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Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the interplay between postmodernism, storytelling, stereotypes, and popular culture in Sherman Alexie's collection of short stories *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The thesis employs the connection between dialogic storytelling and stereotypes to reframe how Native Americans experience themselves in the text and how non-Native people can change their perspective on Native Americans. Multiple voices and narrators influence the twenty-two short stories in the collection. These stories, and the characters in them, are narrative wisps that function as a postmodern textual construction which help readers navigate Alexie's realm. This thesis seeks to answer how humor and the dialogic intersect to address the haunting memories of the past and how Alexie's characters cross the cultural borders between Native American cultures and White American cultures. I examine how Alexie both accepts and challenges stereotypes and adds popular culture to the dialogic to deconstruct the pre-established notion of Native Americans as drunks and as a self-destructive group of people. Alexie tries to provoke his readers by depicting a hopeless universe, and the result is that the life-threatening condition *is* being Native American. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* functions as a reminder to his non-Native readers that contemporary Native Americans exist and that they live their lives similar to the non-Native society. Alexie's satirical depiction of Native Americans and their struggles puts Alexie in the role of a modern-day Trickster that demands social change.

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Introduction

Sherman Alexie calls for social change when he inserts his readers into the Spokane reservation through the twenty-two short stories collected in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1997). Multiple voices and narrators influence these short stories, and the recurring characters function as the readers' advisors. This thesis explores how the various voices in the text influence the three characters Victor Joseph, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, and Junior Polatkin. For instance, Victor's father and Jimi Hendrix are spiritual friends, which influences Victor to a great extent. These narrators employ different modes of storytelling that have emerged from traditional Native American storytelling. The dialogic features which are evident in the relationship between the narrators and the surrounding society illustrate how Alexie draws attention to the tension between Native American and White American culture. Alexie traps his characters and narrators in a no man's land, where their past, present, and future voices are intertwined. When intertwining the voices, Alexie challenges the metanarratives and preconceptions that non-Native readers rely on when encountering Native American literature. Alexie's dialogic style invites readers to a guided conversation with the horrors of the past and the hopes for the future. His guided journeys and conversations reveal that the Spokane tribe lives differently from the outside world while simultaneously living similar to non-Native peoples. This thesis seeks to answer how humor and the dialogic intersect to address the haunting memories of the past and how Alexie's characters cross the cultural borders between Native American cultures and White American cultures.

This thesis suggests that Alexie's readers must pay attention to the postmodern ideas as put forward by Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gerald Vizenor, and Frank Lentricchia to open an array of rewarding readings of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Their ideas center on the notion that the text is a product of various voices that create fragmented narratives. These ideas suggest that the world must reject the established metanarratives which determine how Native American perceives themselves, and also how non-Native readers bring misconceptions about Native Americans to the readings. Alexie's characters are in the midst of a physical and emotional whirlwind of narratives that expose them to the horrors of the past, the apathy of the present, and the future uncertainties. His characters fight the metanarratives which are formed by white civilization's perennial appropriation and suppression. Alexie's characters manage to challenge the established White American metanarratives, and thus, have the power to influence and change these metanarratives.

Victor, one of the recurring characters in the collection of short stories, expresses how his father deals with reality and truth. Victor's depiction of his father exemplifies how his father experiences reality and how he has the power to change the established metanarratives. In the story titled "Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock", Victor's father challenges the metanarratives by saying that he does not care about what is real. He cares about how things should be. Throughout various stories, Victor's dialogues with his father are vivid accounts of Lentricchia's notions that the postmodern is all about social change. Gerald Vizenor is both a Native American and a postmodernist. He argues that Native American literature is a construction of narrative wisps and that readers must look past the tragic understanding of such literature. Specifically, I will examine how *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is constructed of "narrative wisps", and how these wisps influence the story as a whole and how they influence the readers.

The dialogues between characters do not foster change by themselves but they are affected by the various voices from the past, the present, and the future. Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic criticism is evident in most of the stories, where Alexie's readers can notice how each story is told with various voices, and from diverse perspectives. Alexie uses the dialogic with time when he incorporates multiple voices in individual characters. These voices are the results of Alexie's move where he combines the past, the present, and the future. Jerome Denuccio argues that Alexie's characters are located in a social space which exemplify that Native American subjectivity is dialogic. Thomas Builds-the-Fire illustrates this social space in "A Drug Called Tradition", where he presents an image which illustrates how Native Americans are always trapped in the present, and where the skeletons of the past are right behind them, and the skeletons of the future are right ahead of them. Thomas' relationship with Victor exemplifies the dialogic. There is the Thomas of the past who used to be a friend to Victor, there is the Thomas in the present who fights for the friendship of the past, and there is Thomas of the future who is alone. This dialogic presents an uncertainty, and the characters' interactions with the past and the present are moves made to influence the future. I will investigate how *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* demonstrates that the characters are incapable of influencing the future because of their inability to escape the past and the present.

Alexie positions his characters in a dialogic realm influenced by the past, present, and future. Alexie's paratactic style of storytelling forces the readers to participate in the story to

reveal its meaning because readers must deduct the secret information embodied in the ongoing conversation between Alexie, his characters, and his readers. Alexie's use of paratactic style is quite similar to the traditional Native American orature techniques. That is, the orature of the past, and Alexie's present stories, do not disclose the relation of one character to another. Readers must therefore use their imagination to reveal the nature of the relationship between the different characters. In particular, I will explore how Alexie's paratactic style is a tool for breaking the misconceptions of Native Americans as drunk, poor, self-destructive, and hopeless and romantic.

Alexie tackles metanarratives when he employs stereotypes in his works by juxtaposing brutality and suffering with comedy. Louis Owens argues, in *Mixedblood Messages*, that Native American writers who conform to and rely upon stereotypes do it for economic purposes. They create a realm that presents Native Americans according to the preconceptions of white readers to please publishers, critics, and future readers. Alan Velie also expresses his concerns regarding Native American writers' misuse of stereotypes. In "Indians in Indian Fiction: The Shadow of the Trickster", he argues that it is surprising that Native American writers depict the brutality their people have suffered for hundreds of years (*Trickster* 315). While Owens and Velie posit their skepticism toward the misuse of stereotypes, Stephen F. Evans claims, in "'Open Containers': Sherman Alexie's Drunken Indians", that Alexie's use of stereotypes is a tool to shock and provoke the readers in order to create social change. In particular, this thesis explores how Alexie uses stereotypes to break the readers' preconceptions and prejudice.

Alexie perforates stereotypes with popular culture to subvert the established metanarratives. P. Jane Hafen argues, in "Rock and Roll, Redskins, and Blues in Sherman Alexie's Work", that popular culture in the form of music is used to reconcile Alexie's characters with each other, but also with the world which is located outside of the reservation. Alexie employs popular culture in order to recreate his character's identity, by showing them that they can enjoy white popular culture while simultaneously embracing traditional Native American culture. This results in a refashioned bond between the White American cultures and the Native American cultures. The refashioned social bond is contested by James Cox who argues, in "Muting White Noise: The Subversion of Popular Culture Narratives of Conquest in Sherman Alexie's Fiction", that popular culture in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* illustrates assimilation and destruction of Native Americans. Cox makes the point that television as a tangible artifact is a modern-day colonizer. Cox discusses how

television, as a physical artifact, has conquered the lands and minds of the Native Americans, as did the colonizers of the past. Assimilation of Native Americans in white popular culture is not the only reference to pop culture in Alexie's work. Alexie's characters play basketball, and they use basketball as a metaphor for a war they are engaged in. In "Sacred Hoop Dreams: Basketball in the Work of Sherman Alexie", David S. Goldstein argues that Alexie's basketball references exemplify that Native Americans are not some ancient species, but that they are very much part of the contemporary world. Goldstein posits the idea that basketball functions as a reminder of Native Americans' constant battle against the horrors of the past, and the contemporary world. In particular, I will examine how Alexie uses popular culture to reconcile Native Americans with the rest of society.

This thesis explores how Alexie uses popular culture and stereotypes in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* to force readers into a position facing their prejudices. With a postmodern approach to the short stories and the paratactic and dialogic in consideration, this thesis explores how different angles, theories, and approaches function as different lenses to view Alexie's pop culture and stereotypes. Humor functions as one of these perspectives. Alexie is a true satirist, and in "Sherman Alexie's Polemical Stories", Ron McFarland argues that Alexie places himself in the stories by impersonating Victor, Junior, and Thomas. McFarland refers to this as Alexie's trinity of selves, and the purpose of placing himself in the story is to open the door to his absurdist world. The only way to survive in this miserable Native American landscape is by laughing at the absurdity of it all. McFarland argues that humor helps break with the established Native American stereotypes and that Alexie, through humor, manages to express his anger toward White American cultures and his concerns for the future.

This thesis is organized into four main chapters. The first chapter will establish concepts that are the foundation of the thesis. Specifically, I will discuss postmodernism as put forward by Lyotard, Lentricchia, and Vizenor. Lyotard discusses postmodernism in general, and Vizenor specifically discusses it concerning Native American literature. The subsequent part of this chapter will investigate Native American storytelling as put forward by Karl Kroeber and Paul Radin. They discuss traditional Native American storytelling features, which will be helpful when investigating *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. These concepts will be the foundation for discussing Alexie's references to popular culture and his use of stereotypes. The last part of this chapter will discuss Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic and Gerard Genette's narrativity. These works will frame the discussion of the

various voices in Alexie's stories and how the text is both shaped by voices internally within the text and by voices external to the text.

The second chapter will discuss why *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is a postmodern composition and how the dialogic and narrativity influence the text's characters and readers. This chapter will also explore the social space that Alexie's characters are part of and how this social space functions as a tool for the dialogic. Finally, this chapter will discuss the role of the Trickster in the text. The Trickster is a traditional figure from Native American cultures, and Alexie employs the Trickster in his works in a way that both challenges the traditional and mythopoetic role of Trickster, and forces us to reconsider the functions of Alexie's characters.

The third chapter will first investigate Alexie's use of stereotypes. Namely, "the Drunken Indian" and "the Vanishing Indian". Alexie confronts both stereotypes, and this chapter will investigate why and how Alexie confronts them. Subsequently, I will explore how popular culture, represented in television, music, and basketball, is employed in Alexie's work. Finally, this chapter will tackle Alexie's strengths as a satirist and convey how Alexie actively uses humor to challenge stereotypes and popular culture.

The fourth chapter will connect the previously mentioned ideas in the investigation of stories from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The most thoroughly examined stories in this thesis are titled, "Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock" and "Every Little Hurricane". As there is a recurrence of characters and scenes in more than one story, short passages from other stories are also part of the discussion. In addition, this chapter will investigate a scene from Alexie's debut novel *Reservation Blues*, and a poem titled "How it Happens" from Alexie's collection of poems *One Stick Song*.

Chapter I. Theorizing the Postmodern, Storytelling, Dialogic Criticism, and Narrativity

This chapter will investigate literary theories on postmodernism, storytelling, narrativity, and Native American stereotypes. It is crucial for the thesis to identify key aspects in these concepts in order to fully appreciate the role of storytelling and narrative in the work of Alexie. To investigate and to further explain these concepts, this thesis looks at the work of different scholars. First, this chapter will explain the postmodern discourse as put forward by Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard is one of the “founding fathers” of postmodernism, and it will be crucial to examine and understand his ideas. To understand Lyotard’s ideas with relevance to Native American literature, I will investigate the works of Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor is an expert on both the postmodern discourse and Native American literature. Understanding the postmodern discourse help shed new light on Alexie’s work. Second, this chapter will inspect Karl Kroeber, and Bruce Ballenger’s take on Native American storytelling. Native American storytelling has emerged from being solely oral to combining oral and written pieces of work. Third, this chapter will apply Andrew Dix, and Hayden White’s discussions on narrative and narrativity. Fourth and last, this chapter will explain who the Trickster is and explain how this mythical figure from oral storytelling has found its way into the written novel. Alan R. Velie’s article “Trickster Novel” tackles the Trickster and connects oral and written literature. The reason for arranging the ideas of the scholars mentioned above is that they are all connected when discussing Alexie. Although they do not point their fingers directly at Alexie’s work, their theory will function as the foundation for understanding other scholars and Alexie’s work. This discussion will provide necessary knowledge about Native American literature and the idea of concepts that will be utilized in my reading of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

The Postmodern Discourse

Scholars on Native American literature, argue that one must take a postmodern approach in order to indulge in the texts. The postmodern is a widely discussed concept, and many voices participate in the discussion. I will in this subchapter identify and explain the ideas of Jean-François Lyotard, Frank Lentricchia, Socrates, and Gerald Vizenor. Their ideas are

fundamental for opening an array of interesting and rewarding readings of Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, because elements of the postmodern are very much evident in Alexie's work.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard explains his ideas of postmodernism. In the introduction of his book, Lyotard defines *postmodernism* as an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv). To understand Lyotard's definition of postmodern, one must define what metanarratives are. *Metanarratives* are the stories of stories. That is to say, a metanarrative is a narrative that rules all other narratives and functions to legitimate people's and societies' behavior. For instance, a religious text says that people must live according to the set of rules presented in that text. A God or a divine figure forms the rules. This divine figure claims to be all-knowing and can therefore function as the story beyond all other stories. This thesis discusses postmodernism regarding Alexie's work, and he tries to subvert metanarratives embodied in the minds of Native American and non-Native readers. One can argue that the metanarrative of Native Americans is created by how Euro-Americans have described the conquest of the Americas. This metanarrative is several hundred years old and is part of our minds as preconceptions. Lyotard's definition of postmodern thinkers is that they have disbelief or a strong skepticism toward these metanarratives. The reasons for skepticism toward metanarratives are breaking with preconceptions and forming new perspectives on society. Lyotard also presents a narrative term that serves as to challenge these established metanarratives; little narratives. According to Lyotard, the little narratives are "the quintessential form of imaginative invention" (Lyotard 60). This argument's essence is that the little narratives must take the metanarrative's place to foster knowledge through imagination. This means that knowledge without imaginative invention can only reach a limited level. The imaginative invention certainly changes knowledge because it suggests that change results from the idea and the execution of the idea. Alexie's short stories are examples of these little narratives, and he executes his ideas through his characters.

Lyotard argues that the core of postmodernism is to reject metanarratives and to embrace little narratives. When investigating Alexie's work through Lyotard's postmodern lens, one must also explore Lyotard's ideas on the role of the author. Lyotard argues that "the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work" (Lyotard 81). One implication of Lyotard's argument is

that there is a movement from the author to the reader and the context of the text. This means that the author is no longer with us. The author intersects with a mixture that already consists of the reader and the context of the text. Whereas the author might have pre-established ideas on his intentions with the text, the readers may experience the text in a completely different fashion than the author's intentions.

The argument that a text is understood in the space between authorial intention, reader reception, and unknown factors of context is complicated by, what Lyotard coins, "the paradox of the future". This paradox refers to postmodernism as something which is in constant development. That is, postmodernism is in a recurrent state, and one can therefore never know exactly what it will be. In other words, when a literary text is formed without following a set of predetermined rules, one can never know how the text is interpreted. The result of the paradox of the future is that the text (created in the past) is shaped by the future (the reading of the text and the context). This means that literary texts are also in a recurring state, where the past and the future are intertwined. The paradox of the future is evident in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, because the characters in the stories are shaped by both the past and the future.

In conclusion, then, as suggested by Lyotard, the postmodern approach is to reject metanarratives and embrace little narratives. The author has lost his all-knowing power because the text is not understood according to pre-established rules. The relationship between the author, the reader, and the context frames the understanding of the text. The paradox of the future complicates the discussion by intertwining the past with the future in shaping a text.

In *The Apology*, Socrates argues that one must admit that one does not know everything to obtain the highest level of knowledge. This is Socrates' way of rejecting metanarratives. In *The Apology*, Socrates is told by the Oracle that he possesses divine wisdom and that this makes him the wisest man in the world. Socrates does not acknowledge the Oracle's statement, and he travels on an investigative journey to find someone wiser than him. Socrates meets various persons known for their wisdom, and after an account with a politician, he reflects "At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know" (Tredenninck 42). The essence of Socrates' reflection is that admitting that one does not know everything will make one wiser. Concerning the postmodern, Socrates argues that a situated knowledge that sees its perspective and knows where it sits is a more precise knowledge than one that believes it has

access to a metanarrative. Socrates' argument strengthens Lyotard's ideas on little narrative and the text because "true" knowledge is situated in the little narratives and the mixture of author, reader, and context.

Lyotard's argument on the rejection of metanarratives, and Socrates' argument that situated knowledge possesses great power is applicable when trying to change the present state. According to literary critic Frank Lentricchia, postmodernism is all about social change. In *Criticism and Social Change*, Lentricchia argues that postmodernism, "seeks not to find the foundation and the conditions of truth but to exercise power for the purpose of social change" (Lentricchia 12). In other words, Lentricchia suggests that postmodern criticism is a theory that represents the purpose to change society. If one adds Lyotard's argument and Socrates' argument, one can notice that social change can only be fostered through situated knowledge in little narratives.

One scholar who applies the postmodern in the reading of Native American literature is Gerald Vizenor. In *Narrative Chance*, a collection of articles, Vizenor argues that one should investigate Native American literature from a postmodern perspective. To understand these perspectives, Vizenor takes the reader on a journey through the postmodern discourse. In "A Postmodern Introduction", Vizenor discusses how to read and understand Native American literature through the thoughts of postmodernists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, and scholars such as Brian McHale, Stephen Tyler, and philosopher Umberto Eco. Vizenor refers to Lyotard when describing the word postmodern as "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies" and that we find ourselves in a "crisis of narratives" (*Narrative* 3). In other words, a postmodern approach to Native American literature means to critically and thoroughly look at the works of art. By taking a postmodern approach, readers and critics shift from the tragic and individualized understanding of Native American literature to an understanding centered around the narrative, authors, readers, Tricksters, and the comic (*Narrative* 3). The tragic and individualized understandings of Native American literature refer to the interpretations most scholars and everyday readers tend to do when reading such literature. Readers usually look at Native American works of art as a representation of, or a reaction to, the tragic history that almost every tribe share in the era dating back to when the colonizers first arrived. The crisis of narratives, on the other hand, refers to the rejection of metanarratives. In other words, as established earlier, there is no universal truth, and there is no all-knowing narrator with metanarrative power. To cope with the interpretation above, Vizenor argues that one must apply the literary "rules" of

postmodernism. The reason for putting quotation marks on rules is that postmodernism is rejecting the former literary rules. It is, therefore, quite paradoxical to label something like the rules of postmodernism. However, I apply this word to pinpoint precisely the postmodernist ideas which are helpful in the unraveling of Alexie's work.

