

## Eating with More Sense than Taste

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### Abstract

*The Euroamerican conception of literature with its roots in Greek-o-Roman tradition has maintained its focus on pleasure as purpose and universalism as the necessary amplitude of creative imagination. Sherman Alexie, contrarily, believes in tribalism and considers commitment as a prerequisite of great art. His aesthetics of resistance in his poetry and fiction demonstrate a great range of experimentation violating the traditional rules of Euroamerican literary canon. His work is meant less for pleasure and more for a political challenge to the Euroamerican history of genocidal violence against Native American history and culture of tribalism. This conflict between Euroamerican and Native American civilizations runs throughout his work and his style and approach are informed by this purpose. This article on his 'aesthetics of war' studies the purposeful nature of his art for which he employs inexhaustible fund of stylistic weapons. The postmodern approach to literature favors Alexie's celebration of indigeneity and political commitment instead of universalism.*



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Eating with More Sense than Taste: Sherman Alexie's Aesthetics of 'War' for Native American Survival

... I am the

Kind of man who makes rules for himself ...

(Alexie, 1996, p. 50)

## 1. Introduction

Sherman Alexie is an aggressive postmodernist Native American, Spokane, Coeur d'Alene short story writer, novelist, poet and scriptwriter who writes with the consciousness of the proud burden of his responsibility of tribalist commitment. As a 'warrior' of tribalist representation and of the 28000-year long history of Native American civilization facing genocide since contact, he demolishes all literary traditional principles of creative writing because wars are fought often desperately (Alexie, 1996, p. 24). In his postulation of creative purpose, pleasure is a subsidiary to the political purpose of representation. To borrow his own culinary metaphor, he has to "eat / with more *sense* / than *taste*" (Alexie, 1996, p. 44). Insistence on rules, forms and genres imply that they are fixed givens as 'objective' standards and artists are to submit their 'subjectivity' to them but postmodern inquiry doubts all objectivities. This article explores Alexie's position on the 'purposeful' function of literature which conflicts with the traditional view of literature.

## 2. Literature Review

The traditional approach to literature stresses form, and pleasure ensuing from it, ignoring the socio-political purpose of literature. D.W. Lucas (1968) interprets Aristotle's catharsis as a pleasurable relief which is "the consequence and justification of tragic pleasure" (p. 275). The function of tragedy falls at the end only as a consequence of the plot, the way it develops and leads to joy. In Horace's *Ars Poetica*, the essential spirit of poetry, says Abercrombie, is something that is enjoyed (1979). Murray and Dorsch (1965) observed that Longinus' sublimity is characterized by a work's or author's ability to "amaze and transport an audience, overwhelming them with its irresistible power ... the depiction of scenes which can exceed the bounds of credibility" (pp. xlvi, xlvii). Sidney (2005) too focuses on the delightful enchantment of poetry: its basic function is to set "words ... in *delightful proportion*, either accompanied with or prepared for, the well *enchanted still of music*" (p. 131, emphasis added). To enhance pleasure, Dryden (1967) wants to modify imitation, a poet's basic function, because, he thinks, a bare imitation does not suffice to *excite the passions*, and *move admiration* (p. 6, emphasis added). This focus on pleasure comes down to Wordsworth and Coleridge (2003) who were concerned with the adaptation of rustic language for the "*purposes of poetic pleasure*" (p. vi, emphasis added). Then in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite its epochal shift, the form became all the greater concern especially for imagists – and by implication the practitioners of vorticism and futurism as well; they were mutually inter-assuring – for whom poetry should be "objective, [with] no slither" (Ayer, 2004, p. 2). T. S. Eliot's (2017) conception of the classic is based on the principles of 'maturity' of civilization, of the language and of the creative mind summed up

in such ‘formal’ characteristics of expression as objective correlative and unification of sensibility; style is a motif of his essay “What is Classic?”(p. 59).

