

# THE MYTH OF THE AMERICAN ADAM UNDER THREAT: THE REVITALIZED MYTH OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN in Sherman Alexie's CAPTIVITY

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**Abstract:** Contemporary American Literature- commonly referred to as postmodern literature since the 1960s- is an outcome of the multicultural nature of the American society. It gives long-ignored groups such as women, African Americans and American Indians the opportunity to reflect the sense of chaos they have been experiencing due to their identity problem. This article analyzes a short story titled *Captivity* by an American Indian, Sherman Alexie, and by presenting how the writer makes use of postmodern strategies in his fiction, it demonstrates that the more the self of the writer is in chaos the more experimental fiction becomes.

**Keywords:** *Postmodernism/ Native American Literature/ Analysis*

**Özet:** 1960'lardan itibaren postmodern edebiyat olarak adlandırılan Çağdaş Amerikan Edebiyatı, çok kültürlü Amerikan toplumunun da bir sonucu olmakla beraber kadınlar, zenciler, Kızılderililer gibi uzun zaman önemsenmemiş topluluklara, kimlik sorunları yüzünden yaşamakta oldukları kaos duygusunu yansıtmaya olanağı vermektedir. Bu makale, Sherman Alexie adlı bir Kızılderili yazara ait *Esaret* adlı kısa hikayeyi incelemekte, ayrıca bir yazarın kişiliğinin ne kadar çok toplumsal ve psikolojik bir çıkmaz içinde olursa, kurmaca metinlerin de o kadar deneysel olacağını gösterebilmek için Alexie'nin postmodern kurmaca stratejilerinden nasıl yararlandığını açıklamaya çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Postmodernizm/ Amerikan Edebiyatı/ Çağdaş Kızılderili Edebiyatı/ İnceleme*

Today in the United States cultural difference is for sale. Therefore, to be able to have a better understanding of and a sound argument on Contemporary American literature, commonly referred to as postmodern literature since the 1960s, one should consider the multi-dimensional nature of the American society leading its literature to reflect features of a 'jambalaya' - a spicy dish with several tastes remaining distinct in it - rather than those of a 'melting pot' in which all tastes unite and become one single flavor.

Thus, voices of minority groups and women that are heard through their own works of literature are of great significance as they provide one with the insight to analyze postmodern fiction- a means of expressing the self which is an 'experience increasingly fluid in a world increasingly shapeless' (Howe, 1959: 427), namely, a means of reflecting one's encounter with the present situation of America. Postmodern fiction consists of the search of these radical voices for ways to deal with violence, rigidity of life, loss of meaning and identity in America, which carry to great extremes the themes of heterogeneity, fragmentariness and meaninglessness in an extremely experimental form.

Among these voices of long-ignored groups is that of the American Indians who constitute the majority who have had to experience this fragmentation of personality, 'loss' of identity and cultural values in a sense of 'captivity' most. Hence, this article aims at analyzing postmodern American fiction through a short story titled *Captivity* (Geyh et al, 1998: 342-345) by an American Indian, Sherman Alexie, whose work provides one with evidence that the more the self of the writer is in chaos the more experimental fiction becomes since there is no other means of 'personal or artistic' survival in a world which lends itself to no assured definition. (Howe, 1959: 427)

Alexie's *Captivity* - a short story to 'try' to reflect the 'otherness' of the urbanized American Indian of the present time and his early plight against being assimilated - is woven by several postmodern elements leading the conventional reader to a chaotic state since the author has the strong assumption that such literary devices causing conflict are the best means to express the feeling of 'captivity' American Indians have had to experience since the 'white man' first arrived in America and captured not only their land but also their 'selves' which they would never be able to recover. Therefore, the sense of 'otherness' felt throughout history is a central concern for the author, and he reveals it vividly in his experimental work of captivity.