In his essay, Vizenor refers to Lyotard's little narratives when he posits that Native American literatures are "imagined from wisps of narratives" (*Narrative 3*). The stories told, stories heard, and stories acted out are part of creating these wisps. In other words, Native American literature is a fusion of many little stories which challenge the metanarratives. Both significant and insignificant stories are part of the equation. The sum, then, of the equation are different stories formed by the little stories. According to the postmodernist view on literature, these little stories stand alone and should be treated as multiple accounts of truth. The little stories, which Vizenor argues are significant for understanding Native American literature, are of particular interest when examining *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. This is of great interest because the book itself consists of short stories, and it is valuable to see if it is possible to tackle each of these stories as individual stories that simultaneously function as different perspectives on the same metanarrative. The narrative wisps unpack the same story again and again for the purpose to subvert the metanarratives. The essence, then, if one follows Vizenor's postmodern discourse, is that the short stories in which *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* consist should be read as independent texts with the common goal to subvert the metanarrative and preconceptions of Native American literature. This means that the reader must connect the fragments for the purpose of experiencing exciting and rewarding readings.

Vizenor argues that narrative wisps are comprised of stories told, heard, and acted out, and that readers must understand these wisps of narrative. Vizenor challenges the dominating approach to Native American literature when he argues that "Native American Indian literatures are tribal discourse, more discourse. The oral and written narratives are language games, comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands or social science theories" (*Narrative 4*). In order to understand what Vizenor's meaning with this argument is, one must acknowledge that people stereotyped Native American literature for a long-time as they did the people. That is to say, that they looked at Native Americans as inferior to white people and the Native American literature as inferior to white literature. First, people dismissed Native American stories to just being oral. Then, people gave value to Native American stories, but only as they were related to colonialism. On the one hand, this is good

as it pointed out the troubled history in the Americas. It was also reductive because it reduced the stories to just being responses to Europeans and their rampant ignorance and greed. Vizenor argues that a postmodern approach finally gives credit to the complexity of Native American orature and literature. The essence, then, in Vizenor's argument is that by acknowledging Native American literatures as a discourse filled with language games and the comic, one will appreciate the literature as a piece of art, in contrast to a piece made as a response to post-colonialist Native American history. This argument revolutionizes how a reader should tackle Native American literature by shifting from the tragic to the comic. By making this shift, Native American literature can still depict the tragic history of Native Americans, but the postmodern approach allows the readers to enjoy the taboo humor. This shift is an empowering way for Native Americans to reclaim their cultures and forge new literature based on traditional orature.

In his discussion of Native American literatures, Vizenor has argued that by taking a postmodern approach, one will understand the role of narrative and the comic. He also makes the point that Native American literatures should not be understood as a response to colonialism. Vizenor moves on to discuss the reading of Native American literatures as relieving illusions within the dominant culture. That is to say that a text can only represent an illusion of reality, and Vizenor is trying to relieve us of our illusions on both Native American literature and culture. To explain this illusion, it is necessary to turn to the term "pleasurable misreadings" (*Narrative* 5). Pleasurable misreadings are a new way of reading Native American literatures. There are no correct nor incorrect readings of Native American literatures; there are only new and more developed readings. Native American texts should be read with pleasure, while simultaneously influence readers to forge social change. One can say that reading with pleasure is in significant opposition to what literary scholars tend to posit. Therefore, the word 'misreadings' is employed to challenge the notion that literary criticism should not be pleasurable. Pleasurable and misreadings function as an oxymoron in this sense because two counterparts merge to construct a more powerful meaning. Pleasurable misreadings implicate that the reader is doing something unlawful (according to mainstream literary critics). According to the postmodern approach, "pleasurable misreadings" are not only favorable; such readings are also essential in order to fully appreciate Native American literature as works of art. If readers fail to dismiss the tragic world view, the future readings of Native American literature will only be tragic. If readers manage to reject the metanarratives and the universal truth, they will truly see the complexity in Native American stories, and the

paradox of the future will work in favor of Native American texts. Vizenor also argues that “Postmodernism liberates imagination and widens the audiences for tribal literatures; this new criticism rouses a comic world view, narrative discourse and language games on the past” (*Narrative 6*). This argument suggests that readers and scholars must stop searching for tragic and “Indian” themes in Native American literatures. Instead, they must turn their head to the comic, narrative discourse, and language games. The reason for making this drastic shift is that readers should liberate themselves from these illusions. Readers and scholars will, through this liberation, attain the necessary skills to stop stereotyping Native Americans and their literature.

I wrote that the foundation of Vizenor’s argument is the work of other writers. To clarify Vizenor’s ideas, I turn to the references upon which Vizenor builds his arguments. Vizenor refers to Brian McHale’s argument that a postmodern approach will give the reader new insights (*Narrative 4*). In other words, if the reader rejects the metanarratives and resists the temptation to interpret Native American literature as just tragic, the reader will gain new insights into both Native American literature and peoples. Vizenor refers to Stephen Tyler when discussing what, according to a postmodernist point of view, discourse and texts are. According to Tyler, discourse functions as “the maker of the world, not its mirror...the world is what we say it is, and what we speak of is the world” (*Narrative 4*). This means that the different voices which are part of a text can define how the world is. For instance, Alexie’s characters present detailed descriptions of historical situations, but with a twist. The essence of Tyler’s argument, as put forward by Vizenor, is that Native American narratives “are the world rather than a representation” (*Narrative 4*). This argument is interesting, as it certainly challenges the notion that Native American literature represents the world, and it challenges the white culture’s pursuit of connecting every type of literature to the established truth. This means that one should read Native American literature without looking for what we think of as typical literary tools and themes. Vizenor continues to discuss Tyler’s ideas when he, about the text, points out that “the function of the text is not to depict or reveal within itself what it says. The text is ‘seen through’ by what it cannot say. It shows what it cannot say and says what it cannot show” (*Narrative 5*). This means that the function of the text is to present just enough information to the reader so that the reader can interpret the rest him- or herself. In other words, this refers to the illusions of the text which readers must overcome in order to appreciate the text thoroughly.

To summarize Vizenor's ideas, one can posit that to appreciate Native American literature, oral and written, one should (mis)read the works with pleasure. Through the postmodern discourse, readers will appreciate the storytelling, the narratives, and the comic world view in said works. The postmodern approach challenges established ideas on both Native Americans and Native American literatures. These ideas center around the notion that Native American literatures are portraying or representing the experienced reality of Native American peoples. The postmodern approach, which tears apart the illusions, rewards the readers with new pleasurable reading experiences.

Native American Storytelling

Actuating Lyotard's, Socrates', and Vizenor's ideas further, I will explore how Native American storytelling fits in with the postmodern approach to Native American literatures. First, it is helpful to remember the 'little narratives' introduced in Lyotard's work. This part of the thesis discusses these 'little narratives' by applying Bruce Ballenger, and Karl Kroeber's ideas on Native American storytelling. Ballenger's, and Kroeber's ideas push Lyotard's ideas further on the pursuit of understanding storytelling in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

In *Native American Storytelling: A Reader of Myths and Legends*, Karl Kroeber argues that Native American storytelling is essential because the purpose of the story is to ensure the future existence of the tribe. As put forward here, storytelling is so significant for the tribe that every ritual involved storytelling, and the tribe's survival depended on the ability to tell these stories. This, too, challenges the notion that literature (orature in this setting) represents reality. Kroeber's arguments might be the opposite – that reality represents the stories, meaning that by telling a particular story, the teller and listeners can change reality. Kroeber also argues that the stories were slowly changed so that the old stories could have contemporary relevance (Kroeber 2). Understanding the significance of the slow story modification of traditional Native American literature provides valuable knowledge when investigating Alexie's stories. One of the reasons why storytelling plays such an essential role in Native American cultures is that "the culture of a society that does not use writing, where most culture does not exist until someone speaks, is very largely constituted by storytelling" (Kroeber 1). The essence of Kroeber's argument is that information is passed on to members

of society through spoken words, as opposed to cultures that write their information. For instance, when a member of the tribe wants to inform other members about a particular issue, he must tell a story he has previously heard and develop it to fit that context. All tribal members could be storytellers, and the listeners had most likely told the stories they heard. When stories are remodeled and refashioned through every speaker, it gives more complexity to the story than a written piece of information that cannot be as easily changed or adapted. The retelling of the stories omits the need for suspense in the plot. The plot is modified, and the listeners pay attention to this shift because it indicates that the storyteller tries to challenge the former version of the story. Kroeber argues, "Storytelling was a recognized way of 'debating' solutions to practical personal, social, and political contemporary problems" (Kroeber 2). This argument means that a storyteller takes an already existing story and shapes it according to the current situations. When debating such issues, the storytellers give the audience opportunities to evaluate if the contemporary procedures are best suited for the tribe. When storytellers address crucial issues for the tribes' existence, they force critical thinking and enable change. Native American storytelling is illustrated in Alexie's work in that he employs various storytellers and various stories. Some of Alexie's stories look similar, suggesting that his storytellers adapt the story to the given context.

Kroeber has argued that storytelling was necessary for the future existence of the tribe and that storytellers use stories to debate practical issues. The practical is focalized here and is the leading cause for the precise modification of stories. Kroeber argues that "These stories could serve as instruments of social readjustments because their form, their artistry, had taken shape through a history of constant engagement with practical necessities" (Kroeber 3). In other words, Kroeber suggests that the stories tackle practical issues to revision the social environment and lifestyle. The stories have a practical foundation, and the various modes of telling the stories serve as different layers to the practical. The practical foundation helps the audience to understand if the story discusses personal issues or tribal issues. The practical is at the center of the story, but the audience must fully use their imagination to unpack the meaning of the story. Kroeber argues that "The story is understood by its audience through equivalent exercise of imagination" (Kroeber 4). This suggests that the audience must use their imagination to identify the issues which the storyteller addresses. Every story has a touch of imagination in it, and the storyteller and the audience must open up their imagination. It is helpful to describe imagination concerning the storytelling style. As mentioned, the suspense of the plot is not essential in Native American storytelling. Native American plots function as

tools to contrast scenes, characters, and actions. This suggests that Native American storytelling has a paratactic style. Paratactic storytelling refers to a narrative that does not reveal all ideas. This style is typical in everyday speech and is therefore highly applicable in orature. In paratactic storytelling, the relationship between actions is ambiguous compared to other forms of storytelling, where there is a clear connection between one action and another.

The paratactic requires that the listeners pay full attention to the story and that they actively try to create meaning and understanding. The retelling of stories forces the tellers and the listeners to develop new meanings for the stories. These new meanings are for the good of the tribe. According to Kroeber, “Indian tellers did not ‘express’ their subjective feelings; they exerted their talents in the service of stories worth telling because they sustained the health of their community” (Kroeber 5). This suggests that Native American storytelling includes postmodern ideas of rejecting metanarratives. When tellers can leave their subjective feelings behind, they tell stories that are solely objective and leave the subjective feelings to the listeners. Storytellers create wisps of narrative, which again break down to new wisps when the audience uses their imagination to interpret the stories.

The paratactic style of storytelling leaves it to the listener to connect one event to another. Such events, or actions, is in many cases illustrated in the sudden appearance of a character. For example, in Alexie’s work, he introduces new characters to the story, and Alexie removes these characters as rapidly as they are introduced. The function of these characters is to present “a dramatic contrast” to the characters we are more familiar with (Kroeber 5). The listener is responsible for connecting the dots from the new characters to the more familiar ones. However, the storyteller must possess the skills of storytelling for the listener to convey meaning from the story. Native American storytelling is a dance between teller and listener, and when both sides manage to maneuver the story, they are not stepping on each other’s toes. One must understand that for Native Americans, the storytelling was not only part of a ritual – it was *the* ritual. In contrast, in European cultures, the ritual was reduced to going to church on Sundays. The priest was in charge of the ritual, and he told stories from the Bible. One can notice how different voices form the stories in Native American storytelling ritual, which again illustrates the wisps of narrative.

Up to this point, I have used Kroeber’s ideas to illustrate the importance of storytelling concerning the existence of Native American cultures. I have discussed that imagination is vital from the teller’s side of the story, and that imagination is also crucial for the listener. The suddenly appearing characters and situations illustrate the subtle ways the paratactic style

introduces ideas. I will now demonstrate how these characters, and events, are connected to the Native American tradition of the Trickster.

This chapter has established that Native American literatures have sprung from orature to written stories. It has also illustrated how written literature in the contemporary Native American literature scene has adopted features from orature. This chapter will also examine the Trickster's place in written literature. Traditionally, the Trickster is usually male, who plays tricks upon members of the tribe. However, he is also the victim of tricks. Depending on the tribe, the Trickster takes the form of coyote, raven, hare, or an older man. The Trickster has a massive appetite for food and sex. In "American Indian Literature in the Nineties: The Emergence of the Middle-Class Protagonist", Alan Velie discusses the Trickster's features in modern society. According to Velie, the "Trickster is more likely to be a bum than a businessman" and that "he may be lovable, but he is rarely respectable" (*Protagonist* 264). This suggests that the Trickster, in contemporary Native American storytelling, takes the form of an outcast. In other words, the modern depiction of the Trickster has him as a sweet drunk who looks broken. This depiction suggests that the Trickster is very much present in contemporary Native American literatures.

To illustrate the connection between the Trickster and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, I turn to Paul Radin, which in *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, proposes that:

Manifestly we are here in the presence of a figure and a theme or themes which have had a special and permanent appeal and an unusual attraction for mankind from the very beginnings of civilization. In what must be regarded as its earliest and most archaic form, as found among the North American Indians, Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being. But not only he, so our myth tells us, possesses these traits. So, likewise, do the other figures of the plot connected with him: the animals, the various supernatural beings and monsters, and man. (Radin ix)

As suggested here, the Trickster is an impulsive figure who is to blame for both creation and destruction. The Trickster, unintentionally, do good and evil to humankind. According to Radin, the Trickster is a satiric figure who is connected to human beings. Radin argues that “Laughter, humour and irony permeates everything Trickster does” (Radin -x-). The essence of Radin’s argument is that the Trickster is an ambiguous figure, which captivates the audience with laughter and humor. This is interesting when examining *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* because its audience is also captivated with laughter and humor. In other words, the audience (readers) laughs at the Trickster, and they laugh at the stories and the plays that he plays upon characters. This indicates that the Trickster can take place in a story as characters but also as narrators. Later in this thesis, I will illustrate how certain notions of Alexie’s work fits with the Trickster’s features.

To illustrate the connections between the Trickster and the postmodern ideas, I will investigate the Trickster discourse. In “Trickster Discourse”, Vizenor argues that there is a tie between the Trickster and the little narratives. These little narratives make up, what Vizenor calls, hyperrealities. Hyperrealities refer to the inability to separate reality from fiction. Vizenor argues that “Serious attention to cultural hyperrealities is an invitation to trickster discourse, an imaginative liberation in comic narratives; the trickster is postmodern” (*Discourse* 281). Hyperrealities refer to the incompetence to identify reality from the illusions of reality. Vizenor’s argument implies that imaginative liberation acknowledges the postmodern idea that there is no universal truth and that reality and fiction are not the same, and the idea is to create change.

I have, in this subchapter, discussed “rules” that apply to Native American storytelling and the importance of storytelling for the different tribes. I have also discussed what a Trickster is and how the Trickster has occupied the written literary landscape. I will address these theories later in the thesis when I examine Alexie’s work.

Dialogic Criticism and Narrativity

Dialogic criticism is a critical concept when pursuing Alexie's and his characters' storytelling and the relation between every narrative wisp because it leads to a rewarding and interesting read of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. In particular, one must investigate the thoughts and words of Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's ideas on the dialogic suggest an interaction between different aspects and points of view that readers must consider when approaching a text. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Bakhtin argues that "For the prose writer, the object is a focal point for *heteroglot* voices among which his own voice must also sound, these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound'" (Bakhtin 278). In other words, Bakhtin's ideas center on the notion that the multiple voices readers encounter in a text, the novel, in particular, functions as the foundation for the author's voice. According to Bakhtin, dialogic criticism treats texts as a product of the relationship between author, text, and reader. Bakhtin's term *heteroglot*, which is the adjective form of heteroglossia, could be understood as "context over text" (Bakhtin 428). The text, as represented by words, is inferior to the context. The uttered word would have a completely different meaning in one condition than in a different condition. The concept of heteroglossia is paramount regarding the dialogue because the dialogue drives the story. According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia refers to constructing "authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, and the speech of characters" (Bakhtin 263). That is to say, heteroglossia reflects different ways to interpret the text and the world. The way different voices present their ideas creates parts of the intended meaning. Other voices' interpretations of the uttered ideas create the rest of the meaning. These other voices are of particular interest when examining *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, because Alexie employs different narrators, different voices, and different characters throughout the twenty-two stories in which make up the book. In addition, scholars refer to Bakhtin's ideas when investigating Alexie's work, thus making it crucial to understand his concepts and ideas.

To summarize Bakhtin's dialogic criticism, one can argue that the essence of his ideas is that context is superior to text and that the dialogues set in certain conditions define the meaning of the words. Native American storytelling is dialogic because most stories result from a storyteller's new perspectives on an already existing story. This argument means that,

even if storytellers tell the stories in the same spoken or written language, the context and new perspectives create a seemingly new story.

