings that feature Native American music, dancing, arts and crafts. Plain music is usually produced by a group of men who sit around a large doubleheaded drum, singing in unison and drumming with
At powwows this groups of men is known as the “drums”, Simon’s allusion to the “drum” emphasizes Highway’s view that the contemporary Native Indians must reclaim the vision of “Native Reality” which along would ensure their survival in Canada’s white dominated multi-ethnic society. Like Simons, learning to be an Ojibway the protagonist in Richard Wagamese, is re-oriented into the Native way, through the teachings of Keeper’s teaching is the drum both in the figurative and literal sense. Accordingly to keeper, “Dream’s a tool to help us remember the power of the world and in us all. Drum’s the heartbeat. Heart beat of ours, Heartbeat of the land, Heartbeat of our culture”.

(Keeper’s Me, 115).

A peculiar yet interesting aspect is Highway’s artistic and dramatic employment of the “Blues” in “Dry Lips Oughta move To Kapuskasing” implying a shared experience between the Native Indian and the Afro-American. Many historians share the view that only few of the indigenous African cultural expressions survived the Afro-American forcible transfer to America. Sociologist Charles Keil explains, “Slavery as practiced in the United States at least, obliterated all but the faintest traces of African political, economic and familial institutions. Theses aspects of life were rigidly controlled by the white slave masters. On the other hand, basic African predispositions governing religion and esthetics not only survived
slavery, but were reshaped, nurtured and magnified in response to slavery and post slavery conditions” (*Urban Blues*. 5). Interestingly African slave music not only retained many of its Native African characteristics, but also functioned as a second language for the slaves. White colonizers, unaware of the slaves elusive understanding of the English language permitted them to develop a vocal music whose well disguised content was hostility against the white man. Many slave owners discouraged their melancholic singing on the grounds that would make them embittered and sullen impairing their efficiency. But it is quite probable that musical expressions of despair were often heard in the slave settlement out of earshot of the White masters and overseers. Similar to the Native African context, the African slave music served a highly functional purpose, helping them to endure endless days of brutal physical labour and physical violence. It is also served a religiostic function. It served as a multi-level form of communication, acting as a signaling device i.e., field call, holler, huckster shout, field song and spiritual. Further it served for entertainment, as accompaniment for dancing, singing and storytelling.

One of the most significant forms of Black Folk music is the “Blues” which emerged a quarter of a century after the abolition of slavery. It had its roots in the mournful songs of the days a slavery. Blues in its early forms like Talkin’ Blues and Mule Blues reflect the repressive socio-
economic conditions and the Black man’s response to it. Typical of the early Blues is a song W.C. Handy heard in 1832 a song called ‘East St. Louis’ which had lines like, “I walked all the way from old East St. Louis, and I didn’t have but one po’ measly dime” sung repeatedly to the accompaniment of a guitar. (W.C. Handy, An Autobiography, 142) The Blues singer accompanied himself in the knife-blade style on the guitar. The harmonica was used mostly in the rural sought, prior to the guitar and banjo later popularised by Blues artists like Muddy Waters.

A peculiar tonal sliding from one note to a higher notice, the long drawn out crooning and the short melodic refrain were employed by the singer to intensify his melancholic emotions and to sustain it beyond the limits of the words. He used his guitar not just as an accompaniment to his song but as a “second voice”, making it to imitate the human voice i.e., the tonal sliding producing a sort of monotonous drone which wove the words and the melancholy tune to express the singer’s fluctuating emotions effectively.

The late 19th century saw the “Blues” develop into a definite musical style extremely popular among with Afro-American people as it served as a prime emotional safety valve in a turbulent period. Robert Bowman elaborates, “The Blues grew out of, and reflected the social realities of the American South from the 1880’s to the 1920’s. The period constituted the
nadir of American race relations since emancipation (of the African slave). During the time the vast majority of blacks lived in the South, where they faced increasing social, political and economic subordination. There were few safe outlets for their hopes, dreams, and pride, the most important being the black church. But the main secular response was the “Blues” (The Story of Stax Records).