Niall Lucy (2000) notes Friedrich Schlegel’s observation that “all poetry is or should be Romantic” (p. 11). It suggests that poetry – and by implication all literature – has to go beyond any fixity of rules and regulations to sustain its originality. It is in terms of the rejection of traditional fixities that postmodernist writing transgresses genre boundaries to challenge the established authority of arbitrary forms. Ralph Cohen (1998) observes that the term ‘genre’ does not appropriately characterize postmodernist works (p. 11) because it is “a set of expectations” between the text and the reader (Culler, 1975, p. 255). Cohen (1998) traces the roots of this assumption from Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*. Maria Corti (1978) associates these expectations with various features of addressee because every genre addresses the expectations of a certain audience and class in specific conditions (p. 18). Alexie’s works – poetry and fiction – are boldly postmodernist in their challenge to the traditional genre structure. The focus of this article is not genre structure in particular but the postmodernist approach to genre provides a rationale for all creative deviations that Alexie employs to wage and sustain his war through creative works against Euroamericanism. Amongst modernist theorists, only Bakhtin (1986) allows discontinuous structures and multiple discourses (p. 45) Culler observes that postmodern novels are “unreadable” because they flout the aesthetic contract of conventions but Cohen thinks texts remain readable despite flouting of conventions: genres being interrelated always give some basis for readability because, Cohen (1998) paraphrases Culler, “of the basic human capacity for ordering disorder” (p. 295). Lucy (2000) characterizes postmodernist art as “lack[ing] beauty (form, genre) in so far as it does not conform to a communal ideal of art as such” (p. 9). This observation is partly applicable to Alexie’s work: he does not follow the communal (Euroamerican traditional) ideal of art but it is rich in aesthetic beauty. And ‘communal ideal of art’ too must vary from community to community; it is ideological violence to suggest and impose one community’s ideal as mandatory for all communities. Alexie’s deliberate avoidance of genre classification demolishes literary hierarchies with rich aesthetic appeal and this approach is also in line with Native American orature which has traditionally been a blend of song, speech, narrative or ceremony with “quite porous genre boundaries” (Poeter & Poemer, 2005, p. 4). The ‘reasons’ and ‘purity of genres’ apply to the classical approach to literature; postmodernist descriptivist genre theory does not prescribe a fixed number of rules and kinds for authors. Rather, Warren (1949) favors the mixing of traditional kinds to produce a new one (p. 245). Clifford Geertz in his essay “Blurred Genres”(1980) enumerates a list of failure of expectations in postmodernist writings: incorporation of law court testimonies, tables and equations in history, ethnographies in the form of parables, theoretical treatises in the travelogue form, the impossible blending of poetry, fiction, footnotes and images in, for instance, Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, and so forth (pp. 165-66).

### 3. Data Analysis

Alexie’s Native American ‘warring’ aesthetics challenge the Euroamerican tradition’s Greek-o-Roman slavery. His political consciousness and commitment to his ‘tribe’/tribalism have received mixed critical comments. P. Jane Hafen (1997) comments that Alexie’s Coeur d’Alene people were not present at Wounded Knee or Sand Creek; nor can they be associated with Crazy Horse but they affected all Native American tribes (p.

73). Handley's (2007) answer to this too literal critical issue is valid for Alexie as well: it is only a poet's indigenous imagination that conceives facts of nature and history that otherwise eludes untraceable diachrony. The poet finds recourse to metaphors, figural language and indigenous imagination synchronically loyal to the land but with imaginative openness applies to other cultures and regions as well (Handley, 2007, p. 46). Gloria Bird (1998) dismisses Alexie's imaginative synthesis as distorted conglomeration and invalid comparisons. But Bird's observations lack a basic understanding of the freedom postmodern creative writers (can) enjoy, and of the Native history and collective cultural ethos. Lisa Tatonetti (2010) observes that Alexie's works and most Native American writings are marked with poverty and oppression of many reservations across the country. They manifest shared features of Plains cultures resulting from boarding schools, removal and relocation practices, the sustained growth of ritualistic dances, and the emergence of urban Indian centers (Tatonetti, 2010, p. 6). Tatonetti(2010) considers Alexie's ignoring the particularity of the Native American situation counter-productive because he, for instance, anachronistically associates Big Foot's death to 1876. This overgeneralization makes all the wars and all the peoples of color mutually replaceable. A Latina author, Cherrie Moraga (1983), observes that "the danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression" (p. 52). Both Tatonetti(2010) and Moraga (1983) may be otherwise right but Alexie's own view of the specificity of purpose and the role of his art is unambiguously particularized as he does not "try to speak for everybody. I'm one individual heavily influenced by my tribe. And good art doesn't come out of assimilation – it comes out of tribalism" (Berglund, 2010, p. 241). His concept of tribe is vast enough to include the dislocations, forced westward migrations, racial discrimination, Native Americans' bloody anti-colonial struggle, continued yielding to white domination, ideological violence and distortion of the traditional culture/s, the shared features of almost all of the tribes. Alexie takes with love and pride the burden of his 'tribe': "I'm a narcissist, as all artists and writers are," he admits, but he is keen on how he can be "of service" (Campbell, 2003. n. page).