In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, French structuralist critic Gerard Genette posits three different notions on explaining narrative. He separates the narrative statement from the succession of events, and he separates the act of narrating from the first two. That is to say; he separates text, form, and writing. According to Genette, the first meaning “has narrative refer to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events” (Genette 25). In other words, this example of narrative refers to the telling of specific stories to prove a point. Genette’s second meaning of narrative “has narrative refer to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.” (Genette 25). Genette’s second analysis of narrative means that readers must understand how the events are related to each other and that readers analyze the contents of a text without paying attention to its presentation. That is, the reader must understand the text based on how he or she interprets it. The third meaning of narrative, as suggested by Genette, “has narrative refer one more to an event: not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself” (Genette 26). The essence of this third analysis is to illustrate that retelling an event is a story in itself. In other words, the narrator of somebody else’s narrative is also, in a way, part of the story. Genette’s definitions of narrative are fascinating, and he proceeds to state that his study centers on the first meaning. That is to say, the narrative discourse, which, according to Genette, “happens to be a narrative text” (Genette 26). A narrative text, in this sense, refers to the uttered words in a text to tell of an event or multiple events. Genette focuses on the text, but this thesis will apply all three definitions in the investigation of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

As illustrated, Genette’s argument is to study narrative as narrative discourse. He also proposes different elements which are part of this discourse. These elements are order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice. The next part of this subchapter explains, very briefly, these elements, as it is crucial for understanding Hayden White’s “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” and, more important, it sets the foundation for understanding narrative in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

Genette’s ideas about order refer to order as the arrangement of events. The events can either be the time of the story or the time of the narrative. The latter is most interesting, and Genette labels it as anachrony. According to Genette,

An anachrony can reach into the past or the future, either more or less far from the ‘present’ moment (that is, from the moment in the story when the narrative was interrupted to make room for the anachrony): this temporal distance we will name the anachrony’s *reach*. The anachrony itself can also cover a duration of story that is more or less long: we will call this its *extent*. (Genette 48)

Genette suggests that the narrative order makes room for the anachrony by recalling something that has happened (past) or proposes something that *will* happen (future). It is interesting how Genette puts the anachrony as an interruption of the present because one implication is that every narrative is the present.

Duration, or speed, is a concept that refers to the pace at which the narrator describes characters or scenes. Genette proposes the idea of narrative duration as pause, scene, summary, or ellipsis. Genette describes the scene concept as “equality between story time and narrative time” (Genette 94). In other words, scene would refer to instances where the narrative story happens simultaneously as the story. Genette links the manner of duration to dialogues. As put forward by Genette, the concept of summary is “a form with variable tempo” (Genette 94). In other words, the narrator has the power to speed up, or slow down, time. Genette indicates that, in the concept of summary, the narrator paces the story to reveal the most crucial parts.

The third concept presented by Genette is frequency. Frequency refers to the relationship between one or more events and the number of times these events are mentioned. The relationship between events and mentioning these events is interesting because that might reveal the event’s significance. Frequency refers to the difference between the actual happening of an event and the textual notation. Narrative could serve to take a tiny event or even a non-event and transform it into a more valuable event through repetitive mention. Genette proposes that “an event is not only capable of happening; it could also happen again, or be repeated” (Genette 113). In other words, an event can happen more than once, and the critical part is how many times the author mentions the event. Genette puts frequency into four categories; 1) an event occurs once and is mentioned once, 2) an event happens n times and is mentioned n times, 3) an event happens once and is mentioned several times, and 4) an event happens several times and is mentioned once (Genette 114-116). This concept is crucial when examining Alexie’s work because he is known for repetition, and Genette’s categories of frequency suggest that Alexie mentions events and actions a various number of times to prove a point.

Genette's fourth concept, and perhaps the most interesting one, is that of narrative mood. Mood refers to two common literary concepts, which are *mimesis* and *diegesis*. Mimesis is a term used to express how the narrative is copying or imitating something, usually the world. In comparison, diegesis is a term that describes the telling of the story. Although Genette uses common concepts, he rejects mimesis and proposes a developed version of diegesis by arguing that "the truth is that mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words. Other than that, all we have and can have is degrees of diegesis. So we must distinguish here between narrative of events and 'narrative of words'" (Genette 164). Genette's argument suggests that mimesis cannot imitate reality because it is only an imitation of words. He proposes that we have different degrees of diegesis, which, in other words, is related to the narrator's participation in the story.

The fifth concept, which Genette discusses, is voice. Voice is a concept that centers on the subject of the verb. As explained by Genette, "the subject here being not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it, and, if need be, all those people who participate, even though passively, in this narrating activity" (Genette 213). This indicates that a narrative may have multiple significant voices. These voices are essential because they allow the reader to turn to other characters than the main character for information and meaning. Genette also argues that one can illustrate voice by putting the narrator in one of two categories. That is, "one with the narrator absent in the story he tells, the other with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells" (Genette 244-245). Genette's argument is concerning the narrator's voice. The first instance, which Genette labels *heterodiegetic*, is a narrator who overlooks the story. The second instance, the *homodiegetic*, is a narrator who partakes in the story. Genette's ideas are crucial for understanding Alexie's work because his ideas are applicable when tackling Alexie's multiple narrators.

The next part of this subchapter investigates narrativity through the lens of historian Hayden White. This theory is interesting when examining Alexie's work because it tackles narrativity's connection to reality.

In "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", Hayden White discusses the similarities between displaying real events and fictitious events. The essence of White's article is that the relation between narrativity and the portrayal of real events "can only be imaginary" because there are elements from fictitious stories present in the stories that try to depict real events (White 27). The descriptions of real and fictitious have their

foundation in the imaginary in that narrative is its own system apart from the world. Narrative is only mimesis of words; therefore, the story results from an imaginary realness. The imaginary realness is fascinating because it implicates that a story can only mirror reality to some extent. The story, according to White, “could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries” (White 27). White suggests that a story, even if it tries to represent reality, results from the author’s or narrator’s ideas of reality. The author’s and narrator’s daydreams and memories contain their ideas. This indicates that narratives, whether historical or fictitious, never have the possibility to fully describe the reality they try to describe because the experienced reality depends on the author’s intentions and the readers’ interpretations.

White argues that a narrative’s representation of reality can only be the result of imagination. He also argues that narratives have a moral purpose and that the execution of the moral purpose happens in imagination. In other words, White suggests that narratives modify reality to highlight aspects of the author’s or narrator’s morality. On the topic of morality, White argues that “This suggests that narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine” (White 18). That is to say; narratives use morality to direct the readers through the author’s or narrator’s imagination of reality. The morality aspect is of particular interest when discussing Native American storytelling because the core of such storytelling is to guide the readers.

Chapter II. “I ain’t interested in what’s real”: Postmodernity, Storytelling, and Narrative

This chapter discusses Alexie’s writing from a postmodern perspective, and it investigates how Alexie influences his characters and short stories by incorporating features from traditional Native American storytelling and narrativity into his works. Specifically, I argue that while Alexie’s characters struggle to find their place in the contemporary world, they call for social change. Alexie’s storytelling reveals that he tries to connect the past with the present to change the future.

Alexie’s Postmodern Storytelling

Kroeber’s arguments and ideas introduced in the opening chapter surround Native American literatures on quite a general level. By general, I mean that he is trying to pin specific rules to a wide array of literary works. This generalization is dangerous because of the differences in each tribe’s culture. Kroeber’s main arguments about storytelling help understand storytelling in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. When looking at Alexie’s work, it is necessary to distinguish between Alexie as the storyteller and his characters as storytellers. I will first look at Alexie as a storyteller regarding storytelling as put forward by Kroeber, something fundamental and with specific functions. Kroeber’s argument is suitable for analyzing *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* because one can argue that Alexie uses these stories for a purpose, in that Alexie addresses several serious issues in which the Spokane people encounter. According to Kroeber, then, these issues are addressed in order to make a change. In the chapter titled “Somebody Kept Saying Powwow” the narrator, Junior, discusses his urge for having or not having kids. He is discussing this issue with an elderly lady named Norma. First, Junior says that he wants to have so many kids to make a tribe of his own. However, Junior reveals his actual thoughts when Norma asks him if he is joking. Junior’s reply is dark, “Don’t know if I want to raise kids in this world. It’s getting uglier by the second. And not just on the reservation” (*Fistfight* 207). Victor’s answer suggests that Alexie is addressing a much more complex issue than having babies or not. What the answer suggests is that the world is a cruel and horrible place. When Alexie’s character does not want babies, one can think that Alexie has lost his hope for a better world. On the one hand,

Kroeber's argument that storytelling has a purpose beyond the pleasure of reading supports Junior's statement. The postmodern approach has introduced us to the idea that 'pleasure' is a radical form of critique and that we can learn more from pleasure than from metanarratives. On the other hand, Kroeber argues that storytelling aims to change society. Whether Alexie aims for change or addresses the issue to express his pessimism regarding Native American reservations is yet to be determined.

Up to this point, I have used Karl Kroeber's ideas to illustrate Native American storytelling on both a general level but also specifically for understanding *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. There are other critical features of Native American storytelling to be tackled. The discussion on imagination and storytelling is fascinating because one must master the imagination skill to engage with a story from either perspective entirely.

In "Methods of Memory: On Native American Storytelling", Bruce Ballenger brings up three key concepts for understanding Native American storytelling. These concepts are "remembering," "memory," and "shared reality". According to Ballenger, the Native American way of remembering differs from the remembering which occurs in Non-Native American cultures. He argues that "the act of remembering is invested with the power to see and perhaps shape the future" (Ballenger 790). In other words, the act of remembering is not a skill used to recall what has already happened. Remembering is a skill used as a tool for changing the future. Ballenger proposes that the memories in which one remembers, or recall, will provide one with knowledge on "how *not* to live" (Ballenger 791). This argument is ambiguous because if one possesses the knowledge of how not to live, it will influence how one lives. The essence, then, of Ballenger's argument is that one's memories will lead one to a state where one's life is the opposite of what one's memories tell. This indicates that negative situations influence the memories one recalls and that the most potent memories contain information about conditions that fosters anger.

Ballenger argues that remembering is an act to see and perhaps shape the future. He points out the concept of memory in the discussion of remembering. According to Ballenger, there are two types of memory found in Native American cultures. The first is the personal memory, and the second type is the tribal memory. He argues that memory "Instead of providing the story, is seen through an already existing story, or recognized as a familiar category of experience that is widely shared" (Ballenger 792-793). This suggests, then, that people experience the past through others. The issue here is that the personal self could

perhaps vanish in the tribal memories. This connects to the metanarrative which postmodernists are against. There seemingly is a larger story than one's own. Although Ballenger's argument is not so postmodern, he also argues that the personal memory is flexible. In other words, the memory, and the story, is changeable. This is very postmodern. Ballenger proceeds to state that "the implications of this – that tribal memory and personal memory merge – are profound. Perhaps that's why nobody wants to listen to the stories of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" (Ballenger 793). Ballenger's implication on the stories of Thomas Builds-the-Fire is that the other characters in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* neglect his stories because they resist letting his stories control their personal experiences and their personal memory. In other words, Ballenger argues that there potentially is a loss of significant insights if the tribal and personal memories remain separated.. When shaping one's life according to other people's memory, one might get lost in the process. Ballenger suggests that Victor and Junior, two of the main characters in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, put up resistance towards the tribal memory by consistently refusing to listen to Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Furthermore, Ballenger assumes that Victor and Junior are "unable to find the symmetry between personal past, history, and legend" (Ballenger 793). This means that they, too, struggle with experiencing that connection between past and future.

Ballenger's argument on tribal memory and personal memory is interesting when looking at Victor and Junior's resistance toward it. It is helpful to examine why some storytellers embrace this merging. Instead of creating an "I" and "the other", Ballenger argues that "remembering for many native storytellers is an effort to see how what they know connects them to others, not how it sets them apart" (Ballenger 796). In other words, the tribal memory will most likely bring the tribe closer together and shape a shared future. One can argue that Victor and Junior, being modern-day natives, act rebellious toward this collectiveness because they do not know how and where they belong. Victor and Junior walk the tightrope of the true self and the communal self (Ballenger 796). On the one hand, they are afraid of being alone. On the other hand, they are afraid of giving up their whole persona to the community. Many native storytellers do not fear or do not see this difference. Instead, they "try to find themselves in their people, to discover this 'shared reality'" (Ballenger 796). Shared reality means that members of the tribe must act according to the tribal memory. If Alexie's characters refuse to accept the tribal memory, then the result is exclusion from the tribe. Ballenger states, "Only the discovery of 'shared reality' offers redemption" (Ballenger 796). This means that tribal members must devote themselves to the tribe to secure one's

place in the tribe. This is probably hard for Ballenger on a personal level, and it is hard for Alexie's characters as well. One might suggest that, if one agrees with Ballenger's arguments, Alexie portrays his feelings about tribal memory through his characters.

Ballenger's arguments that Alexie's characters put up resistance toward tribal narrative and that Victor and Junior are unable to find the symmetry between personal past, history, and legend, are illustrated in the opening scene of "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona". In this scene, Victor is observing Thomas Builds-the-Fire, who talks to himself. The narrator expresses his thoughts on Thomas by saying, "Thomas was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to" (*Fistfight* 61). This line suggests, according to Ballenger, other character's resistance toward the tribal narrative. I agree with Ballenger's argument that the characters reject the tribal narrative when nobody listens to him, up to a point. On the one hand, this is a way for Alexie to express his ideas as a postmodern writer. The reason is that Thomas represents the tribe's universal truth, and the other character's thoughts about Thomas are ways of rejecting his truths. One can interpret this scene from a different angle and still notice the postmodern ideas. The fact that Thomas speaks to himself is also an example of a postmodern idea where he creates his narrative, and has complete ownership of his thoughts and ideas. Thomas continues to tell stories even if he knows that nobody listens to them. This suggests that Thomas actually tells stories for his own good, rather than for the good of the tribe. I can therefore not accept Ballenger's argument that the other characters refuse to listen to Thomas because they reject the tribal narrative. In fact, they refuse to listen to Thomas because they cannot create their personal narrative. The narrator of this story also expresses an exciting thought about the relationship between Victor, Thomas, and narrative, by saying "Ever since Victor could remember, it was Thomas who always had something to say" (*Fistfight* 61). This indicates that Thomas' storytelling has oppressed Victor since they were kids. After all, Thomas is, perhaps, to blame for Victor's lack of personal narrative. I argue that Thomas is one of the most critical characters in the whole collection. I will discuss this character further in other parts of the thesis.

Ballenger's argument on shared reality is interesting when examining this story. After Thomas has helped Victor getting to, and back from, Phoenix, the narrator expresses Victor's thoughts about shared reality "Victor was ashamed of himself. Whatever happened to tribal ties, the sense of community? The only real thing he shared with anybody was a bottle and broken dreams. He owed Thomas something, anything" (*Fistfight* 74). The fact that Victor is ashamed exemplifies the struggle to find the symmetry between personal and tribal self.

Victor is ashamed of how he treats a fellow Spokane, here represented by Thomas. Second, Victor wonders what happened to the tribal ties. Victor's thoughts suggest that he is aware of how things were in the past. Victor's thoughts support Ballenger's argument on the connection between the past and the present, to some extent. However, Victor can see the connection, he does not have a solution on how to make proper use of that connection. In other words, Victor is fully capable of connecting the past and the present, however, he is not capable of using the connection. The result of Victor's struggle is shame, and the feeling that he owes the tribe something. Victor is stuck in a state of confusion and despair, which is evident in his and his tribe's destructiveness. Although Victor is struggling with using the connection between the past and the present, he has found something that he shares with the tribe. This is paramount for Victor because, as Ballenger has argued, this is the only way for him to be redeemed.

To summarize storytelling's role in this story, I propose that Victor's search for tribal ties has left him clinging to the few things he shares with the community, and that Thomas is Victor's savior and Satan. In other words, Thomas is to blame for Victor's lack of his own stories, but he is also responsible for opening Victor's eyes regarding tribal ties and community.

In "Ceremonial Tradition as Form and Theme in Sherman Alexie's 'The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven': A Performance-Based Approach to Native American Literature", Kathleen L. Carroll discusses Alexie's tools for making white readers understand Native American literature. She argues that Alexie uses Native American stereotypes to speak directly to the white readers to get their full attention. White readers will most likely be familiar with the stereotypes, and when Alexie employs such stereotypes, the readers feel like they understand the story to some extent. She argues that Alexie's narrators narrate the story according to a white reader's point of view. That is, his narrators tell such stories to make the stories familiar for the white reader. The result of such storytelling is, according to Carroll, that "their assumption of these personae exteriorizes the readers' internalized notions, forcing them to confront their social attitudes" (Carroll 74). By exteriorizing internalized notions, Carroll means that the narrator makes the reader's implicit attitudes explicit. White readers do not admit that they are slightly racist, but when confronted with the stereotypes in Alexie's work, these internal racist beliefs reach the surface. In other words, Carroll suggests that Alexie is slowly moralizing the readers by making them confront their prejudiced thoughts. These prejudiced thoughts are justified when Alexie and his characters make fun of other

Native Americans. When Alexie subverts the stereotypes, the readers will get the feeling of being racist and change their attitudes. When Alexie moralizes his readers, he engages them “in the process of unlearning traditional stereotypes and re-imagining alternative forms of consciousness” (Carroll 75). There are different forms of consciousness, and the essence of Carroll’s argument is that readers reinvent their knowledge. Carroll’s idea is that Alexie uses stereotypes to challenge the same stereotypes, and while doing so, a door opens to new insights of Native Americans.

Carroll argues that Alexie plays with the past, the present, and the future. She argues that Alexie’s characters find themselves in a realm where they are trapped in the modern-day stereotypes. She argues that “by drawing the past into the present, Alexie brings the subordinate and the dominant cultures into conversation with each other” (Carroll 75). Most of the stereotypes which are embodied in the present, have their origin in the past. This means that the dominant culture has set the rule for present-day stereotypes. The purpose of this conversation is to unlearn the traditional stereotypes and to create a Native American identity which “ensures communal survival” (Carroll 75). In other words, by mixing the past with the present, Alexie manages to create a renewed Native American identity for Native Americans, and a new way for white people to see Native Americans. Moreover, Carroll suggests that Alexie’s narrators are responsible for mixing the past and the present through storytelling. Carroll proposes that storytelling is a “catalyst that sparks the quest for tribal identity” (Carroll 78). Tribal identity is a widely discussed term, and it refers to how each member of the tribe fits in the community. When Carroll argues that storytelling is the catalyst that sparks the quest for tribal identity, she implies that storytelling reminds the tribe that the past connects to the present. This quest is essential for Alexie’s characters and Native Americans in general because it helps remodel how they think of themselves. Carroll argues that the way Native Americans see themselves “is what traps them in the no man’s land of the present” (Carroll 80). The no man’s land refers to the space between the trenches of two enemies. This idea is ambiguous because there is a reversal in this argument in that Alexie’s characters have left their trenches and are moving toward the enemy trenches. The horrors of the past occupy the present, and Alexie’s characters try to escape the no man’s land by demolishing the trenches of the future. This idea is compelling because it suggests that Native Americans have to remodel their perspectives to escape this no man’s land, which serves as a fitting metaphor for Alexie’s literary war.