*Captivity* at first glance can be taken as a briefly-written short story which consists of fourteen separate sections which are seemingly related to each other and remind one of the American Indian oral traditions: storytelling in the form of a conversation between a contemporary American Indian and a historical figure, Mary Rowlandson, who is the Puritan author of a famed and influential seventeenth-century captivity narrative that portrayed Indians as devils and was considered a landmark text in determining euro-American attitudes toward American Indians.

However, this short story contains a lot more than the revelation of a visit to the past

for it is an extremely intensive work typical of that of a postmodern author trying to depict 'today's' paradoxical situation by referring to the 'past', and thus writing in his individual manner, with his own 'vision' and perception of his own 'paradox' - that of the one trapped in between, between past and present, touching and becoming, and captivity and freedom.

To be able to analyze *Captivity* on a sound basis, one should try to understand the author's ideas on this paradoxical situation of himself and the American Indians. 'We are more than just writers', 'We are [Native] storytellers', 'We are spokespeople', 'We are cultural ambassadors', 'We are politicians', 'We are activists', 'We are all of this simply by nature of what we do, without even wanting to be' says Alexie- a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian who prefers to be called an Indian, finding Native American a "guilty white liberal term". For him, the tradition of storytelling is vitally significant as it is all that American Indians have as defence against the eclipse of the euro-American culture. "I know I have so much left to say and I don't know how much time I have left to say it all." he says to express the importance of storytelling as a means of reflecting the 'otherness' faced by the American Indian amid foreign signals of the 'white', completely ungraspable, thus meaningless to him.

Yet, in his unique way of storytelling, one rather sees the contemporary image of the American Indian, which bears little resemblance to the portrayals of stereotypical 'Native Americans' as loincloth-clad, befeathered warriors or disillusioned drunks. Therefore, one can consider him to be subverting conventions; not only white conventions about Indians but also Indian conventions about Indians by exploding the myth of the huge, stoic, warrior Indian. In that sense his is a mythological endeavour since he is both a literary and social 'other' at odds with the white society as well as his own. To him, what is real and acceptable in terms of the American Indian and white norms is not important as he is interested in what things ought to be like and reflects in 'Captivity' the dilemma of the American Indians having to live in the world of 'other' people and being treated as the 'other' themselves.

Thus, *Captivity* is Alexie's individual interpretation of this dilemma which he deals with by referring to imagination, fantasy and even magic that he places in a setting somewhere between past and present as a means of coping with and reflecting the hard reality American Indians have been facing throughout history: the rejection of the act of genocide with which the American nation began (Fiedler, 1972: 68). Therefore, history is of great significance to Alexie, and his notion of writing, thus, parallels that of the Italian author and theorist of culture Umberto Eco as he states in the postscript to his *The Name of the Rose* (1980) :

The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognising that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited; but with irony, not innocently. (Geyh et al, 1998: 622)

Alexie reveals his notion of history by both engaging a historical figure to demonstrate his visit to the past and employing a style as that of a storyteller due to his belief that inspiration is to be found in the original springs of narrative: the oral tradition in American Indian history.

Yet, the work itself is not as traditionally constructed as it seems to be. A narrative of fourteen sections that seem to be sequentially ordered will naturally make the conventional reader have an expectancy of semantic coherency while these sections are indeed not related to each other at all except that each section starts with a sentence that contains the same word used in the last sentence of the previous section or has an equivalent of it. The sense of discontinuity in the work contributes to the author's aim of illustrating the sense of discontinuity and disorder in the traditional way of living. This contradiction within the nature of the work is what causes the ambiguity which inevitably leads the reader to trace certain postmodern elements since he/she cannot otherwise avoid being locked up in a chaotic labyrinth caused by the 'meaninglessness' of the work which is a postmodern theme itself.

Among the unconventional aspects of *Captivity*, one can feel the themes of 'otherness' and 'alienation' as illustrated through the use of postmodernist literary devices of intertextuality, paradox, self-reflexivity, self-consciousness, openness, interplay of reality and fantasy, borrowing from popular culture, indefiniteness of time, fragmented form, and indeterminacy due to the multiplicity of meaning which all lead one to chaos and meaninglessness in conventional terms.