Though the emancipation did not substantially alter the socio-economic conditions of the majority of African Americans, it had a profound effect on the psyche of the generation born into freedom, who created a new music that reflected both their world view and the social circumstances which confronted them in the white capitalistic American society. The modern Blues comprises of a three line lyric with an a, a, b rhyme scheme, a corresponding twelve bar melody and a distinctive three-chord progression. John F. Sawed elaborates, “The Blues did not “entertain” nor were they “art” objects. They were something akin to religious chants (although never a part of orthodox religious belief). Emotionally charged, deeply personalized the Blues were in part a problem solving technique, closer to the confessional than to the stage. The Blues audience respondent to the common plights presented to them by the singer as personal experience. As the singer overcame his problems, or was overcome by them, so the listeners shared in the catharsis” (American
Afro-American writer and activist LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) pointed out that freedom brought a number of new experiences to black people. Primary among them were mobility, loneliness, the freedom to seek out consensual love relationships and the need to find employment. These four themes are voiced over and over again in the blues songs of the first several decades of the 20th century. The Blues served as a potent outlet for emotional expression for the Afro-American just as the fostering of traditional cultural expressions like storytelling, music and dance did to the Native Indian, helping them to survive and withstand the atrocities and injustice of the White capitalistic society. In the play “Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing” Zachary Jeremiah Keechigeesik’ plays a melancholy blues tune at focal points in the play underlining Simon starblanket’s passionate chanting and dancing, the Native way. The production notes indicate that the “soundscape” was mostly provided for by a musician playing, live, on Harmonica off to one side. It is a though the “dreamscape” of the play were laced all the way through with Zachary Jeremiah Keechigeeisk’s “idealized from of Harmonica playing, permeated with a definite “Blues” “flavor”. (Dry Lips. 10). It is as if Zachary adapts the role of the Blues travelling ministrel, following Simon Starblanket’s gropings to experience his vision of Native Reality. Zachary’s Blues music is personalised his vision of Native Reality, Zachary’s Blues music is personalised expressing the inexpressible. It’s sad mournful tune trying to
echo the untold suffering of the Native peoples in Canada and their estrangement from their tradition, culture and mythology. Like Highway, Beth Brant also incorporates Blues in her text “Coyote Learns a New Tricks”. AS K.P. Jayanthi explains, “Blues Music echoes The Blacks pain at the racism and violence they had to encounter, a subversive form a music that represented the transcendence of boundaries of race, class, gender, sex and the pathos of oppressed lives. (Beyond Resistance. 184). Highway’s use of blues suggests an attempt to elicit a soul searching response from his Native audience and the White society in Canada. Zachary’s Blues tune underlines climatic events in the play such as Dickie Bird’s molestation of Pegahmagahbow with a crucifix, Big joey’s impotency in dealing with son Dickie Bird’s predicament and a grief stricken, vengeful, inebriated Simon Starblanket accidentally shooting himself to death, culminating in Zachary’s extremely agonizing outburst against divinity’ both Christian and Native’ questioning the injustice meted out to the Native Indian. A similar sentiment is expressed by Afro-American Blues musician Duke Ellington, “The Characteristic melancholy music of my race has been forged from the very white heat of our sorrows and our groupings after something tangible in the primitiveness of our lives in the early days of our American occupation” (Encarta. 2005 Reference Library Premium) Zora Neale Hurstone, Afro-American writer and folklorist stated, “When we sing the blues, we’re singin’ out our hearts
we’re singin about our feelings. Maybe we’re hurt and just can’t answer back, then we sign or maybe hum the blues” (Encarta. 2005 Reference Library Premium).

With the appearance of phonograph records in the 1920’s the dissemination of Black folk music especially the Blues began. Adapted by the professional performer and the commercial music industry, it becomes a major form of entertainment. Besides, it also continued to function as a catharsis of emotions. To the Afro-American, singing about trouble defeated sorrow, somehow purged the hear of fear, anxiety and depression. The Blues helped him to bear his sorrows. As good example is James Baldwin’s novel “Sonny’s Blues”. An important function of the Blues and Afro-American music in general is to create an emotional rapport between individual and his society. As Afro-American writer Richard Wright explains that most Blues “are not intrinsically pessimistic; their burden of woe and melancholy is dialectically redeemed through sheer force of sensuality into an almost exultant affirmation of life, love movement and hope” (Blues Fell This Morning. 9), which conforms Highways affirmation of the Native philosophy of life.

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