To summarize Carroll's ideas, she argues that Alexie's storytelling closes the gap between the past and the present, and it closes the gap between Native Americans and White Americans. This means that, by confronting stereotypes, Alexie manages to change how Native Americans see themselves and change the white people's perspective.

Carroll's ideas are evident in the story which bears Thomas' name. In "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire", the tenth story in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Thomas is very much connecting the past, present, and future. As the title suggests, Thomas Builds-the-Fire is on trial. Thomas refuses to reveal what he is accused of, but it is safe to assume that he is accused of telling stories. When reaching the moment of testimony, Thomas refuses to have anyone but himself witnessing. Thomas' opening line of the testimony reveals that he does what Carroll refers to as drawing the past into the present. Thomas' opening line is "It all started on September 8, 1858" (*Fistfight* 96). Thomas is referencing a historical scene from the past because this was the date when U.S. Army Colonel George Wright led a massacre of 800 Native American horses. Thomas tells the story from the horses' perspective, and he slightly changes the past by stating that he was the only horse that survived. It is interesting how, here, Alexie makes his character retell a terrible story from an animal point of view. There are numerous other situations where Native Americans got slaughtered, but Alexie portrays a story where horses are the primary victims. This might suggest that Alexie tries to underline the cruelty of the colonialists, however, from a different perspective. Portraying cruelty in a rather humorous manner makes the situation more accessible to the reader. That is to say, by adding a humorous layer to something stirring, Alexie manages to get the reader's attention without scaring him off.

While the depiction of the past is straightforward, the present and the future are presented subtly. First, the depicted present in this story is, at first glance, the time of the trial. However, the text does not reveal the date of the trial. This is peculiar because the text references a specific date when depicting the past. The readers get the information that this is a story situated in the 20th century. The information about the present which is presented to the reader is that it happened in the 20th century. The future is not mentioned either, which is interesting because it might imply a lack of hope for the future.

Furthermore, Thomas tells a different story dating back a few months before the horse-slaughtering. In the second story, Thomas imposes himself as a Native American chieftain named Qualchan. Thomas' Qualchan story reveals that he killed two U.S. Army soldiers in 1858. A newspaper article from the present reveals that "Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the self-

proclaimed visionary of the Spokane Tribe, was sentenced today to two concurrent life terms in the Walla Walla State Penitentiary” (*Fistfight* 102). This means that Thomas is punished today for something that happened around a hundred years ago. Although I understand Carroll’s argument that Alexie brings the past to the present to bring together the dominant culture and the subordinate culture, I argue that this story shows Alexie’s anger towards the dominant culture. The Native American in this story is punished for something that happened hundred years ago, however, the dominant culture is not accountable for the massacres of members of the subordinate culture. Perhaps that is why Alexie illustrates the cruelty towards Native Americans as the slaughtering of horses. This illustrates that contemporary Native Americans struggle with the past and that they, as Carroll argued, are trapped in the no man’s land of the present.

One can argue that Alexie, in “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire”, illustrates his anger towards the dominant culture. However, this is also a story that demonstrates the importance and the dangers of storytelling. In the story’s opening dialogue, Thomas’ behavior is described as dangerous because he has “A storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth” (*Fistfight* 93). First, this quote is compelling in terms of characterizing storytelling as a fetish. One can interpret fetish as something one needs to fulfill sexual satisfaction. Fetish might also refer to objects with magical powers, or something which is highly respected. I propose the idea that this quote suggests that Alexie sees storytelling as something magical. Alexie labels Thomas’ extreme need to tell the truth as dangerous. This suggests that the truth only can create distance between the dominant culture and the subordinate culture. The shared reality, which Ballenger argues to be the goal of storytelling, is impossible to achieve when the truth is told. This argument suggests that the truth can never mean the same for different people, and what one man sees as the truth might be the complete opposite for another man. This is interesting because it suggests that Alexie does not try to show the truth in his stories, but he tries to illustrate how storytelling can bring people together no matter their differences.

Up to this point, this chapter has discussed Native American storytelling and its effect on *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. As discussed in chapter one, the Trickster is a significant figure in Native American storytelling. It is needed to explore how Alexie employs the Trickster.

In “Imagination, Conversation, and Trickster Discourse: Negotiating an Approach to Native American Literary Culture”, Paul L. Tidwell walks through the field of literature to

identify signs of “*indirect connections to life*” (Tidwell, 623). These signs, according to Tidwell, might teach readers about other cultures. Tidwell emphasizes that he does not try to step “outside” his own culture, but he tries to understand other cultures (Tidwell 623-624). In order to fully appreciate other cultures, one must participate in the dialogical conversation where the focal point is to exchange ideas for mutual good. Moreover, Tidwell brings the Trickster to the discussion by arguing:

This trickster, as comic holotrope, serves as a *model* of Native literary culture in which Coyote laughs both at and from within [Wolfgang] Iser’s ideas concerning the imagination, fiction, and the world. That this important irony (trickster simulacra) is at work in Native American fictions should not surprise us, but the complex new meanings these fictions evoke as their narratives collapse, relapse, and unfold suggests how important stories are to individual survival and cultural renewal. (Tidwell 627)

In other words, the Trickster plays a crucial role in the dialogical conversation because he helps individual survival, cultural renewal, and he helps readers value different cultures. Tidwell’s argument is intriguing because it connects irony and complex new meanings. This is intriguing because the Trickster functions as a sign for, a symbol of, and an interpretation of the culture, which gives the Trickster enormous power when acting as an agent of change. The main principle of Tidwell’s argument is that the Trickster is at work to shake the narrative, the reader, and reality. When the Trickster is at work, he functions as an undercover agent guiding the readers through the literary field. The Trickster does not expect readers to step outside their culture, but he expects readers to put in an effort into understanding his field.

Tidwell argues that the Trickster plays an imperative role in Native American literature. Moreover, in my examination of the Trickster’s role in Alexie’s work it is interesting to identify Tidwell’s ideas on Trickster-elements in stories, and their effects on the readers. According to Tidwell, “the Trickster cavorts, confusing a character here, reorder a plot there, keeping the mixture unsettled and potent” (Tidwell 628). This suggests that the Trickster is in charge of the narrative because he can re-organize the whole narrative and keep the reader alert. Tidwell’s depiction of the Trickster is beneficial when exploring Alexie’s literary field.

Furthermore, when the Trickster guides the reader through the literary field, he also guides the reader towards Vizenor’s pleasurable misreadings. Tidwell proposes that “the

effects of these readings is that the interpreter is propelled, not beyond culture but directly into the ‘whole complex’ dialogic that catalyzes reciprocity in the first place” (Tidwell 628). In other words, Tidwell suggests that the Trickster drags the readers into the exchange of ideas for mutual good. It is this exchange of ideas that reveal the Trickster’s true purpose.

I agree with Tidwell’s arguments on the Trickster’s function and the connection between the Trickster and the readers. However, I will push his ideas further by connecting them to the works of Velie, Radin, Vizenor, and explore how the Trickster figure comes to life in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. I will investigate different stories and their characters when exploring the Trickster figure.

First, this thesis has revealed that, traditionally, the Trickster imposes as different animals or as an older man. However, Alexie’s work reveals that in contemporary Native American literature, the Trickster comes to life through multiple characters, either old or young, male or female. The reason for proposing such an argument is the Trickster’s primary function, which is to play tricks to foster change. It is essential to note that the tricks be implicit or explicit and that the goal is to foster change in the characters, and perhaps most important, foster change in the readers. For instance, the Trickster makes his appearance in “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire”. The situation in which the Trickster appears is a scene where a character named Esther leaves her husband. Her husband is tribal chairman David WalksAlong, a former police chief. Esther “packed her bags the day after she listened to Thomas speak; Thomas was arrested the day after Esther left” (*Fistfight* 94). One can examine this situation from two different angles. On the one hand, one can notice how Thomas’ actions impact Esther and David WalksAlong. This impact implies that Thomas serves as a Trickster, and the tricks he plays on Esther make her leave her husband. Thomas’ tricks backfire on him, which results in two concurrent life sentences in prison. Thomas’ actions employ Trickster features such as playing tricks on himself and others. He also confuses the other characters when he starts speaking again. The overall result of Thomas’ actions is that he ends up in jail. As mentioned, one might look at this scene from a different perspective. That is, looking at Esther as the Trickster. If Esther is the Trickster, how are the features employed? Esther is not specifically playing tricks on her husband, but she reorders the plot by leaving him. As a result, Thomas goes to trial and tells a story that evokes feelings such as guilt or disgust in the audience. However, the second illustration of the Trickster is not as strong as the first one. I propose that Thomas functions as the most significant Trickster of the two.

Narrative and Refashioned Bonds

I have established that storytelling is important when looking at traditional Native American literature and that Alexie also depends on storytelling in his work. It is crucial to examine how the stories are told, who the tellers are, and why the stories are told as they are. The following subchapter will discuss narrative and narrativity in the works of Alexie. The meaning of narrative is “story”. Narrative, then, refers to the stories told, and the characters and situations that make up a text. It is fascinating to investigate narrative concerning Alexie’s work because he employs different voices which tell stories simultaneously. This subchapter will therefore investigate Alexie’s narration and his narrators. That is, locating the tellers of the stories.

In “Escape Stories: Narratives and Native Americans in Sherman Alexie’s ‘The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven’”, Andrew Dix argues that narrative, in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in heaven* is about Native Americans’ perennial losing to white culture. According to Dix, narrative “is understood as possibly another means of inscribing the defeat of Native Americans” (Dix 162). Dix’s argument suggests is that the different narrators and narratives in Alexie’s work function to display the Native American loss. The kind of loss discussed here concerns the short story “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire”, where Thomas takes on several roles when telling counterfactual stories. Thomas’ role as a storyteller is a postmodern technique because the boundary between fact and fiction is blurred as the world is textual. History, memory, and experience are bound up in the text, so we cannot pull them apart. The essence of Dix’s argument is that the counterfactual stories do not help shape the future, but the stories are seemingly reminders of the cruelty which the Spokane tribe had to deal with. Dix’s argument that Alexie’s narrative functions as an agent for the suffering brought upon Native Americans by White America’s treatment of the Native peoples is challenged by Dix himself when saying that Native Americans in Alexie’s work try to “escape *from* stories” (Dix 162). This quote is a reference to indigenous peoples’ gaining sovereignty from White America. In other words, this quote suggests that Alexie’s Native Americans do not try to escape into counterfactual stories. In reality, they try to escape from the stories, and they try to escape from reality, and they use the stories as instruments for escaping.

Dix argues that narrative in Alexie’s work functions as an agent for the cruel treatment of Native Americans and that they try to escape from stories and reality. Dix also makes an argument about the connection between geography and narrative in Alexie’s work. Dix argues

that “the geography of Alexie’s fictions tends now to be desacralized, drained of any predetermined narrative significance. His characters also struggle to imagine themselves acting out significant stories across time” (Dix 156). Dix argues here, is that the geography and characters in Alexie’s fictions do not value their surroundings as the people did before. When the geography is desacralized, it illustrates that the land has lost its value as something sacred. Alexie’s depiction of the land, which traditionally is sacred, has it now reduced to a wasteland, or a no man’s land. Alexie’s rejection of the sacred land causes his characters to reject the Native American traditions that storytelling and narrative are the highest levels of social interactions. Alexie’s characters play out disenchanting behavior, in that they reject the traditions which were previously respected. Dix argues that Alexie’s multiple narrators do not bring any epiphany to the tribe. Instead, his narrators remind the tribe of the horrid past, present, and future. Dix’s argument on Alexie’s geography and characters, and how the narration works, complicates the core idea of the postmodern approach to Alexie’s work.

Although Dix’s argument supposedly rejects the postmodern discourse, he indeed finds his way back to the postmodern. Dix argues that the story titled “A Drug Called Tradition” exemplifies how Lyotard presents narrativity in a postmodern society. In this story, the three characters Victor, Junior, and Thomas experience a degree of connectedness. This story illustrates, according to Dix, “Lyotard’s perception that any collectivity which organizes itself by narrative ‘finds the raw material for its social bond not only in the meaning of the narratives it recounts, but also in the act of reciting them’” (Dix 166). Lyotard’s argument suggests that members of a society must retell and rehearse the stories. This connects to the idea that Native American storytelling centers on the modification of stories. Here, Dix makes clear that postmodern narrativity is much in place in Alexie’s work. We have noticed that Dix, on the one hand, argues that Alexie’s narrators reject the Native American tradition of storytelling and narrative. On the other hand, Dix argues that Alexie is very much embracing the Native American tradition in regard to remodeling the social bonds of the Spokane tribe. This suggests that Alexie is aware of the traditions and that he pays profound respects to it.

To summarize Dix’s article, one can argue that Dix’s sees Alexie’s narrative as highly complex. Dix argues that the narratives used by Alexie create a refashioned social bond within the Spokane tribe, and that Alexie has refashioned the Native American storytelling.

Dialogic and Social Spaces

The following subchapter will push Dix's argument further by illustrating how Alexie's storytelling not only refashions the social bonds within the Spokane tribe but refashions how the dialogue between Spokane members and the outside world plays out.

Jerome Denuccio applies Bakhtin's ideas in his article "Slow Dancing with Skeletons: Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*". Here, he explores Alexie's collection of short stories through dialogic criticism. In addition, Denuccio discusses 'survival' as a recurring theme in the collection. As the title of Denuccio's article suggests, he centers his discussion on the skeletons found in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The narrator in "A Drug Called Tradition" expresses that "Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you" (*Fistfight* 21). This, according to Denuccio, is a dialogic feature in Alexie's work because "the self is positioned in a social space replete with memories, dreams, and voices that invite attention and response, that must be accommodated and negotiated if the self as an individual and tribal subject is to emerge" (Denuccio 87). Denuccio's argument suggests that the character's past voice and future voice figure into the dialogic of the text. This means that the context the characters are in is a realm under the impact of social, historical, and individual factors. The essence of this argument is that Alexie's characters must reconcile with both past, present, and future to rise from an inferior condition. Denuccio argues that the characters in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* "wage daily battles against humiliations and perennial hurts" (86). In other words, these daily battles are vast parts of the social dialogue Denuccio mentions. Acknowledging the relationship between the past, present, and future is paramount to understand Alexie's characters.

Denuccio argues that the collection of short stories is used to encourage, or promote, survival. Even though it may seem like the characters struggle to move on, Denuccio argues that "Alexie's storytelling links 'now' with 'then, Indian lives with 'five hundred years of convenient lies' (150), repeatedly, for though 'it hurt[s] your eyes and head,' it speaks survival" (Denuccio 96). The dialogic of the story is shaped by the character's voices from the past and the future. In fact, each character is more than one narrator. This complicates the analysis of the characters because their various voices convey different meanings. For instance, there is the Thomas of the past who used to be a friend to Victor, there is the Thomas in the present who fights for the friendship of the past, and there is Thomas of the

future who is alone. When all these voices are added, one understands that the essence of Denuccio's argument is that the voices shape the stories and the characters. It is this intertwining of voices that ensures the characters' survival.

Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has revealed how Alexie's dialogic storytelling displays postmodern ideas concerning social change. Alexie's ideas may not result in instantaneous social changes, but I argue that the white readers, in particular, have their perceptions of Native American people and literature changed. Dix's arguments have revealed that Alexie tries to remodel social bonds as a step toward social change. Denuccio's argument that Alexie positions his characters in a social realm influenced by multiple voices connects to Bakhtin's dialogic criticism. This chapter has investigated how storytelling and dialogic ensure the characters' survival.

Chapter III. “Land of the free, home of the brave”: Native American Stereotypes, Pop Culture, and Satire

Alexie incorporates Native American stereotypes and popular culture into his writing to diminish the “Vanishing Indian” and the “Drunken Indian” stereotypes. Many critics express their concerns about authors who employ stereotypes because non-Native readers supposedly are incapable of disregarding stereotypes if a Native writer presents them. Literary scholars criticize Alexie for glorifying stereotypes and conforming to white popular culture's appropriation of Native Americans. I will, in this chapter, explore how Alexie employs both stereotypes and popular culture in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, first to reveal that white readers are prejudice, and second, to change their attitudes toward Native Americans. In order to fully appreciate Alexie's work, I must investigate these issues from both sides of the table. I must explore the works of critics that support Alexie's use of stereotypes and the critics who do not support it. In order to deal with the topics mentioned above, I will examine the works of Louis Owens, Stephanie Gordon, Stephen F. Evans, and James Cox. As humor plays a significant role in Alexie's work, I will investigate Ron McFarland's ideas on Alexie as a satirist. Specifically, I will explore how Alexie's humor is a tool to relieve white readers of their misconceptions and prejudice.

The Drunken and the Vanishing Indian

In *Mixedblood Messages*, Louis Owens argues that Alexie's depiction of the Spokane reservation is nothing more than a “literary tool” for pleasing publishers and mainstream readers. Owens fears that Alexie's depictions of a dysfunctional reservation filled with deprived, alcoholic, violent, and self-destructing characters harm Native Americans through non-Native readers' ignorance. Owens argues that “such portraits not only present just one side of Indian existence, but more unfortunately conform readily to Euromerican readers' expectations that American Indians are all doomed by firewater; white readers find their stereotypes comfortably reinforced by sensationalized alcoholism and cultural impotence” (Owens 72). The essence, then, of Owens' argument is that Alexie's portraits of reservation life and the Native Americans who inhabit said reservations conform to white readers' expectations that all Native Americans are drunk and that they eventually will self-destruct.