Jeff Berglund (2010) traces the roots of Alexie's poetic process in nostalgia, not unrealistically indifferent to the contemporary Native American reality. In his interview, Alexie says that to him "Indian and nostalgic are synonymous. As colonized people ... we are always looking to the past for some real and imaginary sense of purity and authenticity" (Berglund, 2010, p. 243). As an autobiographically confessional writer, Alexie identifies with the Native American peoples. For this purpose, Nancy J. Peterson (2010) observes, Alexie's "later stories and poems ... have experimented with diverse materials and forms, often borrowing from Anglo-American, African American, and Western cultures to depict Indians on the move, bringing tribal identities and Native worldviews into urban and mixed-blood environments" (p. 10). For Alexie, imaginative writing is a tool of 'reshaping the world' (Berglund, 2010, p. 256) to replace the existing dissatisfying one. A piece of art not performing this function is just a 'tasty' report on the affairs. Therefore, his poetry and fiction violate rules of creative writing, the arbitrary rules which have got the status of tradition. "Nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a dictator ... Let Aristotle and others have their dues" but we must not thereby be prevented from conceiving discoveries of today's truth and fitness, says Atkins (1947) and demonstrates Alexie whose violation is theoretically informed: postmodernism celebrates the breakdown and failure of the "set of expectations" traditionally encoded in literary writing and reading (p. 123).

Alexie with unmitigated anger and soul wound is fighting a desperate war against the history of genocide of Native Americans and his poetry and fiction with bold experimentation are his tools to fight his desperate war. Harlan Atwater's interview in "Search Engine" is partially representative of Alexie's own theory of literary creative aesthetics. Corliss's uncle rhetorically questions her what those white people could teach her, expecting the answer: nothing (Alexie, 2003, p. 14). But Alexie himself can hardly say so as he was very well-read in Euroamerican literature. Atwater reflects Alexie's reverence-revulsion ambivalence towards white authors: Jenny Shandy, his fictional teacher, taught him 'mostly white classical poets' and he had to find for himself "the Indian poets, the black poets, [and] the Chicanos" and this enabled him to blend "the white classicism with the dark-skinned rebellion" (Alexie, 2003, p. 22). Native American worldview is characterized by an inseparable mutuality between individual and tribal life. Euroamerican individualism, contrarily, is incompatible with the Native American view of communal life: "the very idea of individual self-representation", argues Paula Gunn Allen (1986), "is fundamentally at odds with many Native American world-views" (p. 55). With his conviction in the significance of tribal roots of literature, Alexie is conscious not to get lost in the haze of universalism.

Berglund (2010) is right that anger "if left to fester [may prove] a self-destructive force" (p. xxix). Alexie (2000), conscious of this counter-productive possibility of anger, never lets it go into poetic or fictional expression without creative buoyancy; he, however, does not compromise his war either. As he is intensely conscious of his tribal commitment, he employs imagination as an instrument of his battle: "Imagination is the only weapon on the reservation" (Alexie, 2000, p. 20). This understanding of the function and utility of imagination and anger produces three interdependent compact formulas of his creative expression: "Survival = Anger x Imagination; Poetry = Anger x imagination; and therefore, Survival = Poetry" (Berglund 20). In "Why We Play Basketball" (1996), he announces his purpose: "... to know / who [is] best, who [can] / change the game into / something new" (Alexie, 1996, p. 23). This game of literary creative tradition has for two millennia been followed and endorsed by Euroamerican history of canonization. For the margins of the world, the best is not the one who continues and strengthens the tradition; the best is he who can change the rules of "the game." In this sense, Alexie himself is the best who has changed the rules of the game, and transformed literary expression into 'war' which is a game for those who can neither play it unless is a game nor they needed to in the past five centuries. For Alexie (1996), "it is war, / often desperate / and without reason" (24).

The tradition of literary criticism and theorizing, more than two millennia of well-disciplined and "reasoned" exercise, has focused on keeping it pure and without any political commitment, the focus being on pleasure rather than purpose: "It is just a game". Alexie(2009) changes it into something new, a 'war' to be fought "desperate[ly] and without reason" imposed by the genre structure and literary rules, a war with a purpose much larger and higher than slavish submission to arbitrarily established tradition. In *The Absolutely True Diary of Part Time Indian* (2009), the protagonist, Arnold Junior, draws cartoons because, in case of anyone language, a certain percentage of the audience would be able to understand him whereas if he draws a cartoon of a flower, everyone can recognize it as a flower. With this cartoon-like clarity of intelligibility, his purpose is to save his 'tribe': for Junior, his cartoons are small lifeboats to survive in the series of floods from broken dams (Alexie, 2009, p. 5). His sister, carrying a very symbolic name, Mary-Runs-Away, true to her interest in romance novels, elopes with his Montana Indian lover.