### **Intertextuality and Paradox**

The beginning of Alexie's 'Captivity', as quoted below, is an extract taken from an influential Puritan narrative of captivity written by Mary Rowlandson who was taken captive by the Wampanoag in 1676:

He (my captor) gave me a biscuit, which I put in my pocket, and not daring to eat it, buried it under a log, fearing he had put something in it to make me love him. (Geyh et al., 1998: 342)

The above section about a historical defeat of the white is significant due to two reasons. Firstly, it reflects the intertextual nature of this work since it contributes to the author's demonstration of his reference to another narrative and revisiting history as a means of presenting today's situation. This gives one hints about his view of authorship that is quite parallel to that of Michel Foucault's as stated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969):

the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first line and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration...it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences...The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands...its unity is variable and relative. (Ward, 1997: 149)

Thus, Alexie- while making use of an extract from a historical narrative- illustrates how his text exists inescapably in relation to a vast repertoire of codes, conventions and influences, which is called intertextuality by Roland Barthes. In his essay *The Death of the Author* (1968) Barthes says 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'. (Ward, 1997: 147)

This extract is significant also due to a second reason, which is its demonstration of how postmodern fiction inscribes and contests both social and literary conventions at the same time. Hence, an innovative aspect in postmodern fiction which is its preservation rather than rejection of what it contests is observed in Alexie's use of this extract taken from a narrative completely against the goodness of American Indians, which in contrast and rather ironically serves as a bitter criticism of the white within the text. Moreover, this *paradox* caused by the extract's apparent reference to the historico-political context- the empirically observable world-justifies that there is 'historiographical metafiction' within this short story and that it functions in a way to problematize history by questioning the commonsensical and exposing the processes by which sign systems make meaning out of the past and produce our experience.

### **Self-reflexivity and Self-consciousness**

Following the extract is Section 1 that exemplifies the self-reflexive and self-conscious mood within the work as revealed in the very first sentence: 'When I tell you this story, remember it may change'. (Geyh et al, 1998: 342)

With this very first revelation of the 'fictionality' of this 'fiction', the reader is brought back to the text from any possible external world he/she might consider as related to the text. Thus, with the narrator's reminding the reader of the work's fictionality further in Sections 3 and 8 by stating that he is 'telling a story' and 'in this story there are words fancydancing in the in-between', the reader is led to a deeper chaos which is due to the sense of *paradox*. If the text is completely fictional and leads back to itself only, what the narrator says resists truth and meaningfulness, too. Thus, this ambiguity causes in the reader a sense of 'otherness' felt due to his/her being an 'other' to the text, and contributes to the author's achievement of expressing the otherness of the American Indians when the rules of the white and the 'language of the enemy' are exposed on them.

Apart from the self-reflexivity of the text as a reason leading the reader into a paradoxical representation of textuality to demonstrate the paradoxical state of the contemporary American Indians, one can also observe 'self-consciousness' within 'Captivity'. By deliberately frustrating the reader's conventional expectations, the text draws attention to its own becoming by involving the reader in the mimesis of process while skeptifying him/her of the reliability of it. This conflicting feature is seen at its most concrete when the narrator in Section 3 says, 'Nothing changes, neither of us knows exactly where to stand and measure the beginning of our lives.', and continues to say, 'Everything changes'. (Geyh et al, 1998: 342)

Another unconventional feature is at the end of the story in Section 14 when the narrator says,

Leonard tells me he's waiting for the bus to the dark side of the moon, or OZ, or the interior of a drum. I load up my pockets with all my possessions and wait with him. That Greyhound leaves at 3 A.M. That's all we can depend on. (Geyh et al, 1998: 345)

and leaves the reader with a giant question mark in his/her mind for he/she has to interpret which dimensions this openendedness of the ending leads one to. This unfinished ending gets its support from the author's assumption that 'What you read is unfinished until completed in the self' (Alexie, 1998: 1)

This problematic relationship between the reader and the text is not to be solved unless the reader becomes an active participant in approaching the text by means of concentrating on the multi-layered nature of every word in that 'verbal context' and decoding the use of unconventional typography causing visual and contextual disorder, which otherwise leads one to *paradox*: the deep black hole somewhere hidden in the story ready to trap the reader.