Owens also posits that Alexie's portraits of reality are somewhat justified because, according to Owens, "to ignore the painful would be to falsify the picture" (Owens 72). In other words, Owens suggests that Alexie must portray the reality in his works, but he should at the same time try to incorporate more elements of traditional Native American culture. Owens suggests that Alexie should create literary work similar to famous Native American authors such as Gerald Vizenor and Leslie Marmon Silko, whose works are, according to Owens, not conforming to white readers' expectations.

Owens has argued that Alexie's portraits of reservation life are necessary to illustrate the horrors of reservation life. He also argues that Alexie's sensationalized alcoholism and self-destructing characters are too much. His tools function, to some extent, to help white readers get through the works without losing sleep. Owens makes an argument that Alexie is walking the tightrope between, on the one side, a "lesson in morality", on the other side, he manages to give "the commercial market and readers what they want and expect in the form of stereotypes" (Owens 76). This argument is interesting because Owens implies that Alexie tries to teach the non-Native readers something. That something is, perhaps, that white culture is to blame for the suffering of Native Americans. However, Owens suggests that Alexie fails to do both. Owens argues that by encasing morality in humor, Alexie presents to white readers an image of Native Americans as "nonthreatening" (Owens 76). This image, again, makes it comfortable for non-Native readers to enjoy Alexie's work. Owens' argument that Alexie's writing is comfortable to white readers suggests that the readers acknowledge the terrible conditions of the reservation; however, as long as *they* (Native Americans) do not disturb *us* (White Americans), it is satisfactory.

Owens argues that Alexie reinforces the "Drunken Indian" stereotype in his works. He also adds the "Vanishing Indian" stereotype to the discussion. The "Vanishing Indian" is a stereotype that Native Americans vanish when confronted by white culture and white peoples. Alexie's self-destructing characters reveal to the reader that Native Americans are perfectly capable of vanishing without the "help" of white civilization. Confronting Alexie's work, Owen posits that "Such fiction tells the reader that the Indian is a helpless, romantic victim still in the process of vanishing just as he is supposed to do" (Owens 77). Again, the essence of Owens' argument is that Alexie conforms to the white readers' expectations. For Owens, helpless and romantic refer to Native Americans as a gentle reminder of the untouched landscape in which the Americas used to be. In the discussion of "community" in Alexie's work, Owens posits that the only present community is "the community of imploding and

vanishing Indians” (Owens 78). In other words, Alexie’s work fails to portray the reservation as a diverse community inhabited by different individuals. Instead, Alexie’s universe depicts Native Americans who will eventually disappear. The disappearance of Native Americans is no longer in the hands of white culture. As put forward by Owens, “White people no longer have to shoot or hang the Native, who is quite willing to do the job him- or herself” (Owens 82). Alexie’s characters are, according to Owens, perfectly capable of removing themselves from the earth by committing suicide or slowly self-destructing at the hands of poverty, alcohol, and terrible living conditions.

One can argue that the essence of Owens’ ideas is that Alexie and other Native American authors must be careful when portraying stereotypes. However, Owens argues that it is unlikely for Alexie to be successful without conforming to white people’s expectations. Owens acknowledges that Alexie tries to give a lesson in morality to his readers; however, he argues that it is difficult to reach the audience with a particular morality when the goal is to be published and sell copies.

In the discussion of stereotypes in Alexie’s work, it is necessary to recall the Trickster. In “Indians in Indian Fiction: The Shadow of the Trickster”, Alan R. Velie discusses how Native American writers misuse stereotypes. He argues that many Native American writers portray their characters poorly. Velie argues that “One may be surprised at the unflattering portrait of Indians at the hand of Indians, particularly since Indians have suffered from stereotyped depiction at the hands of whites for centuries” (Velie 315). The core of his argument is that he is surprised that Native American writers conform to the stereotypes created by white culture. Velie criticizes the depiction of characters as drunks and losers. However, Velie does not put all the blame on the writers. He discusses visions white readers might have on Native Americans. Velie argues that this “partial vision is caused by the way Anglos read about Indians; that is, what preconceptions we bring to what we read, which causes us to see things differently from what the authors intend, and to miss important aspects of the characters and their actions” (Velie 319). The essence of this argument is that white readers are filled with prejudice when reading Native American literature, resulting in the loss of fundamental aspects of the characters.

One can extend Owen’s and Velie’s ideas by exploring Stephen F. Evans’ suggestions on how readers should tackle stereotypes when reading Alexie’s work. In “‘Open Containers’: Sherman Alexie’s Drunken Indians”, Evans argues that Alexie successfully employs Native American stereotypes and character types in his work. Evans thoroughly sets up his article by

discussing the “Drunken Indian” stereotype. Through C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, Evans explores how Alexie embodies satire and irony in his fiction. In order to fully acknowledge Evans’ arguments on Alexie’s use of stereotypes and character types, it is necessary to present the definitions that he employs when discussing stereotypes and satire. When trying to grasp the stereotype that all Native Americans are drunk, Evans turns to Fergus Bordewich, who posits that the modern perception of Native American puts them “as fundamentally pathetic and helpless figures, defeated by a white man’s world with which they cannot be expected to cope” (Evans 51). In other words, the ‘drunken Indian’ is a stereotype that suggests that pathetic Native Americans turn to alcohol in order to stay alive in the white man’s world. Alexie’s characters struggle to stay alive, and Evans’ argument functions as a foundation for further discussions of Alexie’s characters. A set definition of the ‘drunk Indian’ stereotype is not sufficient to understand Alexie’s use of that stereotype. A recurring topic, or tool, in Evans’ article, is satire. According to Evans, one must understand satire through the lens of C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, which states that *satire* is:

A literary manner that blends a critical attitude with humor and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity. True satirists are conscious of the frailty of human institutions and attempt through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling”. (Evans 51)

In other words, a true satirist is aware of the moral weakness which occurs in human institutions, and by acknowledging this notion, the satirist functions as a spokesperson for change. This definition is fitting when discussing *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* because Alexie uses humor to inspire remodeling and provoke his readers into a position to look for ways to improve themselves and society.

Alexie has been criticized by Native American literature scholars and writers, such as Louis Owens and Gloria Bird, for portraying a reservation environment that is too harsh and that his use of stereotypes does more harm than good. However, Evans argues that

Much of Alexie’s work to date comprises a modern survival document from which his readers gain strength by actively participating in the recognition of reality as viewed through Alexie’s satiric lens or from the reflections of his satiric mirror. As with all literature generally, and literature that reflects oral tradition techniques in particular, the author (speaker)—audience (listener / reader) dynamic implies and requires mutual participation for the making of meaning. (Evans 52)

First, this quote suggests that Alexie's work is a guide for survival, in which the readers can locate information on how to survive. The essence of Evans' argument is that the reader must partake in the story to adequately recognizing the reality in which Alexie reveals. When looking through Alexie's satiric lens, readers will acknowledge the, according to some scholars, harsh environment portrayed. Evans points out the author-speaker dynamic, and this dynamic relation refers to the recurrence of characters, situations, and themes, which Evans argues are part of an ongoing development (Evans 48). What may seem like repetitiveness is part of Alexie's oral tradition skills, which Alexie expresses through his representation of reality and the intertwining of the traditional with the modern.

Evans argues that one should experience Alexie's realities through his satiric lens. In the discussion on stereotypes, Evans argues that "Indian fiction actually has relied upon stereotypes and formulaic constructions for the achievement of meaning" (Evans 50). To put it differently, Evans argues that by employing stereotypes and following a set of formal literary rules, Native American writers generate more meaning compared to a sugarcoated reality or by creating fluctuating stories. Evans' argument is compelling because Alexie, too, relies upon stereotypes and formulaic constructions in his work. In the investigation of Alexie's work, Evans demonstrates how Alexie relies upon stereotypes when he writes that Alexie's work is "saturated with images and characters that reveal and embody the devastating, debilitating, and destructive effects of alcohol on Indian culture" (Evans 52). In other words, Evans argues that Alexie embeds his fiction in reality in the way he fills his characters and images with destructiveness. Furthermore, Evans argues that "Alexie's fictional realism" indeed contains hard facts derived from studies in the field of sociology (Evans 52). Alexie portrays *his* experiences from the reservation, and he illustrates "real Indian existence and experience" (Evans 52). Evans points out that Alexie tackles the harsh environment by using stereotypes and that his work depends on a proper illustration of how terrifying the reservation life is.

Evans argues that Alexie very much portrays reality through his stereotypes. Evans admits that negative stereotyping might cause damage; however, he argues that there are "artistic and moral strengths" in Alexie's drunken Indians that downsize the potential damage (Evans 54). If looking at the definition of satire, the artistic and moral strengths are tools to remodel the social institutions. The artistic strengths refer to Alexie's writing, and the moral strengths refer to his overarching goal, which is to promote change. Evans takes it even further by stating that "in the collaborative making of meaning between Alexie and his

readers, images of the drunken Indian functions as ‘open containers’ to house or decant realistic valence of meaning for modern reservation life and people” (Evans 54). The essence of Evans’ argument is that by employing the drunken Indian stereotype, and by including elements from oral tradition, Alexie manages to open up a world to which non-native readers usually are not granted access. Alexie’s paratactic writing style scarcely opens the world for the readers, and his humor helps readers fully open the world. On the topic of this open world, Evans argues that Alexie uses stereotypes explicitly to depict how white civilization has treated Native Americans. Evans argues that “Alexie’s purportedly stereotypical drunken Indians achieve and convey for readers vital resonances of realism when he uses them to express the recursive, historical patterns of defeat and exploitation of Indian peoples by white civilization (Evans 54). Here, Evans implies that the defeat and exploitation of the past are recurring. This suggests that the horrors of the past are alive and present in the contemporary Native American world. Evans suggests that Alexie’s stereotypes have the purpose of portraying the ‘real’ world in his fiction; however, he does not try to illustrate that Alexie’s realism is a tool for blaming the white culture. As put forward by Evans, Alexie’s goal is to show his audience that “his community *must* and *can* survive cultural extinction” (Evans 55). There seem to be some closure, or a sense of harmony, toward the end of Alexie’s stories. This refers to Evans’ argument about survival. Survival is one of the recurring themes in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and one can understand why Evans puts it like this. Evans’ argument deals with survival on a larger scale than the individuals one meets in Alexie’s universe. The survival expressed by Evans is a common survival for all Native Americans. He argues that the goal is to survive “cultural extinction”, which is interesting because it implies that the Native American culture is in jeopardy. One way to cope with this problem is, according to Evans, to portray stereotypes and character types with artistic and moral strengths.

Evans has argued that Alexie’s character types and stereotypes are means for Native American survival. He discusses the complicated issue that alcoholism might be a genetic disease among Native Americans. When discussing this issue, Evans argues that alcohol functions as a tool for social bonding among Native Americans. Evans explains, controversially, that Native American alcoholism results from being “deprived by white civilization of traditional social bonding mechanisms and outlets for expressing innate prowess as warriors, some Indians find in alcohol a medium to replace those elements” (Evans 58). In other words, Evans argues that Native Americans are born with a warrior-like

spirit, and when the white civilization restrains this spirit, the Native Americans must find another way to express and act out these warrior instincts. This is somewhat contradictory because, on the one hand, alcoholism is not genetically bound. There is an ongoing debate on this issue, and one can argue that it is “genetic” in the sense that harsh living conditions are passed on from generation to generation in the reservations. This means that alcoholism among Native Americans is not a recursive thing because of their genes. There are psychological and sociological aspects that play the most prominent roles. A study of the correlation between children’s living condition, and their causes of death and substance abuse when reaching adulthood, supports this (Felitti et al. 1998). On the other hand, alcoholism occurs because of the innate warrior spirit. Although controversial, Evans again turns to Bordewich’s sociology study when discussing drunkenness among Native Americans, and he argues that it “is something fundamentally different from alcoholism among non-Indians and, indeed, that it sometimes even embodies positive traits, a spirit of camaraderie rooted in tribal tradition or an assertion of ‘Indianness’ in the face of a hostile white world” (Evans 58). Evans’ argument implies that Native Americans no longer have the same ceremonial tradition of storytelling that they did before. In fact, they turn to alcohol to create some resemblance to their spiritual roots. Alexie’s characters experience this camaraderie when they drink, when they speak about drinking, and when they observe other people who drink.

Up to this point, Evans has argued that Alexie uses specific character types and stereotypes to ensure tribal survival and that alcoholism among Native Americans is rooted in an innate warrior spirit. He has expressed his thoughts about stereotypes and alcoholism as something created by the white civilization. However, Evans also brings the dangers from within to the discussion by arguing that “Alexie deplors self-destruction and the debasement of cultural values through alcohol, especially as it is rationalized through the easy illusion of tribal ‘unity’” (Evans 59). That is to say, Alexie does not hide behind the aforementioned argument that alcoholism is a way of bonding, and a tool for bringing alive the warrior spirit. Evans argues that Alexie is, in fact, fighting against this tribal unity, and this common excuse for abusing alcohol. He argues that “For Alexie the moral satirist, the mirror that he turns toward his readers is minatory, admonitory, and shaming, beaming a reflection of false values that themselves must be defeated in order to insure real survival (Evans 59). This is a powerful argument by Evans, and the essence of this argument is that Alexie’s readers, and Native American readers, in particular, must debunk these shared beliefs that alcoholism is

embodied in something cultural and innate. Once readers overpower these false beliefs, one will reach actual survival.

Evans argues that alcoholism is everywhere in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*; however, illustrated in a more mellow tone than in some of Alexie's other work. Evans argues that "the satire mellowed somewhat by fuller views of characters who embrace life on the reservation as a humorous disjunction of traditional ways and modern reality – as defined, of course, by white civilization" (Evans 59). In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Alexie lets the reader explore a reservation life balancing the tightrope between the traditional ways and modern reality. White civilization defines this reality, which again references the stereotypes that Alexie employs. Evans argues that the readers are somewhat biased when interacting with Alexie's work. In other words, the white civilization corrupts the readers' perceptions. This, again, forces Alexie's artistic skills to be on point. This humorous everyday life is, according to Evans, perfectly illustrated in the short story "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore". The particular scene in Evans' argument is when Adrian forgets that he has stopped drinking, and he asks Victor for a beer. The following dialog between Adrian and Victor highlights how Alexie uses humor to illustrate a grave matter:

"How many times do I have to tell you? We don't drink anymore."

"Shit," Adrian said. "Keep forgetting. Give me a goddamn Pepsi."

"That's a whole case for you today already."

"Yeah, yeah, fuck these substitute addictions."

("The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore" 50, Evans 59).

Evans uses this sequence as an example for illustrating Alexie's humor because this dialog portrays sober Native Americans in sort of a pathetic manner. This is demonstrated through Adrian, who is sober, which is good. This plays with the idea that Adrian has quit drinking, but still drinks in his mind. The fact that Adrian forgets functions as a constant reminder that he actually craves alcohol, and, maybe more critical, he craves the camaraderie related to drinking.

Evans argues that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* illustrates alcoholism in a more mellow tone than in Alexie's other work; however, he points out that there are certainly stories and scenes filled with darkness and sadness. For instance, Samuel

Builds-the-Fire (the grandfather of the infamous Thomas) drinks alcohol to find “wisdom and courage,” but he only reaches “an epiphany of despair” (Evans 59). This illustrates Native Americans who turn to alcohol to reach the traditional spirituality from the past, but the only thing Samuel finds is sadness. The narrator of the story tells the readers that “At the halfway point of any drunken night, there is a moment when an Indian realizes he cannot turn back toward tradition and that he has no map to guide him toward the future (*Fistfight* 134). The narrator in this scene suggests that Native Americans are lost, and that they do not possess a map to find the way; however, Evans argues that this universe is a map – a map for the reader. He writes that this scene is “a modern map for negotiating the realities of contemporary reservation life that can lead to survival” (Evans 59). This is the core of Evans’ argument, that Alexie uses satire and humor as a demand for change. Alexie’s characters seem lost, but the characters in the realm outside of Alexie’s universe are not lost – they possess a map. Again, we touch upon ‘survival’, and one can observe that an important element for surviving is the aforementioned relationship between Alexie and his readers. In addition to the previously mentioned scenes, Evans points out one final scene that is crucial for understanding the “Drunken Indians” in Alexie’s work. Extracted from the story titled “Amusements”, this scene takes the reader on a journey to a reservation fair. The two characters involved, Victor and Sadie, have fun at the expense of Dirty Joe, a fellow Native American. Dirty Joe lays passed-out drunk on the grass. One thing leading to another, Victor and Sadie put him on a roller-coaster for the amusement of all the bystanders. Evans argues that this “Story perhaps is Alexie’s most powerful statement on the exploitation of Indians through alcohol; here however, Indians victimize another Indian in an ironic reversal of the usual historic relationship” (Evans 60). In other words, by making a shift in the role of the ones exploiting, Alexie manages to prove his point that alcohol is not a genetic thing, and that it is the result of white civilization. Furthermore, by reversing the victimization, Alexie can illustrate exploitation in a shocking manner which evokes, on the one hand, sadness and disgust, while simultaneously evoke laughter in his audience.

Evans has argued that Alexie manages to shock his audience by putting the ‘drunken Indian’ on display both with humor and sadness. In addition, Evans has exemplified how Alexie turns the tables by making Native Americans victimize another Native American. Moreover, on stereotypes, Evans argues that Alexie is “demolishing, or defamiliarizing their accepted meaning” (Evans 68). That is to say, Alexie again shocks his audience by breaking with the established point of view on stereotypes. Moreover, the essence of Evans’ argument

is that Alexie fulfills his job as a satirist by breaking with the common beliefs and shifting focus from excuses to actual survival.

To summarize Evans' ideas, one can truly posit that he thinks highly of Alexie's work and Alexie as a satirist with artistic and moral strengths. He argues that Alexie's work fosters social change, and that he manages to reach his audience by tackling Native American stereotypes in his way. That is, Alexie uses stereotypes both with the meaning which is normally accepted; however, he also picks the stereotypes apart and gives them new meaning.

I agree with Evans' arguments that the aforementioned scene humorously illustrates everyday life. I argue that this scene also exemplifies the character's inability to connect the past and the present. The reason for making this argument is that the character's inability to remember important things, which are part of his present life, suggests that he is no way near to remembering things that occurred in the past. I argue that this exemplifies that Alexie does not try to moralize the readers. In other words, if his Native American characters are unable to remember and to learn from the past, how can he expect his non-Native readers to do it? In fact, this suggests that readers should embrace *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* for its humorous depictions, instead of reading it with questions of morality in the back of their heads.

