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Nanabush as a Character in the Play ²the Rez Sisters

The Rez Sisters is a play written by Tomson Highway and ⁵was originally performed in the year 1986 in the English version. The Native Earth Performing Arts performed it in 2010. A Cree language version was completed. The Rez Sisters play is about seven sisters living under reservation in India, and the spirit called the Tricksters tries to manipulate them. Act one of the play starts with sisters Pelagia and Philomena, who discuss their difficulties living in the reserve while working on their roof.

Nanabush is a character in this play and is also called a traditional ³trickster. He has been described as basically a comic clownish type of a personality. In this ⁴play, Nanabush appears ⁴concealed in a seagull, a nighthawk, and the Bingo master. Nanabush is ⁴the one who takes Marie- Adele into the spirit world after ⁴she dies in the game of bingo (Firewood). Throughout the Rez, Sisters Nanabush observes only the action, which Marie- Adele and Zhaboonigan only see. This is because their suffering had made them becoming close to the spirit world. The mythological figure of Nanabush represents prominently Cree and Anishinaabe mythology as a representation of the nature of humans and their characters in many of their facets. Nanabush constantly changes between the languages, the embodied forms, genders, and the states of being, making it hard to be understood.

Nanabush, entirely in the play, is a pivotal figure in indigenous spirituality. Nanabush is the Tricksters that teach people the meaning of nature and its existence and disrupt standard patterns. Highway in the play places Nanabush as a way of connecting the world of spirits and traditional culture to the present's seven sisters' reality. In the rez sisters, Nanabush manifests himself in many forms. He manifests himself as a nighthawk and a seagull and a bingo master and moves in the extremes of white and black, despair and hope, tragedy, and comedy. Nanabush also manifests himself in order and chaos and between the whites' culture and those of the natives.

Nanabush in the rez play engages in both cultures whereby each may be accommodated without shared destruction.

In the rez sisters, Nanabush has been used as a figure for exploring the spiritual world's subtext and a trickster figure who offers commentary on gender politics. Trickster gods have lingered in the various folk cultures. The trickster's primary attribute and actions are the moral dualism absence; tricksters are not good or bad but are always very manipulative and playful, primarily to expose other people's foolishness. Nanabush has been used in the rez sisters' play to reveal the gender concept, which has been imposed in a more particular way in its empirical context. In the Sisters, Zhabooning and Marie- Adele are the only characters who can speak and talk to the Nanabush because they happen to be the most bodily damaged characters. In the play, Tomson described Nanabush as a pivotal and figure who is as essential in the indigenous world as the Christ in Christian mythology.

Nanabush has been used as a male character in the Rez Sisters. He is the central symbolic character in the play. The character Nanabush is present in Marie- Adele and in Zhaboonigan, who are playing innocently. Nanabush is also present when Zhaboonigan is in anguish and despair, describing her rape and the scene where women are fighting and when Marie Adele collapses and dies. These appearances of Nanabush possibly speaks to the understanding of him as an apathetic deity and reinforcing the play in the end. Marie – Adele, who is close to death, only sees Nanabush as a spirit when he appears in the form of a bird and also by Zhaboonigan, who is mentally handicapped.

What is the Character Cultural Significance?

The figure of Nanabush in the play embodies the extremist conflict in the culture and the inherent paradoxes of life and death. Nanabush, in the play character, follows the characters in the space and interacts with them in various ways. How the interactions of Nanabush and the characters in the play unfolds signifies that even though their spiritual component is not discussed and involved in the dialogue, it survives as an essential and integral part of the sisters' lives well as their identities. Nanabush, throughout the play, shows the meaning of scenery and the importance of reality on the planet. In the space, some characters like Marie –Adele is a character with a strong and culturally connections which are spiritual.

The tension in the play, which is between the white culture and the and Indian culture, is one central theme in Rez Sisters. The sisters try to center themselves in the white culture by attending a Bingo in Toronto, but Nanabush follows them throughout the journey; this signifies that the emergence of the white culture is not enough or is not adequate to the disappearance and forgetting of the Indian culture. To illustrate the flexibility of the culture, Nanabush is depicted in various traditional ways. Nanabush occupies the form of a seagull, the Nightwalk, and the Bing Master. Including Nanabush as a Bingo master signifies the mixing of the white and the

native culture. This outlines the duality that always exists in the culture of the white and the Indian culture. The form of Nanabush as a seagull serves as a representation of happiness and fun. This seagull form of the Nnabush makes a character named Zhaboonigan feel safe and reveals how he was raped. While saying this to him, Nanabush is undergoing an agonizing contortion, which signifies the damage that had occurred spiritually due to Zhaboonigan being sexually abused by the white boys.

What does it add to the play?

Nanabush led to the development of characters throughout the play. Nanabush, in relevance to the Indian culture, functions as an ensemble following other characters. As he is asked concerning these characters, Nanabush in *The Rez Sisters* is the central work in the play. He has been drawn of the cultural and personal memory by characters like Marie-Adele and Zhaboonigan across the space. The different forms that the Nanabush takes in the play, like that of the seagull, bring out happiness and fun to the character Zhaboonigan. This leads to her revealing to the Nanabush how she was sexually abused. This brings out the theme of culture as

Nanabush's agonize contortions signify how the spiritual culture of the Indian has been altered with. Nanabush assists the play through the characters like Marie-Adele and Zhaboonigan as they are able to recognize Nanabush in his disguise form, showing that though Marie Adele is facing death, she is more open to the spirit world. Nanabush makes the play have a trickster figure, and only some of the characters who can see him are the ones who can speak Cree, which suggests and shows a mythological world connection and the historical world. The Cree brought about rhythm and tempo in the play, making it to be humorous. The rhythm and the language become fun. The presence of Nanabush and its significance to culture shows how the play has changed the religious or spiritual belief into art, and the creative spirit behind the myths in the oral tradition has been transformed into a new form of creativity in the play.

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