One such 'tricky' part in terms of the use of such typography is observed in Section 5 when the narrator says,

Remember: I am not the fancydancer, am not the fancydancer, not the fancydancer, the fancydancer, fancydancer. (Geyh et al, 1998: 343)

The decreasing number of the words in the above sentence can be considered as a means of illustrating the gradual loss of identity in the American Indians and the conflicts experienced by the urbanized, who - despite being deprived of their traditions - are never treated like the euro-Americans, and thus feel trapped in between: no trace of identity on either side, neither American nor American Indian; but the 'other'.

### **Interplay of Reality and Fantasy**

When the circumstances of reality are perceived as so predominantly tragic, one may try to change the definition of what is real. The tragic is seen as illusory, and the real is a private dream. The repatterning of the past, or of the present, in line with an individual imagination is, obviously, the protest of the writer persuaded he cannot change the world and determined to change at least his 'vision' of it. A sense of powerlessness before reality becomes for such a writer a catalyst for seeking a world of manageable size, of controllable problems, of puzzles confusing only to the 'other'.

Alexie in *Captivity* reflects the same tendency, and breaks down the reality of all distinctions by treating present and past, truth and falsehood interchangeably. Thus, he presents the reader 'his reality': Reality and fantasy intermingled. This blurring of imagination with tough reality of the past and present finds its most obvious form and justification from the author's perspective in Section 7:

Piece by piece I reassemble the house where I was born, but there is a hole in the wall where there was none before. "What is this" I ask my mother. "It's your sister," she answers. "You mean my sister made that hole?" "No," she says. "That hole in the wall is your sister." For weeks, I searched our architecture, studied the walls for imperfections. Listen: imagination is all we have as defense against capture and its inevitable changes. (Geyh et al, 1998: 343)

In the above section, the author gives the justification of his use of 'the imaginary' in

his work, and he thus reveals his individual solution to today's dilemma of the American Indians, who feel as if they are stuck between two walls which will never let them go unless they imagine to go through them. This idea of an escape through walls is due to one of the childhood memories of the author. He says, 'In third grade, I stood alone in the corner, faced the wall, and waited for the punishment to end. I'm still waiting'. According to Alexie, the only way to save his 'self' was not kicking at the wall to get out or to be heard, but his imaginary world. 'Imagine that your own shadow on the wall is the perfect door' says Alexie, and relates his being a storyteller to his childhood memory. 'Most little boys use their energy physically. My energy was used internally. I created imaginary worlds for myself. I became a storyteller because I had to be.' (Summa, 1998 : 3)

Trying to fight against the past and its outcomes at present, therefore, finds its literary form as an interplay of reality and fantasy in *Captivity*. The author's employment of this style is supported by and seen in the form of features such as 'borrowing from popular culture of the white', and 'indefiniteness of time'.

Having to live in the society of the white, Alexie-like all other American Indians- is under the influence of the mass society of the white which forces him to escape into his imaginary world to be able to avoid this painful confrontation. Alexie is aware of what the threats of the mass society can be and grasps the concept that Howe explains thoroughly:

The mass society is a relatively comfortable, half welfare and half garrison society in which the population grows passive, indifferent and atomized: in which traditional loyalties, ties and associations become lax or dissolve entirely; in which coherent publics based on definite interests and opinions gradually fall apart; and in which man becomes a consumer, himself mass produced like the products, diversions and values that he absorbs. (Howe, 1959: 426)