Television, Music and Basketball

This thesis has explored how Alexie uses stereotypes and storytelling to guide his characters and readers with a psychological map that fosters new ideas regarding how Native Americans think about themselves and how non-Native people think about Native Americans. Alexie employs stereotypes to subvert the stereotypes and illustrate that people and society can change. Alexie also uses popular culture in his works to create reconciliation between individuals and social groups. Alexie creates a playful relationship between the popular culture of the dominant culture and the traditional Native American culture. This subchapter explores how Alexie uses television, music, and basketball to reconcile characters and illustrate how the dominant culture has influenced the subordinate culture and vice versa.

In "Muting White Noise: The Subversion of Popular Culture Narratives of Conquest in Sherman Alexie's Fiction", James Cox discusses both popular culture and narrative in the

works of Sherman Alexie. In his discussion, Cox applies Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and his novel *Reservation Blues*. The title of this article is powerful. First, the title is powerful concerning what "white noise" illustrates in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Readers of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* will identify three instances of the term white noise. Alexie's description of white noise is "the end of another broadcast day" (*Fistfight* 160 and 191). However, Cox's idea of the white noise reveals that its meaning is much more complex than signifying an end. Cox argues that white noise illustrates the past, present, and perhaps, the future. Cox writes, "Alexie uses the static to signify a broad historical context in which European and Euro-American culture has attempted to assimilate and destroy Spokane" (Cox 56). In other words, Cox argues that the 'white noise' represents the voice of the invaders, and it illustrates how the invaders have suppressed Native American culture by assimilating that culture. I agree with Cox's argument. However, one can push it further by arguing that the white noise functions as a constant reminder of the creators of the reservation. The invaders created the reservation and the white noise. It illustrates how the white culture watches Native Americans, and instead of being an end, the white noise represents a beginning. In other words, Native Americans start over when the white noise pollutes their governmentally owned houses.

On the one hand, Cox argues that white noise is a reminder of assimilation and destruction. He also argues that the source of the white noise is an essential tool for understanding Alexie's works. Technology, and television, in particular, is, according to Cox, "an instrument of late-twentieth century colonialism" (Cox 56). Cox compares television to colonialism, and he manages to illustrate how television, as a physical artifact, has conquered the land of the Native Americans, as did the colonialist of the past. Cox's comparison embodies the past's recursive horrors inside of a box in every reservation home. Cox argues that television has a "destructive influence on Native America" (Cox 56). The physical television, and its content, play the same role that guns played in the fifteenth century. It is a tool for suppressing Native Americans and keeping them under control. The significance of the television is perfectly illustrated in one of the short stories in *The Lone Ranger* when the unknown narrator says, "Last night I dreamed about television. I woke up crying" (*Fistfight* 106). This quote suggests that the narrator is fighting against the horrors of the television. However, the narrator cannot escape that horror. Not even at night. Other stories in the collection tackle the same type of struggle. For instance, in "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven", the title story, the narrator, who recently got back to the reservation after

living in the city, says, “Mostly I watched television” (*Fistfight* 187). Here, the television is the reason for the narrator’s lack of ambition. Television becomes the reason for his destroyed life, but it is also the narrator’s way of tackling his problems. This means that television is both reason for and a solution to the same destructiveness. The result is that television in Alexie’s work functions as an artifact leading to an evil circle that Native Americans cannot escape.

In his article, Cox argues that the function of the television in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is to illustrate the destructive influence on Native Americans and that white noise illustrates assimilation and destruction of the character’s hope. Cox labels assimilation and destruction as “popular culture propaganda” broadcasted through television (Cox 61). Cox describes it as the dominant culture’s construction of Native American culture. On the one hand, Cox argues that Alexie uses his narrators to criticize the Euro-American portrayal of Native Americans. On the other hand, Cox argues that the purpose of Alexie’s narrators is also, and perhaps more important, to change the dominant culture’s hegemony over Native Americans. For Alexie’s characters, it often seems complicated to navigate in the realm of twentieth-century America. However, according to Cox, one of the characters manages to search for answers in the right places. “Thomas, who mutes the white noise that infects the reservation in order to speak his stories, is the source of this answer in *The Lone Ranger*” (Cox 61). In other words, by muting the white noise, Thomas is also muting the dominant culture’s voice. As a consequence, Thomas can regain control over the Native American narrative. Thomas’ ability to regain control is impressive because Native Americans have not reigned over their land or culture for several hundred years.

James Cox argues that white noise, television, and popular culture are tools used by Alexie to illustrate how Euro-Americans have suppressed Native Americans, and how the dominant culture controls the Native American narrative. Cox exemplifies his arguments when he addresses different scenes in *The Lone Ranger*. For instance, Cox uses Victor from the story titled “All I Wanted to Do Was Dance”, to illustrate how Victor tries to put himself in the dominant culture’s narrative. In this scene, Victor is dancing with a new Native American girl every night to relieve his frustration concerning that he once loved a white girl. One can argue that the role of Victor is not to put himself in the dominant culture’s narrative. Instead, his role is actually to create more distance between the dominant culture and Native American culture. One might argue that creating such distance is the key for Native Americans to control their narrative completely. Another character who supports Cox’s

arguments is Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Thomas is the most excellent storyteller on the reservation, and his stories are compelling. Cox argues that Thomas mutes the ‘white noise’ to seek answers. However, there are particular scenes where Thomas is facing the dominant culture’s representatives. In “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-fire” (*Fistfight* 93), Thomas finds himself in the courtroom facing criminal charges for telling stories. In this short story, Thomas takes on the persona of multiple figures associated with Native American history. Thomas takes control of the narrative, and he forwards a critique against the dominant culture. For example, when Thomas takes on the role as ‘Qualchan’ the judge asks him about the purpose of it. Thomas says: “The city of Spokane is now building a golf course named after me, Qualchan, located in that valley where I was hanged” (*Fistfight* 99). Here, Alexie is criticizing the dominant culture’s use of Native American history for economic purposes. Thomas is perhaps addressing this issue on behalf of Alexie.

Cox argues that television creates assimilation and destruction, and that it creates distance, and that it also closes the gap between cultures. Alexie uses popular culture to reconcile characters, and this is evident in his references to music. In “Rock and Roll, Redskins, and Blues in Sherman Alexie’s Work”, P. Jane Hafen argues that Alexie assigns blues tropes to Native Americans to demonstrate the reservation life. More importantly, Hafen argues that blues tropes and other music genres are means trying to solve a conflict and take back the expressions of reservation life. Thus, forcing the readers to change, or reconsider, their view on the Native Americans. According to Hafen, “each musical style, even when blended, represent what Houston Baker calls a ‘vernacular voice’ that plays against the domination of mainstream culture” (Hafen 71). Here, the musical styles figure in the dialogic as described by Bakhtin. By bringing different musical styles to the reservations Alexie tries to break the established view of Native Americans as isolated peoples. Houston Baker’s ‘vernacular voice’ suggests that music is for everyone. However, Alexie uses blues tropes to break the established view on blues as an Afro-American phenomenon and illustrate Native Americans’ constant battle against the establishment. Alexie’s reference to Jimi Hendrix as a counterculture figure supports this notion. However, the irony here is remarkable since Hendrix has become institutionalized and a part of that mainstream culture he was rebelling.

On the one hand, Hafen argues that Alexie uses musical references to challenge the established suppression of Native Americans. However, Hafen also argues that Alexie uses music to point out the spiritual and personal reconciliation of the characters by reliving moments through music. For example, Hafen points out that in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*

Fistfight in Heaven Victor's father's "friendship" with Jimi Hendrix illustrates this reconciliation. Victor's father tells a story that exemplifies this "friendship". The story follows a specific procedure and is "ritualized". When examining Alexie's work, the term "ritualized" is significant. Native American storytelling is ritualized in the sense that one story is told similarly from one century to another, and it is ritualized by where and when it is told. It becomes familiar to the audience. The same way in which Victor's father's story becomes familiar for Victor. Hafen argues that "This ritualized storytelling and music enable the child, Victor, to unite, however tenuously, with his alcoholic father" (73). From this perspective, Hafen illustrates how Alexie uses traditional Native American culture (storytelling) and contemporary music (rock and roll/blues) to form a new, however weak, bond between father and son. In Victor's case, he is reliving his father's stories to bring back the memories of his father before him leaving Victor and his mother. Although Hafen does not say so directly, she implicates that music plays a vital role in Alexie's work, not only to break the established governing of Native Americans but also to reconcile the characters through ritualizing it.

Hafen argues that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* illustrates how Alexie uses music to reconcile his characters. I agree that Alexie uses music to unite individuals. Victor's recollection of missing his father is a practical example to support this argument further:

On those nights I missed him most I listened to music. Not always Jimi Hendrix. Usually, I listened to the blues. Robert Johnson mostly. The first time I heard Robert Johnson sing I knew he understood what it meant to be Indian on the edge of the twenty-first century, even if he was black at the beginning of the twentieth. That must have been how my father felt when he heard Jimi Hendrix. When he stood there in the rain at Woodstock. (*Fistfight* 35)

In this scene, Victor unites with his father through music. Even if it is a different musician, they feel the same. Their similar feelings indicate that Alexie uses music to form a bond between them. Victor believes that musicians from the past understand the present and that they understand contemporary life. When music becomes the connection between the past and the present, its function is to perform as a storyteller. The primary difference between music and traditional stories is that the song lyrics are constant, and the stories are changing. Alexie's depictions of music and musicians stress how big of a role society and environment play in making meaning.

Furthermore, one can argue that Alexie uses music to create distance between Native Americans and the rest of the US by bringing the notion of a counterculture to the table. Alexie's use of Jimi Hendrix's version of *the Star-Spangled Banner* in the third short story in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* supports this notion. In "Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock" Victor explains how his father was sent to prison for protesting against the Vietnam War and his father's reaction after being released. "After all that shit I'd been through", my father said, 'I figured Jimi must have known I was there in the crowd to play something like that. It was exactly how I felt'" (*Fistfight* 26). In "'This is America': Jimi Hendrix's Star Spangled Banner Journey as Psychedelic Citizenship", Mark Clague argues that Hendrix's version of the National Anthem is as "sonic snapshots, taken repeatedly and often to catalog the state of the nation and to call for change" (Clague 436). Therefore, in the scene mentioned above, one can notice that Hendrix functions both as a tool for uniting individuals and as a tool for creating distance and calling for change. One can argue that music in Sherman Alexie's work unites individuals and calls for social change. Social change in the sense of unjust treatment and also change in perception.

Furthermore, this particular story reveals that Alexie's use of pop culture is a way for him to connect Native American culture and white culture. When Victor discusses love and music with his father, his father says, "Hell, son, every Indian needs a piano or guitar or saxophone now and again" (*Fistfight* 30). I argue that this quote suggests that Alexie makes his characters embrace the dominant culture's music and instruments to shorten the distance between the two cultures. When his characters can enjoy both cultures, then his readers can also enjoy both cultures.

Some scholars argue that if a Native American author references the dominant culture's pop culture, the dominant culture subverts the author. A contributor to the discussion on popular culture in Native American literature is Stephanie Gordon. In her article, "'The 7-11 of my dreams': Pop Culture in Sherman Alexie's Short Fiction", she argues that Alexie's use of pop culture references functions as a portal between the traditional and the contemporary Native American. Gordon challenges the notion that pop culture referencing demotes Native American identity, by arguing that "Alexie's construction of Indian identity shows a dialogue of both traditional and contemporary, 'pop' influences, and at times includes canonic or 'high' culture, which indicates that his program is to unsettle the popular notions and expand the idea of what a contemporary Native American is" (Gordon 30). First, the

dialogue in Gordon's argument refers to Bakhtin's ideas that identity, or the self, is a construction of the society in which the individual finds himself. Gordon suggests that Alexie's goal is to change the established view on the contemporary Native American by mixing tradition with the contemporary. When arguing that Alexie tries to unsettle the established notion, Gordon refers to the relationship between non-Natives and Natives. She points out the title of the collection, where the Lone Ranger and Tonto are fighting. Normally, Tonto is the Lone Ranger's sidekick and functions as a representation of the romantic Native American. However, Alexie's title is "a reversal of this narrative, showing Tonto engaged in a fight with the Western hero, who represents the dominant culture" (Gordon 30). Gordon points out the title as an illustration of Alexie's mission. He uses pop culture, not to submit to the dominant culture but to challenge it. Moreover, Gordon argues that the idea that Alexie challenges the dominant culture "typifies the struggle Alexie's characters have with self-definition and self-representation" (Gordon 30). Alexie's characters struggle with defining themselves as individuals. In addition, self-representation refers to how Alexie's characters struggle in defining *who they are*, and *who they could*, and *should be*. The essence, then, of Gordon's argument is that Alexie uses pop culture in his short stories to illustrate this struggle in which his characters experience.

Gordon argues that Alexie's characters struggle with self-definition and self-representation, and that Alexie portrays a reversed image of the relationship between Tonto and the Lone Ranger to challenge the dominant culture. Gordon discusses how Native American identity is merged with American identity through pop culture and how pop culture is presented to the characters. Gordon argues that the TV (which is mentioned numerous times throughout the collection) can be "insidious" (Gordon 31). Gordon implies that television, as a tangible artifact, is harmful to Native Americans. Gordon refers to the content which is presented through television. In the title story, the narrator makes refers to the popular TV-show "The Brady Bunch". Although some scholars will argue that referencing a TV-show like "The Brady Bunch" implies that Alexie's character's struggle with identity-issues, Gordon points out that:

This scene shows Alexie rejecting essentialism and also shows Native American identity wrapped up in American identity – those master narratives of conquest and 'happily ever after.' But again, this is not to say that American identity is the starting off point for this narrator; but rather that the Native character incorporates the parts of American identity that he chooses to, and still retains his essential identity. In other

words, he is no less Indian for liking ‘The Brady Bunch,’ even while he questions its value. (Gordon 32)

This is an interesting and important argument because it challenges the notion that Native Americans should live, and act, according to innate features. It is important because Gordon acknowledges that Alexie’s characters can be autonomous. They are allowed to choose what they like – whether it is Native American culture or American culture. The result of this, according to Gordon, is that the characters also acknowledge that their identity is connected to American identity.

Gordon has argued that Alexie rejects essentialism through his characters, and that his characters are allowed to enjoy pop culture and traditional Native culture. Gordon also brings ‘high culture’ to the discussion. She argues that “‘A Drug Called Tradition’ combines a dialogical mixing of popular culture, high culture, and tradition as a way to negotiate identity” (Gordon 32). Again, we see Bakhtin’s ideas put to work, and what Gordon implies is that identity in this sense is a product of social and cultural factors. Gordon argues that the traditional part of this story is when the characters want to travel back in time. In order to do so, they turn to a new drug, which is an element from popular culture. Therefore, according to Gordon, the characters’ pursuit of ‘Indianness’ is only possible through embracing elements from the dominant culture. In this case, drugs. What Gordon refers to as ‘high culture’ in this story, is Thomas Builds-the-Fire’s speech about skeletons. Thomas’ speech refers to T. S. Eliot’s lines from *The Waste Land*, where he writes that humans are trapped between shadows. The difference, however, between Alexie and Eliot is that Alexie’s characters speak of skeletons as opposed to shadows. Alexie’s characters referencing T.S Eliot is vital for understanding the dialogic in Alexie’s work because it indicates that Alexie is “playing with identity” and that his “Indians drive Camaros, allude to Eliot, and drink Pepsi” (Gordon 33). In other words, Alexie’s characters allow themselves to embrace the dominant culture while simultaneously sticking to tradition. This is part of the dialogic and “shows the characters’ ability to dialogue with the larger culture” (Gordon 34). This dialogue with the larger culture is crucial when trying to understand Alexie’s work. The essence of Gordon’s argument is that the ability to dialogue with the larger culture widens the character’s pursuit of identity, and will eventually result in ‘real’ Native American identity.

I have noted that the embracing of traditional culture, pop culture, and high culture is vital for Alexie’s characters’ identity. However, Gordon also points out that this mixture of cultures could help how the outsiders view Alexie’s characters. Referring to the newspaper

headline about Victor's father in "Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock", Gordon argues that "the dialogic mixing of tradition and popular culture helps remedy the way the culture at large views Victor's father" (Gordon 35). In other words, Victor's father is a complex character that sees himself as both Native American and American. This is interesting because it indicates that Victor's father can change mainstream perception on Native Americans, which is crucial in regard to breaking with stereotypes.

So far, this subchapter has explored popular culture as music and artifacts from the dominant culture. The next part will discuss the game of basketball in Alexie's work. Basketball was invented by the dominant culture and loved by Alexie's characters. It is necessary to explore basketball's role in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

In "Sacred Hoop Dreams: Basketball in the Work of Sherman Alexie", David Goldstein argues that basketball, and especially losing a game of basketball, in Sherman Alexie's work is an allegory of Indians' place in the society and how Indians are losing in life. Goldstein proposes that "Alexie aggressively reminds us that American Indians live their lives in the contemporary world" (Goldstein 80). In other words, Indians are not to be seen as isolated in the reservations, and they are not ancient 'creatures' occupying the American land. Basketball is a relatively cheap game to play, and therefore it is natural that it is accessible to the less fortunate parts of town. Alexie fills his description of reservation life with poverty, and Goldstein argues that the "interrelationship between life and leisure manifest itself quite thoroughly in Alexie's works, especially in his treatment of Basketball" (Goldstein 78). Here, Goldstein suggests that Alexie employs basketball in his work because Native Americans value the relationship between humans. In other words, basketball is used as a connector joining the members of the tribe. The essence in Goldstein's argument is that basketball connects members of the tribe. Moreover, basketball connects the tribe to the outside world.