Romance with its suggestion of an alternative world, and running away as a metaphor for getting rid of their entanglements are their ways of battling. He and his sister are thought as “gone absolutely crazy” but they are “warriors” never “afraid of confrontation” (Alexie, 2009, p. 91). Alexie too might be considered “absolutely crazy”. He being at war with the Euroamerican colonial agenda of the annihilation of the American Indian culture and history, is fighting with the following conflicts: Red and White polarity of racism, Biblical ‘truth’ and Native American ‘superstition’, Euroamerican and Native American versions of history, reservation Indians and urban Indians, pre-Columbus and post-Columbus (or pre-contact and post-contact) Indians. In “Sasquatch Poems” (1996), he initiates it with two descriptions of Sasquatch, one from Meriam Webster’s ‘scientific’ definition, and the other from Robert Michael Pyle’s *Where Big Foot Walks: Across the Dark Divide* (Alexie, 1996, p. 103). As the conflict is the result of the two conflicting civilizations, Alexie questions Christianity as it was the root of Euroamerican colonial adventures. Christians take the bread and wine believing them to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ and never get the blessing of doubt that they might be just superstitions. Alexie (1996) with compassionate irony tries to bring home to the colonizers that this “colonial superstition is as beautiful / as any of our indigenous superstitions (p. 108).

Euroamerican scientific, religious, historical and philosophical discourses have been manipulating and constructing white truth and the Bible served as a rationale for their exploitative projects and Bible becomes an apt rationale and justification for that (Alexie, 1996, p. 30). Bering Strait theory is a geographical theory that ‘explains’ how Native Americans came to America from Russia. Alexie (1996) poetically challenges this pseudo-scientific claim: “Sasquatch did not cross Bering Strait” (p. 109). The elitist history’s claim that Columbus was the first sign of civilization and of “human” presence in America, Alexie’s (1996) whether Columbus reached America even prior to the Eagle (p. 76) to refute the Euroamerican version of history and civilization. To counter the claimed positivist basis of western civilization, when Grandmother is asked in “Sasquatch Poems” whether she believes in Sasquatch, she says that she does not know but “he sure do *stink*” (Alexie, 1996, p. 110, emphasis added). And then he rightly adds that “more people have seen Sasquatch than have *seen* God” (Alexie, 1996, p. 103, emphasis added). Stinking and seeing refer to empiricity of the truth of Sasquatch to assert that even from the Euroamerican scientific perspective of truth it is Sasquatch, not God, that can come up to the scientificity of truth claims. But despite that scientists cannot afford the existence of the Sasquatch because it will topple down their God (Alexie, 1996, p. 107). The whole poem sustains this conflicting contrast.

One stratagem of fighting this war is through what Peterson (2010) calls “the relationship and tension between Native and Western poetics” (p. 136). Peterson (2010) has analyzed Alexie’s poem “Defending Walt Whitman” in detail and observes that the poem’s power derives from the frictive tension which actually runs throughout his work and is the basic constitutive element of his imagination. “Song of Ourselves”, a two line poem, [“While Walt Whitman sang about his body, the still body /of one Indian grew into two, then ten, then multitudes” (Alexie, 1996, p. 20)] reflects a tension at multiple levels: this song of “Ourselves” suggesting ‘communitism’ and tribal collectivism is in sharp contrast with Euroamerican individualism announced in Whitman’s (1990) “Song of Myself” sings of “my body electric” (p. 81); between Euroamerican canon – Whitman being its strongest representative – and the Native Americans who have been fighting white genocide for red survival.

The same tension in “Search Engine” (2003) runs at many levels: between Euroamerican education and repressive and intellectually misshaping white ideological state apparatus on one hand and on the other Native American traditional worldview of history and culture; between being “raised in a matriarch[y]” and “liv[ing] in a patriarch[y]” (Alexie, 2003, p. 14); the contradiction between sending the daughter to University for white education and the conviction that their “daughter is going to save the tribe” (Alexie, 2003, p. 16); between Auden defaced with scholarly graffiti, worn and misshapen by Washington State University, “scribbled all over the margins” with notes jotted down by three generations on one hand and on the other Harlan Atwater that was never issued for any purpose (Alexie, 2003, p. 9); between working “as a loan officer for Farmers’ Bank” and the assertion that “we’re still Indians” (Alexie, 2003, p. 17); and between what University has taught Corliss about Hopkins and what her uncles believe about him. She proudly introduces him as a 19<sup>th</sup> c Jesuit poet but the uncle retorts that whites were killing Red Indians in the 19<sup>th</sup> c (Alexie, 2003, p. 13). And one more contradiction is between Alexie’s writing in English and questioning the bases of Euroamerican English canon. However, learning English for Indians was a compulsion for survival, not a choice. Alexie gives the reason of writing in English through her mother’s words in *You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me: A Memoire* (2017): she knew the indigenous ancient words which would be buried with never to be spoken again but she advisedly did not teach him that language because, she said insightfully, “English will be your best weapon” (Alexie, 2017, p. 120).