Alexie reflects this painful assimilation of the American Indian by including several names or expressions from popular culture and presenting them in a hyperreal manner. Section 6 contains this imaginary mood as quoted below:

Fancydance through the tall grass, young man, over broken glass, past *Crowshoe's Gas Station* where you can buy an Indian in a Bottle. " How do you fit that *beer-belly* in there? " asks a white tourist. " We do it, " I tell her, "piece by piece" (Geyh et al, 1998: 343)

The American Indians 'trying to fancydance' and struggling to turn to their past feel squeezed in this mass society filled with elements to be consumed by those individuals who are indeed consumed by them: *Crowshoe's Gas Station* and beer-drinking are only two of the millions which make the urbanized American Indians feel as if they are gradually taken both physically and spiritually captive in a bottle. Their captor is the American system, that of capitalism, that of the white who even make money out of these bottles by selling them as souvenirs to white tourists.

The author's use of the imaginary element by means of the inclusion of popular culture is also observed in section 12 when in an imaginary conversation the narrator speaks to Mary Rowlandson:

What do you want? I cannot say, "I love you. I miss you." June, Mary Rowlandson, the water is gone and my cousins are eating *Lysol sandwiches*. They don't need you. (Geyh et al, 1998: 344)

The use of the brandname *Lysol* - a disinfectant- and the association of that with the act of eating demonstrate to what extent the author makes use of the 'real' to escape into the 'imaginary' since neither 'Lysol' nor the act of 'eating' can have a meaning when associated with each other in the reader's mind despite the fact that both are 'real' and meaningful as separate items to the same reader. The imaginary point that American Indians are eating *Lysol sandwiches* can be interpreted as their giving harm to themselves when they want to be closer to this mass society of the white. That is why the urbanized Indians do not need Mary Rowlandson to view them as devils and harm them with her ideas for the contemporary Indians ruin their own 'selves' by their own will.

### **Indefiniteness of Time**

As is the case with the above-quoted section, Alexie also blurs the line between past and present due to his assumption that past and present are never divisible and that past- or some version of it- remains an active and transforming force in the present. He says:

There are things you should learn. Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you. Maybe you don't wear a watch but your skeletons do, and they always know what time it is. These skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices. And they can trap you in between, between touching and becoming. But they are not necessarily evil, unless you let them be. (Bowen, 1999: 1)

and refers to the past as a symbol of passed-out traditions: the skeleton which sometimes needs to be touched in order to get a better understanding of the present, but this should never take too long or deep since it can otherwise make whoever touches it 'become' a skeleton locked up in the traditions which cannot survive in today's world.

This concept of the past as indispensable from the present is what causes the sense of indefiniteness of time in *Captivity*. In Section 3, for instance, the narrator says to Mary Rowlandson: 'Was it 1676 or 1976 or 1776 or yesterday when the Indian held you tight in his dark arms and promised you nothing but the sound of his voice?' (Geyh et al, 1998: 342), and continues to say in Section 5: 'This must be 1876 but no, it is now, August.' (Geyh et al, 1998: 343)

Alexie furthers his use of the dislocation of time in Section 9 as he says 'The 20<sup>th</sup> century overtook the reservation in 1976, but there we were, stuck in 1975.' (Geyh et al, 1998: 343). This indefiniteness of time is due to the author's ironic approach toward history, which finds its best expression when past and present are intermingled. This strategy is employed by the author to demonstrate within his imaginary world the meaninglessness of the contemporary American Indian way of struggle against the white for time is not important at all, and the more things change,



the more they stay the same. To Alexie, the same act of genocide- though in a different form - is in progress now. There are no more the fierce battles of the past but a more internal war of assimilation in today's society of American Indians who are stuck 'between then and now, between walls in the alley behind the Tribal Café where Indian boys smoke old cigarettes at half-time of the all-Indian basketball game' (Geyh et al, 1998: 343), which Alexie expresses by means of the dislocation of time to illustrate that 'nothing changes' throughout history, but 'everything changes' in the urbanized individual of American Indian origin. He is now a captive of the contemporary way of living the white have: smoking and drinking. Yet, the only way for him to escape, to Alexie, is his use of the internal energy of imagination which takes the form of 'storytelling' as stories are the best weapons of the American Indians who have nothing else 'to be introduced as evidence' of what they have experienced throughout history.