While the game of basketball functions as a connection between the reservation life and the outside world and as a connector between members of the tribe, basketball also illustrates the connection between basketball and war. This connection is pretty straightforward. You fight, and then you win or lose. Goldstein suggests that "Alexie gives the impression – that the connection [basketball and war] for him his literal, not figurative" (78). In other words, Goldstein proposes that Alexie's use of basketball in his works, is a tool to illustrate the war, or the challenges, in which Indians have to go through in their daily life. In Alexie's work, the characters constantly participate in a war against society – and

themselves. In his article, Goldstein reminds us that basketball is more than a tangible artifact. It is a spiritual symbol. In “Indian Education”, Alexie displays a newspaper article about the narrator’s basketball team (ironically named Indians) which reads as follows, “INDIANS LOSE AGAIN” (*Fistfight* 179). Goldstein argues that this newspaper headline is extremely important when examining basketball in Alexie’s work. He argues, “With a single newspaper headline with a double meaning – Indians losing once more in the game of hoops and in the game of life – Alexie pushes basketball to mean far more” (82). By arguing that basketball means far more, Goldstein suggests that the real battle is not played out in basketball courts. The game of basketball in Alexie’s work reveals that his characters’ real struggle is located outside of the courts.

To summarize Goldstein’s ideas on basketball in the work of Alexie, he argues that basketball is a tool to illustrate the connection between Native Americans and Americans. Moreover, it functions as a representation of the Native Americans’ daily battles and, eventually, their loss.

Alexie’s Satirical Reservation

As noted earlier in this chapter, Alexie packs his works with humor, both dark and mellow. Alexie is widely considered one of the funniest contemporary authors on the American literary scene, and it is crucial to investigate how he manages to relieve his readers from sentimentality through humor. This subchapter investigates Alexie’s satire and, more precisely, how his satire is part of a literary war against white civilization’s metanarratives.

In “Sherman Alexie’s Polemical Stories”, Ron McFarland discusses Sherman Alexie’s use of humor and anger as a response to ‘white culture’. He also brings the role of Alexie’s voice to the discussion. This is interesting because McFarland’s ideas conflict with both Vizenor’s and Lyotard’s ideas. One can argue that McFarland’s response to Alexie’s work is somehow polemical itself. When discussing humor and anger, McFarland argues that “much of Alexie’s poetry and fiction works like a joke, and I do not mean this in any deprecatory sense” (McFarland 33). In other words, McFarland argues that Alexie’s work performs as jokes; however, McFarland is not degrading Alexie’s work as just jokes. The essence of McFarland’s argument is that when his poems and fictions are performing as jokes gives the contents more edge. This means that Alexie can, shockingly and provocatively, reach his

readers. Moreover, McFarland's argument can be illustrated by looking at his argument on exactly the type of humor in Alexie's work. McFarland argues that "Alexie's poems and stories are filled with such moments of the painful humor that defines his kind of 'black,' or 'absurdist,' or whatever one labels it, certainly very 'serious' comedy" (McFarland 31-32). From his argument, we extract the obvious in that Alexie's humor is serious. However, McFarland's argument that one can fit Alexie's work into the 'absurdist' or the absurd is much more interesting. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, one can define 'absurdist' as either "a writer whose work presents an audience or readership with absurdities, typically in portraying the futility of human struggle in a senseless and inexplicable world," or, as an adjective "relating to the perceived futility and senselessness of human life" (OED). Both definitions are alike, and Alexie's work certainly fits both of them. In particular, Alexie's work is very much absurdist in regard to 'futility' and 'senselessness' in which his characters experience throughout most of the short stories. The essence, then, of McFarland's argument is that Alexie opens up a world of senselessness to the reader, and that this senselessness in which the reader experiences help us understand the absurdity of Alexie's universe. To emphasize his argument on humor, McFarland points out a sentence from "This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona" where Victor has to travel to Phoenix to pick up the belongings and ashes of his late father. "Victor felt a sudden need for tradition" (*Fistfight* 62). McFarland argues that this quote is both powerful and funny. The reason for pointing out this argument is that "sudden need" and "tradition" do not fit very well together. Humorously, these counterparts explain how the character finds himself balancing the tightrope between western culture on one side, and Native American culture on the other. The core of McFarland's argument in regard to humor, and with this quote in particular, is that much of Alexie's humor tackles situations where western culture and Native American culture are intertwined.

McFarland argues that Alexie's painful and absurdist comedy reveals a world which seemingly is filled with senselessness, and that his humor arranges for an intertwining between western and Native American culture. McFarland argues that Alexie is part of the story himself. McFarland's title suggests that Alexie combats somebody or something. To illustrate this, McFarland points out three characters, which occur in most of the stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, namely Victor, Junior, and Thomas. These characters are part of what McFarland describes as Alexie's trinity of selves. He argues that "A Drug Called Tradition," which appears early in the book and which involves all three of

Alexie's 'trinity' of selves, is perhaps as representative of Alexie's polemic as any single story might be" (McFarland 34). First, this argument implies that Alexie is on a war mission or that he urges to fight something. McFarland turns to the Ancient Greeks when explaining polemic as "war," and a polemicist as "warrior" (McFarland 27). If Alexie is a warrior who wants to fight, one has to understand what, or who, he is fighting. McFarland suggests that Alexie is fighting Native American stereotypes, and that his personal anger drives him. With Alexie's ongoing war in mind, one can fully appreciate what McFarland describes as "trinity of selves". In reality, McFarland argues that the aforementioned characters are three different representations of Alexie. These characters represent different aspects of Alexie's personality. In this story, the three boys will try a 'new drug' for the first time and drive towards a lake to try this drug. During the twelve pages in which the story consists, we can notice how the characters represent Alexie. For instance, Victor represents rationality and is the character who tends to generalize Native Americans the most. Victor is the narrator of "A Drug Called Tradition", and his rationalist behavior is expressed more than once. When Junior wants to try the 'new drug' while driving, Victor expresses some concerns regarding drug use and driving. Later in the story, Victor yells at Junior, trying to make him slow down while driving. His generalization of Native Americans is, according to McFarland, best illustrated when Victor says, "When Indians make lots of money from corporations that way, we can all hear our ancestors laughing in the trees" (*Fistfight* 13). When McFarland points out this quote, he suggests that Victor tries to illustrate how easy it is for corporations to "buy off" Native Americans, and that they usually waste the little money they have usually on alcohol and fireworks. McFarland proceeds to discuss how Thomas represents Alexie by arguing that "Thomas embodies the inspired imagination" (McFarland 36). In other words, Thomas represents the imaginative aspects of Alexie, in that he is the character who is allowed to drift through time and space, while also expressing Alexie's ties to Native American traditions. There are multiple occasions where Thomas drifts off and imposes as historical figures and illustrates the past and the future. In "A Drug Called Tradition", Alexie's inspired imagination, as put forward through Thomas, is expressed when Thomas takes the three boys on a visionary trip to the past. McFarland points out Alexie's attributes present in Victor and Thomas; however, he does not offer the reader a straightforward interpretation of Junior. Despite not offering a straightforward interpretation of Junior, McFarland implicitly argues that Junior has the attribute of joining the forces. That is to say, Junior is the character who connects the rational and the imaginative attributes of Alexie. To illustrate this, McFarland argues that we, through Junior, "detect the poet behind Alexie's fiction" (McFarland 35). In

other words, Sherman Alexie *is* Junior, and Thomas, and Victor. In sum then, McFarland argues that Alexie is a warrior. Thomas, Junior and Victor are his arms-bearers, and his weapons are words.

McFarland argues that Alexie is at war with “white culture”, and that Alexie and his arms-bearers are armed with words. These words are put to action through dark humor and satire. McFarland argues that Victor and Thomas represent Alexie’s personality, and that Junior tether these personalities; thus, Junior *is* Alexie. However, the main point of interest is to locate what that white culture he fights really is. McFarland argues that Alexie is fighting against Native American stereotypes. McFarland posits that Alexie, through his teetotalist characters, “combat the Barfly stereotype” (McFarland 38). The essence of McFarland’s argument is that Victor, Thomas, and Junior do not drink alcohol in order for Alexie to point out that not all Native Americans are drunks. The “Barfly stereotype”, commonly known as the “Drunken Indian”, are almost a universal truth when people discuss Native Americans. McFarland argues that even if Alexie tries to combat this stereotype “he cannot deny its foundation in painful reality” (McFarland 38). In other words, there are some real issues with alcoholism in real life which has to be dealt with through Alexie’s fiction in order for Alexie to express and, eventually, get rid of his anger towards the white culture.

To condense McFarland’s argument, he suggests that Alexie is portraying himself through his characters, and that Alexie opens the door to an absurdist world. McFarland also argues that through, a sometimes dark, satire, Alexie manages to lead warfare against the white culture which has corrupted Native American life and culture.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Alexie’s use of stereotypes has the purpose of breaking, or changing, the stereotypes. For instance, the ‘Drunken Indian’ stereotype is widely portrayed in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and Alexie acknowledges that it has some truth to it. However, he also makes the point that not all Native Americans are drunk, and as a result, he changes the readers’ attitudes toward the stereotypes. This chapter has imposed the idea that Alexie is creating a portal from the reservation to the outside world. His pop culture references are tools for uniting Native Americans with other Native Americans, while also uniting them with the outside world. In addition, Alexie manages to employ stereotypes and

pop culture without making fun *of* Native Americans, but he is depicting humorous situations, which is eye-opening to the readers through satire.

Chapter IV. “All you have to do is change the memories”: Social Change and Reconciliation

I argue that the short stories in which this chapter explores reveal that the purpose of Alexie’s storytelling is to call for social change and reconciliation between people, both on and off the Spokane reservation. The stories applied here are similar in composition yet different in content. The relationship between Victor and his father is illustrated in both “Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock” and in “Every Little Hurricane”. Both stories depict a relationship between a son and his father, a relationship forced to the surface by chaos. These stories also reveal how storytelling fosters autonomy in the members of society by catalyzing reaction as opposed to action. In “Every Little Hurricane” and “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire”, Alexie takes part in the stories by employing various voices. His voices reveal the connection between the past, the present, and the future. These four stories illustrate how Alexie’s characters struggle to find their identity amid the past and the future and in the midst of simultaneously told stories from various voices. Alexie’s postmodern and dialogic writing exemplifies how the characters reconcile and how the relationship between Alexie’s characters illustrates a call for social change. This chapter reveals how Alexie manages to create reconciliation and calls for social change through his clever use of pop culture and stereotypes. Alexie is an outstanding satirist, and his absurdist universe and childish humor conducts the readers through his field of storytelling.

Witnesses and Nothing More

In the opening chapter of this thesis, I discuss different perspectives on postmodernism and how to approach Alexie’s works through a postmodern lens. Vizenor’s argument that readers should tackle Native American literature with “wisps of narrative” and “pleasurable misreadings” functions as an extension of the ideas of Lyotard, Lentricchia, and Socrates. Multiple voices influence the debate on postmodernism in Native American literature, and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is composed of many different voices. There are different characters and different narrators, and amid these voices, we find Alexie’s authorial voice. Velie’s argument that non-Native readers bring preconceptions and prejudice

to their readings complicates the discussion. One can argue that internal and external voices shape *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

This thesis examines storytelling, stereotypes, and pop culture in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. To exemplify these themes from a postmodern perspective, I find it imperative to investigate the story titled “Because My Father Always Said He Was The Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock” because it involves the relationship between Victor and his father. This relationship intersects with various voices that reveal information that is crucial for understanding the text. Identify the various voices that influence the text provides a rewarding exploration of Alexie’s storytelling and the relationship between Victor and his father.

In “Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock”, Alexie employs various voices. First, there is the voice of Victor as narrator (onward referred to as the narrator). The narrator depicts a scene where his father is in the crowd at Woodstock where Jimi Hendrix plays his version of the United States’ national anthem. Victor’s father is the only Native American in the crowd, and his father feels connected to Jimi Hendrix, both as a soldier and as a minority. The narrator describes how Victor’s father beat up a National Guard and had to spend two years in prison. Victor’s father’s connection to Hendrix is strong, and he plays his Hendrix tape until it does not work anymore. This relationship between Victor’s father and Jimi Hendrix is, according to Hafen, reconciling Victor with his father. They reconcile through Hendrix’s music which adds his voice to the story. Bakhtin’s dialogic suggests that language and social factors shape the story. The dialogic is present in this story, and the dialog plays out between Victor, his father, and Jimi Hendrix. The narrator presents a vivid image of how this dialog works:

1. I would lie awake all night and listen for the sounds of my father’s pickup.
2. When I heard my father’s pickup, I would run upstairs and throw Jimi’s tape into the stereo.
3. Jimi would bend his guitar into the first note of “The Star-Spangled Banner” just as my father walked inside.
4. My father would weep, attempt to hum along with Jimi, and then pass out with his head on the kitchen table.
5. I would fall asleep under the table with my head near my father’s feet.
6. We’d dream together until the sun came up. (*Fistfight* 26)

The narrator's memory of the ceremonial relationship with his father and Hendrix indicates a ritualized relationship. This is a recurring situation, and the narrator communicates that "Jimi Hendrix waited for my father to come home after a long night of drinking" (*Fistfight* 26). First, this indicates that the narrator strongly desires a relationship with his father. In his pursuit of reconciliation, he completely overlooks that his father is driving while under the influence of alcohol. The narrator's memories of this ritual unite him with his father, and he can strengthen this unity through his memories. Alexie reinvents the "Drunken Indian" stereotype without actually changing the facts; his father was a drinker. Alexie reveals other voices speaking similar words but telling a different story. Hendrix's and the narrator as a kid's voices complicate the story because they are voices from the past. For instance, Hendrix's voice is a dead man's voice which technology preserves, and it lives on in the act of turning him into a story.

On the other hand, Victor recalls that his father cries himself to sleep. The crying father illustrates sadness. Moreover, the last two steps of the ritual, where Victor and his father dream together, are best illustrated with Denuccio's argument that the characters' context is a realm under the impact of social, historical, and individual factors. One can notice that when Denuccio's and Hafen's argument merge, music reconciles Alexie's characters with each other and the outside world. Jimi Hendrix's voice not only reconciles Victor and his father but also forces Victor to respond to this social space in order for him to emerge as an individual. The emerging of an individual refers to Alexie's characters' reconditioned identity. The characters' reconditioning happens simultaneously to readers' renewal of perspectives.

The story reveals a close relationship between Hendrix and Victor's father, but it also reveals that Hendrix is one of the causes of Victor's parents' broken marriage. When Victor confronts his mother on the topic of her and Victor's father splitting up, she answers, "This might be the only marriage broken up by a dead guitar player" (*Fistfight* 34). Victor's mother suggests that Hendrix is partly responsible for the outcome of her marriage. This puts Hendrix in a peculiar position. Hendrix of the past is the leading cause of Victor's present grief of losing his father. However, Hendrix's present voice functions as a figure of reconciliation because he brings Victor closer to his father. When Alexie juxtaposes Hendrix as both destroyer and savior, one can notice how Hendrix takes the form of the Trickster. Alexie's Trickster is part of the various voices that readers encounter in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and the Trickster creates a unique tension between the characters. This

tension puts both characters and readers in an interesting position to rethink their first impressions of the stories.

Victor's relationship with his father is illustrated later in the story as well. Victor's father buys a motorcycle to escape the fights he has with Victor's mother. One day, Victor's father is in a motorcycle accident which almost kills him. Toward the end of his stay at the hospital and finally recovering, he tells stories to Victor. As a result, Victor questions his father's truthfulness and his ability to tell what is real. His father's reply is, in my opinion, the most postmodern quote in the whole collection of stories. "What's real? I ain't interested in what's real. I'm interested in how things should be" (*Fistfight* 33). Victor's father is not interested in the truth; however, he is particularly interested in expressing his ideas on how things should be. This quote suggests that Alexie tries to change society through his postmodern writing. Here it is necessary to recall Lentricchia's argument that postmodernism "seeks not to find the foundation and the conditions of truth but to exercise power for the purpose of social change" (Lentricchia 12). Lentricchia suggests that the purpose is to change the future; however, Alexie's characters also propose that one can create a different reality by changing the past. This is illustrated in Victor's thoughts on his father's ideas, "My father's mind always worked that way. If you don't like the things you remember, then all you have to do is change the memories" (*Fistfight* 33-34). This scene is quite ambiguous regarding postmodernity. On the one hand, Alexie's characters' ideas center on the notion that the truth is unnecessary as long as your ideas foster change. However, the second quote suggests that you can create an illusion of the world if you disapprove of it. This is fascinating because one might argue that Alexie's characters intentionally use personal storytelling to modify their memories and, in turn, their identities. This connects to tribal memories and the established shared reality. In this way, these modified personal narratives finally affect the shared reality and tribal culture. As a result, one can interpret this as a call for social change because the characters modify stories to modify reality.

Visions and Survival

As a physical object and with its content, television plays a significant role in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. This thesis has discussed that television represents modern-day colonization in that it has conquered the Native American reservation and keeps its people captivated. Cox argues that television is a tool for assimilation and destruction. I

agree with Cox's arguments, in particular when he argues that television is modern-day colonialism. It is interesting to observe how the white noise created by the TV traps Alexie's characters. As discussed earlier, Alexie's characters have trouble identifying their personal self, and that they struggle with connecting the past, the present, and the future. For instance, in the story titled "Family Portrait" the narrator depicts the television's place in the family. The television is a vociferous artifact that obstructs the narrator from recalling the past. The narrator of the story says that "I don't know where all the years went. I remember only the television in detail" (*Fistfight* 192). This quote exemplifies that the television could be the reason for not remembering in detail what happened earlier. I suggest that it is about unity. In other words, Alexie's characters embrace the dominant culture's artifacts and ideas, not to submit to them but to create unity in the contemporary reservation life. This story illustrates Alexie's characters' incuriousness toward the relationship between the past, the present, and the future. When the narrator tries to recall a situation that occurred years earlier, he concludes by not recalling his age. According to the narrator, the reason for this is that "I was Indian" (*Fistfight* 192). This demonstrates that time is different for Native Americans than what would be the case for non-Native people. Although I agree with the argument that television captivates Native Americans and strangles their future dreams, I also propose that television creates unity within the family, which is a way for Alexie's characters to relocate their identities in the contemporary world.

While the television is captivating as a physical object, its content presents the metanarratives and the established preconceptions of Native Americans. Television limits us to one dimension, and one-dimensional TV shows have corrupted Native Americans' image of themselves, and in "Imagining the Reservation", Alexie frames this by asking the question, "Does every Indian depend on Hollywood for a twentieth-century vision" (*Fistfight* 151)? The answer to this question is no. Alexie reveals that his characters find different ways to visualize themselves as "Indians". Hollywood productions are just part of Alexie's dialogic. Thomas Builds-the-Fire takes the vision into his own hands when he, in the story titled "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire", tells stories where he imagines himself as a horse and a warrior, participating in historical battles. Thomas controls the narrative of Native American history, and while doing that, he takes control over his narrative. When Alexie puts Thomas in charge of the history of Native Americans, he is fighting the dominant culture. This illustrates what Stephanie Gordon refers to in her argument about fighting the dominant culture to mitigate the tension between the subordinate and dominant cultures. Alexie's characters reorder

history, as they do stereotypes. Changing the perspectives on history and stereotypes enables change. The first step is to acknowledge how the metanarratives have arisen, and this knowledge is the foundation for social change.

Chaos and Love

Alexie' presents a chaotic and absurd landscape in which his characters struggle to survive. Chaos and absurdity are juxtaposed with comedy to lead his characters toward survival. Vizenor's argument that one should (mis)read Native American literature with pleasure and that the postmodern discourse reveals wisps of narrative in which the purpose is not to portray but to change reality is highly applicable when examining Sherman Alexie's collection of short stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Vizenor's pleasure refers to looking beyond the tragic themes in Native American literature. I agree with Vizenor's arguments on why readers should read Native American literature from a postmodern perspective. Following Vizenor's ideas regarding the postmodern approach to Native American literature, one can argue that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* certainly is a postmodern work because the work itself consists of wisps of narrative. Alexie's collection of short stories is composed of such wisps of narrative. However, the aforementioned recurring theme and recurring characters, challenges the notion that every story should be read as a singular story. For instance, alcohol or alcoholism is mentioned nine times throughout the collection. Vizenor's ideas would be that alcohol is used to illustrate the comic. However, if we turn our heads to reality, we will notice that the ethnic group with the highest percentage of alcoholism in the United States is Native Americans. It would therefore be tempting to disregard the postmodern ideas put forward by Vizenor. However, if one manages to resist the temptation, one might argue that alcohol, as portrayed by Alexie, is used to break with the metanarrative of the 'Drunken Indian' stereotype which depict all Native Americans as drunks.

Going back to Vizenor's idea on the wisps of narrative, I agree with his argument that Native American literature, Alexie's work, in particular, is created by many different voices. Although I have put forward the fact that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* has three to four recurring characters, one must also consider how these characters are influenced by other characters and the situations they are in. They are all creating their wisps of narrative, and the dialogic style intersect the wisps. Consider, for instance, a scene from the

story titled “The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore” where Victor and a character named Adrian sit on the porch and observe the reservation. The two discuss reservation heroes in terms of basketball players. As a response to white people forgetting their heroes, Victor says that “a reservation hero is a hero forever. In fact, their status grows over the years as the stories are told and retold” (*Fistfight* 48). Victor’s statement exemplifies Vizenor’s narrative wisps because it illustrates how much power there is in every story and that a person’s legacy is carried out by the stories told and retold. Here, it is helpful to recall Kroeber’s argument that Native American stories were slowly changed so that the old stories could have contemporary relevance (Kroeber 2). Kroeber’s argument reveals how powerful Native American storytelling is because the storytelling is what makes a reservation hero a hero forever. When the stories are modified the hero will be a hero for future generations as well because the hero conforms to the contemporary ideas and beliefs. White cultures’ heroes will eventually fade as heroes because the stories are not modified. For instance, a hero performed an action 500 years ago and this action is regarded as cruel in the contemporary world. The hero has now turned into a “former hero” but his/her actions are distasteful in the contemporary world. The composition of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* supports Vizenor’s arguments on Native American literature and the postmodern; however, one can also argue that Alexie’s work relieves us from illusions on Native Americans while simultaneously addresses critique towards the conditions in which the Native Americans suffer. The ambiguity in this discussion is interesting because one might argue that the illusions are justified from a realistic point of view.

Alexie tackles reconciliation between individuals and societies by juxtaposing violence and love. In “Every Little Hurricane”, the opening story of the collection, Victor depicts a New Year party held by his parents. Victor brings the reader through a storm of alcohol, violence, poverty, and nightmares. Despite the darkness which fills this story, there are elements of love and reconciliation in it. Love and social bonds are shaped through shared horrors, and these shared horrors are illustrated in Alexie’s recurring mixing of the past and the present. employs stereotypes and humor to illustrate that Native Americans are able to survive no matter the surrounding. He sets his characters up for laugh by creating ludicrous situations. The stereotypes are emphasized through unflattering images, and the self-destructing characters conform to these images. “Every Little Hurricane” seems like a horrible depiction of the contemporary life, but Alexie uses humor to show the reader that there is hope, and that it is possible to survive even the heaviest storm. “Every Little Hurricane” is a

short story which absolutely illustrates the harsh living conditions on the reservations. Victor, which is both protagonist and narrator of the story, shows that it is possible to escape the harsh environment, and eventually, the harsh reality. Alexie's characters refashion the social bonds through an, as put forward by Dix, an escape from reality through stories. This escape is best illustrated at the end of the story when the narrator illustrates the end of the story by framing Victor's situation. The narrator says "But it was over. Victor closed his eyes, fell asleep. It was over" (*Fistfight* 11). This scene exemplifies how the character escapes the story by falling asleep. While Victor manages to escape from reality by falling asleep, there are other characters who do not manage to escape from reality through stories. There are various scenes in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* that illustrate how the characters are trapped in the story. For instance, "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" ends with the narrator saying "Thomas closed his eyes and told this story" (*Fistfight* 103). And in "A Good Story", the narrator says "Uncle Moses sat down in the story chair and told this very story" (*Fistfight* 143). These stories exemplify that the story is recursive, and that there are no ways of escaping it.

"Every Little Hurricane" exemplifies the characters' daily struggles and how Alexie uses irony to illustrate how the characters deal with these struggles. The irony in the opening story strengthens this mixing of the past and the present. The most apparent evidence of irony is regarding the year in which the story takes place and the narrator's name. First, the year 1976 is 200 years after the beginning of the nation USA. It is ironic how the story's opening scene depicts a celebration of the bicentennial year when one considers the cruelty these 200 years have brought upon the Native Americans. Second, the narrator of this story and nine other stories in the collection is named Victor. The original meaning of Victor is either winner or conqueror. The irony is remarkable concerning his name because he tells stories of loss and stories about being conquered. I argue that Alexie has given one of his main characters the name Victor to change the metanarrative picturing Native Americans as losers. Victor's name suggests that there is hope because it functions as a constant reminder that Native Americans can win and regain control of their lands, narratives, and identities. This is not to say that Victor and the other characters march out of the reservation on a physical war to regain their land. Victor wins in more surprising ways; he regains control of his identity. The narrator in "This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona", argues that the most important thing in Victor's life is to be part of an equitable trade. The narrator depicts Victor's thoughts about fair trade as "all Victor had ever wanted from his whole life" (*Fistfight* 75). In this scene,

Victor changes his behavior which results in him achieving his life goal. Victor's achievement directs our attention to the small and personal victories that matter. The opening story is a roller-coaster of emotions, which starts with a steep downhill as Victor illustrates how relentless violence and alcohol abuse fills his chaotic world. Victor watches his uncles' fight, and the following paragraph explains the narrator's thoughts on the violent and chaotic scene which happens outside of his window:

“They are going to kill each other,” somebody yelled from an upstairs window. Nobody disagreed and nobody moved to change the situation. Witnesses. They were all witnesses and nothing more. For hundreds of years, Indians were witnesses to crimes of an epic scale. Victor's uncles were in the midst of a misdemeanor that would remain one even if somebody was to die. One Indian killing another did not create a special kind of storm. This little kind of hurricane was generic. It didn't even deserve a name. (*Fistfight* 3)

This scene exemplifies Owens' ideas of self-destructing Native Americans, and it portrays Alexie's characters as harmless to white readers. First, we read that nobody would care if they kill each other, which conforms to the metanarrative of history. Second, Alexie reverts this metanarrative because the story is told by the voice of a Native American. Here, what we normally would read as the white society's voice is now told by a Native American. This reversal is thought-provoking because Karl Kroeber argues that storytelling and memory are essential for the sake of the tribe. Therefore, one can assume that the tribal unity, supposedly, is strong, and one would expect characters to look out for each other. The position of the narrator changes this idea because the assumption that Native American peoples look out for each other is challenged. The narrator's position illustrates how Alexie both accepts the metanarrative but challenges it. This paragraph also illustrates the ties in which Alexie's characters have to the past. The fact that “Indians” have witnessed crimes for hundreds of years might be the reason for the apathy toward “One Indian killing another” (*Fistfight* 3). This apathy is perhaps the reason for the characters' inability to escape the past.

The primary text which this thesis investigates is *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. However, I find it necessary to illustrate suicide and self-destruction as exemplified in Alexie's debut novel *Reservation Blues*, and in his poem “How it Happens” from the collection of poems, *One Stick Song* because both texts tackle preconceptions and prejudice. Alexie exemplifies self-destruction and suicide in both works. In *Reservation Blues*, Alexie uses the same characters as *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in*

Heaven. Towards the end of the novel, the familiar character Junior Polatkin commits suicide, and Junior's wake is illustrated in the tenth chapter. The wake takes place in Thomas Builds-the-Fire's kitchen. There are not many people present, however, some unnamed characters have sent flowers and condolences. As a response to the flowers and the condolences, Victor says, "But nobody gave a shit when he was blowing his brains out. They were all cheering him on" (*Reservation* 277). This is an explicit depiction of suicide, and Victor's statement conforms to Owens's argument that Native Americans vanish without interfering white people. Victor's attitude towards the mourning of the dead is filled with anger, as he is criticizing people who fails to be there when another person is alive. This explicit reference to the modernized "Vanishing Indian" supports Louis Owens's argument by illustrating that Native Americans themselves do not care about their people.

In his poem "How it Happens", Alexie demonstrates self-destruction and conforms to the overriding assumption that most Native Americans are drunk:

Every day for a year
 Three Indian men waited at the bus stop

 then one morning, only two
 and only two for the next year or so

 then yesterday, only one
 clutching a brown paper sack

 As I drove by
 the last one turned away

 Then this morning, briefly
 I considered stopping

 to ask the one what happened to the two
 though of course I already knew. (*Song* 28)

In this poem, one Native American vanishes every year. The disappearance of the two could be coincidental, but the brown paper sack in the third couplet indicates that alcohol is part of the scene. Brown paper sacks are generally associated with alcohol consumption in public places. The fifth and the sixth couplets of the poem reveal that the speaker already knows what has happened to the two "Vanishing Indians". This suggests that the narrator conforms to the "Vanishing Indian" and the "Drunken Indian" stereotypes. The narrator is entitled to

use stereotypes to prove his point, and that point is located in the fifth couplet. The narrator considered stopping, but he moved on. This indicates a critique toward a society that is aware of injustice and inadequate treatment of its people. It is interesting to observe how Alexie's paratactic style forces his readers and the speaker to guess from the details in the poem. When the speaker leaves the "what happened" open but saying it is closed, the speaker and the readers are divided. Readers assume that they know what happens, as does the speaker, but the readers are different. The readers' assumption is once removed; thus, they are more easily prey to stereotypes. This is an exciting setup for Alexie to use. He is both making his readers insiders (they know what happens) and reminding them that they are complete outsiders (they do not know at all what is going on beyond the stories they just heard). Alexie leaves his readers with preconceptions and a brown paper bag. I argue that this couplet serves as a tool to moderate and, eventually, obliterate the established Native American stereotypes.

Owens' arguments are, to some extent, felicitous when reading "Every Little Hurricane". I agree with Owens' idea that Native Americans seemingly vanish without white cultures' assistance. Seemingly is an important word here because white cultures are to blame for the vanishing Native Americans. As discussed in chapter three, harsh living conditions, which result from white civilization's abuse, are to blame for addictions and suicides. Owens also argues that Native American literature cannot incorporate moralizing themes when the overarching goal is to sell more copies. However, Owens' arguments overlook the satirical elements, which is evident in this story. As mentioned, the narrator's name and the aforementioned historical reference implies a strong irony from Alexie's side. Dark and unflattering humor on account of the characters fills this story. Unflattering illustrations of Native Americans is criticized by Velie, and the preconception in which white readers bring to the reading emphasizes the unflattering image. There is, however, a reason for Alexie to portray his characters in an unflattering and humorous way. There is one particular scene in this story which reveals the dark humor in Alexie's work. In this scene, almost every party-goer are thrown out on the lawn. The narrator presents a vivid description of the situation where almost everybody from the party is on the lawn "dancing in the snow, fucking in the snow, fighting in the snow" (*Fistfight* 10). The three actions depicted here are not funny or provoking when looked upon as isolated actions, but they all function as different wisps of narrative. When these wisps influence each other by having the characters perform them simultaneously, it becomes hilarious. Alexie creates an orgy of happiness, love, and violence out there on the lawn. The scene reaches its climax when snow is added to the mixture

because the snow functions as a reminder of the white noise. In other words, the situation that plays out on the lawn is corrupted by white noise. That is, it is corrupted by the idea that white culture tries to put a layer on the reservation life. The idea that snow represents a layer of oppression is evident in Alexie's various depiction of snow. The fight between Victor's uncles is depicted in the opening scene of this story. The narrator presents an image of the fight when he tells that "Adolph soon had the best of Arnold, though, and was trying to drown him in the snow" (*Fistfight* 3). In this scene one can notice how snow refers to white people, and that drowning refers to death. This comparison illustrates how Native Americans are fighting both internal and external struggles. The narrator of "Indian Education" also presents a vivid image of snow and death when he depicts "They pushed me down, buried me in the snow until I couldn't breathe, thought I'd never breathe again" (*Fistfight* 171). Again, snow and death are intertwined, but Alexie offers a solution to remove this layer of death and oppression. In "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock", Alexie illustrates how pop culture functions as a tool for creating a path through this white layer. The narrator says that "My father smiled, turned the volume up, and we rode down the highway while Jimi led the way like a snowplow" (*Fistfight* 28). Here, Jimi Hendrix's music function as a tool to lead the way from despair to survival by reconciling characters. It is through this reconciliation that the internal and external struggles vanish.

The previous paragraph illustrates that snow represents death and oppression, and that pop culture creates a path to escape the struggles. This story also presents an image of how refashioned social bonds foster love and intimacy. Simultaneously to the aforementioned scene, Victor lays between his parents, where he "put one hand on his mother's stomach and placed the other on his father's" (*Fistfight* 10). This creates a special bond between Victor and his "alcoholic and dreamless" parents (*Fistfight* 10). This special bond is portrayed through the intimacy which is shared, both on the lawn and in the bed. When Victor feels intimacy with his parents, "The people outside seemed so far away, so strange and imaginary," and it creates a "downshift in emotions" and "the tension seemed to wane" (*Fistfight* 10). Victor manages to create distance to the outside world. Furthermore, if Native American time is "now", Victor clearly manages to live and enjoy that present moment. Victor shows his capability to remove himself from the chaos, the violence, and the white noise. This intimate bond between the characters, despite the alcohol and violence, is a key ingredient for Alexie's work, because the reader lets his guard down when entertained, which makes it easier to

appreciate the more serious parts. In other words, when Alexie creates a story filled with self-destruction, violence, and humor, the reader is caught off guard when the story reaches its moralizing point. I argue that “Every Little Hurricane” consists of narrative wisps which portrays self-destructiveness through humor in order to teach the reader that there are intimate relationships, and shared love, even amidst a reservation storm.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored different stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and connected these stories to the ideas presented in chapter I, II, and III. Specifically, this chapter has illustrated that Alexie is a postmodernist who applies a dialogic and paratactic style of writing to reverse metanarratives and break with the misconceptions of Native Americans as drunk and self-destructive peoples. The multiple narrative wisps in Alexie’s writing allow the readers to feel the moral without falling into the sentimentality of stereotypes. Alexie’s humor has revealed that Alexie does not conform to the wishes of white readers, but it inserts Alexie and his characters into the text as Tricksters. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is a valiant collection of short stories that attacks the established truth to pursue social change.

Conclusion: A Call for Social Change

This thesis has illustrated that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is a postmodern text. The text is a construction of traditional Native American storytelling, in which is evident in Sherman Alexie's orature techniques. Alexie transfers the paratactic style of orature to his written universe, and readers must partake in the stories to reveal their meaning. Alexie's vivid images of historical situations intertwine with the present struggles on the reservation. The dialogic of the past, the present, and the future form his characters. Furthermore, when Alexie adds the voices of the white culture through his repeated use of stereotypes and popular culture, his characters are in a complicated realm influenced by thoughts and voices from various perspectives. The voice of Jimi Hendrix creates a path out of the white noise's oppression and violence. The final voices which shape *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* are the readers' voices. The text's composition forces these voices into positions where they all have preconceptions and misconceptions of Native Americans, and Alexie speaks directly to his readers through stereotypes and popular culture. Some scholars criticize Alexie and other Native writers for portraying Native Americans in an unflattering way to sell more copies. This thesis has argued that Alexie both accepts and challenges stereotypes and adds popular culture to the dialogic to deconstruct the pre-established notion of Native Americans as drunks and as a self-destructive group of people. Alexie manages to create eye-opening stories which happen to sell lots of copies. As a response to the criticism toward his eagerness to sell copies, I would argue that his overarching goals of social change and deconstructed stereotypes benefit from every copy sold and read.

This thesis has argued that Alexie challenges the simplification of alcohol and self-destructiveness in reservation life. Alcoholism is presented through satire in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* to exemplify that drinking functions as a reconciling tool for Alexie's characters. Through alcohol, his characters reconcile with the traditions of the past and the present characters. Although alcohol addiction and self-destruction are widespread among Native Americans, the reason is not in their genes. Alexie tries to provoke his readers by depicting a hopeless universe, and the result is that the actual life-threatening condition is being Native American. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* functions as a reminder to his non-Native readers that contemporary Native Americans have not vanished;

they do exist. Alexie's satirical depiction of Native Americans and their struggles puts Alexie and his characters in the roles of modern-day Tricksters which demand social change.

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