### **Fragmented Form**

However, Alexie's way of storytelling in *Captivity* is quite different from what one expects to see in the oral tradition. Despite the use of a colloquial style in it, the story bears little resemblance to traditional stories which have coherence and meaning.

The fourteen sections in the story seem to be numbered in a sequential order, yet, this only contributes to the incoherency within the work. The reason why it has a fragmented form consisting of separate paragraphs is best explained in its author's own words about his view of the world:

I still remember when I first understood the purpose of paragraph. I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words. The words inside a paragraph worked together for a common purpose. They had some specific reason for being inside the same fence. This knowledge delighted me. I began to think of everything in terms of paragraphs. Our reservation was a paragraph within the United States. My family's house was a paragraph. At the same time I was seeing the world in paragraphs with genetics and common experiences to connect to each other. (Alexie 1998: 1)

The conflict of the work emerges when it is made obvious by the author that there is no reliable 'linker' between the paragraphs of the American Indian and the white, which have to be existing in the same complicated essay: that of the 'American society'. Hence, the presentation of this rather unrepresentable paradox of the fragmentation within the nature of contemporary America also serves as a means of reflecting the fragmentation within the American Indians themselves who do not exactly know where to go to find their identity: the past or the present.

The assumption that the fragmented form in *Captivity* reflects the fragmented American society and the situation of the contemporary American Indians can also be considered to get its support from Jean Baudrillard's view of postmodernism that describes postmodernism as a culture of fragmented sensations in which traditionally valued depth, coherence, meaning, originality and authenticity are dissolved amid empty signals of free-floating images which he refers to in a lecture called *The Evil Demon of Images*(1987) :

It is the reference principle of these images which must be doubted, this strategy by means of which they always appear to refer to a real world, to real objects, and to reproduce something which is logically, and chronologically, anterior to themselves. None of this is true...images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction. (Ward, 1997: 62)

Since the sections in 'Captivity' resemble such free-floating images in Baudrillard's terms, they imply no coherent relationship or logical binding. Yet, their incoherency is a major factor which gives them the freedom and 'right' to reflect the 'incoherent' nature of the society today. This supports how the author makes use of postmodernism and its fragmentation as a postmodern strategy to deal with this paradox caused by the indeterminacy of where to trace the 'real'.

### **Indeterminacy**

This indeterminacy, therefore, can be considered as the natural outcome of the multiplicity of 'free-floating' meanings in America, which to an Indian is not meaningful at all for it looks more like a superabundance of disconnected images. The author, therefore, includes a sense of indeterminacy in *Captivity* and demonstrates how the deconstructive theory of Jacques Derrida finds its form in the literature of the 'other'.

According to Derrida's deconstructive theory one should not and cannot find 'pure' knowledge outside of society, culture or language. Derrida supports the idea that language cannot point outside of itself. In other words, language is a self-referring, self-regulating system, and the text creates an illusion of coherence, which -according to deconstructionism- is a very precarious one showing that what it allows the reader to see as central is created by what the author has decided is marginal. The text is therefore partly what it is not. The conflict within *Captivity* is due to this opposing nature of the text. As is the case with any text from a deconstructive approach, the textuality of *Captivity* cannot be interpreted to find out what it is 'really saying' as it, on the contrary, 'tries to show that the grounds from which texts and theories seem to proceed are always *shifting* and *unstable*'. One way it achieves this is by recognizing the active role played by the invisible or marginalized in it while the other is by reflecting a system of imaginary oppositions'. (Ward, 1997:78)

Section 4, as quoted below, exemplifies the sense of indeterminacy due to the oppositions contained in the text:

Language of the enemy: *heavy lightness, house insurance, serious vanity, safe-deposit box, feather of lead, sandwich man, bright smoke, second-guess, sick health, shell game, still-waking sleep, forgiveness.* (Geyh et al, 1998: 343)

Derrida argues that all thought performs such arbitrary acts of splitting. Thus we habitually think with such oppositions as good/evil, inside/outside, nature/culture. One half of the distinction is always seen as inferior to, derivative of, less than, disruptive of or expressive of the other half, which in this process gets privileged as

the pure, primary presence. There is always a bias toward one term over the other (Ward, 1997: 77), and this leads one to a state of indeterminacy as is the case with the American Indian experience since the first encounters with the white.

The sense of contradiction in the above-quoted section is owing to not only its presentation of the contradiction felt between American Indians and the white but also the conflicts felt among American Indians themselves. The opposing nature of the two different societies is presented by means of including elements from each culture and using different typography. As for the presentation of the conflict felt among American Indians, one sees in the use of opposite concepts such as 'feather of lead' and 'sick health' the illustration of contradictory aspects within the American Indian culture today. The use of opposites leads the reader to feel as if the text is caught between:

'paranoia and schizophrenia, as though hesitating between conjunction and disjunction, and thus unable to render itself coherent and logical, unable to probe below the surface'. (Federman, 1993: 22)

and thus causes a sense of indeterminacy in the reader whose dilemma with the text is of consequence no different from the American Indians' predicament with the problem of their own 'reality': **forgiveness**.

Forgiveness in the American society, which is a precious emotional resource to Alexie, is a contradictory concept by nature. Having had to encounter all sorts of assimilation throughout history, it is not easy for American Indians to *forgive* all that has happened to them in America. 'There is a huge open wound.' says Alexie about the tremendous level of anger in the Indian community. 'It will never be the same as it was before', and 'healing would require apologies and reparations from the U.S. government'; but :

'It would change the whole myth of America, the **American Adam** - the rugged individual, the courageous pioneer, this whole American dream' he says. (Himmelsbach, 1996: 1)

Forgiveness is thus a keyconcept which ought to be dealt with while investigating the American Indian experience and its inevitable outcomes since it is where today's major conflict resides: the conflict felt between American Indians and the white as well as that among Indians themselves due to their recollection of the past. There is a great paradox caused by the problem of forgiveness at the heart of life in the American society as noted by Alexie in an interview in 'Sidewalk' :

If people start dealing with Indian culture and Indian peoples truthfully in this country, we're going to have to start dealing truthfully with the genocide that happened here. In order to start dealing truthfully with our cultures, they have to start dealing truthfully with that great sin, the **original sin** of this country, and that's not going to happen. (Johnston, 1999: 1)

Hence, to Alexie the unforgivable nature of the original sin of the white is merely what causes the sense of chaos in contemporary America : trying to forgive those who have committed the original sin, which is an impossible act by nature.

Similarly, the author's effort to exactly reflect this impossible act and its chaotic results is not possible. Alexie is aware of the fact that conventional strategies leading one to order and unity certainly fall short of demonstrating the sense of disorder in the present world, and thus 'instead of imitating or trying to represent this external reality, he conceives that the world is not to be *explained* but rather it is to be *experienced*. To him, the reader can experience the chaotic state of the American Indians if he/she is made to encounter similar chaos in approaching fiction.

This notion of his justifies his deliberate use of postmodern strategies that make the reader feel disorder, discontinuity and chaos. The only way out for the reader is to have his/her individual perception out of this conflicting fiction, which aims to reflect today's problem of the myth of the American Adam. Hence the only means of putting an end to fictional and spiritual *captivity* in Alexie's work is questioning Adamic innocence and revitalizing the myth of the American Indian in this 'real fictitious reality'.

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