Native American poetry “remove[s] or downplay[s] any cross-cultural forces that threaten to dilute or negate its Indianness,” says Anderson (2005, p. 54). Alexie (2003) also demonstrates this tendency: in a sustained conflicting relationship, Euroamerican literary, historical and religious discourses run parallel to Native American discursivity throughout Alexie but he never lets Euroamericanism dominate Native Americans Indianness. The second strategy is Alexie’s challenge to Greek-o-Roman foundations of Euroamerican literature and civilization. When Corliss, the protagonist of “Search Engine” ventures out in search of Harlan Atwater, her beloved Native American poet in the story, she feels depressed that neither she is Odysseus nor her eight-hour journey qualifies for an Odyssey. But, she consoles herself that perhaps Odysseus too was not that heroic. Rather,

he was a drug addict and thief who abused the disabled  
... he had only one eye [and] it’s easy to elude a  
monster with poor depth perception. [He] *cheated* on  
his wife, and *disguised* himself as a potential lover so  
he could *spy* on her, and eventually slaughtered all of  
her suitors before he identifies himself. He was also a  
romantic *fool* who believed his wife stayed faithful  
during the twenty years he was missing and presumed  
dead. *Self-serving and vain*, he sacrificed six of his  
men so he could survive a monster attack. (Alexie,  
2003, p. 28, emphasis added)

Alexie (2003) reverses Homer’s hero into a “self-serving and vain cheater, and romantic spying fool” to collapse his heroism. But this deconstructionist rendering of Odysseus is meant to expose the sham civilizational mission of European colonialism for which this epic which was primarily “a powerful piece of military propaganda” laid cultural and ideological foundations. Alexie (2003) critiques Homer for transforming “a *lying colonial*

*asshole* into one of the most admired literary figures in human history” (p. 28, emphasis added).

The great amplitude of Alexie’s formal range is the third strategy of Alexie’s ‘war’. All possibilities of deviation become ‘norms’ with typical Alexien ease and his limitless mercurial experimentation lets one norm stay hardly in one poem and the next poem has its own ‘norms’ flouting all Western protocols of creative writing. And so is the case with his short stories and novels. Leibman (2005) comments on Alexie’s warring spirit in *The Summer of Black Widows* which is applicable to his other works as well: his purpose of combating Euroamericanism and the genocide of his peoples face/d within it, can be better served through “the strategies of the white world it fights – including its poetic forms” (p. 545). Each poem in his poetry collections has a different style, never reflecting the desire to be fixed and framed in a pre-defined pattern. Even in sonnets, a traditional poetic form with fixed stanza form and rhyme scheme pattern, he follows none of the dictates of the form except the number fourteen, and that number too is meant for flouting, not following, the tradition. He alternates the 14 lines between the patterns of 8+6 and 4+4+4+2 from sonnet to sonnet. The third “Totem Sonnet” runs as follows:

Crazy Horse

Sitting Bull

Captain Jack

Black Kettle

Ishi

Joseph

Qualchan

Wovoka

Anna Mae Aquash

Wilma Mankiller

Tantoo Cardinal

Winona LaDuke

Buffy Sainte-Marie

Maria Tallchief

Steamed Rice (Alexie, 1996, p. 34).

The items collected in this sonnet of apparently perfectly fourteen lines of a ‘sonnet’ are made to carry lightly the weight of the Native American history, rewritten (or semi-poetically suggested only, to be more appropriate) from the indigenous subalternist perspective. Using to the minimum the readers’ pre-understanding of what poetry is – that has spoiled their approach to the form and function of literature – Alexie weans them away to a new understanding of both form and function of literature through satisfying shock from poem to poem and from story to story and from novel to novel. He gets this effect,



says Peterson (2010), through “dynamic creative bricolage in blending Indian realities and traditional Western poetic forms” (p. 135). For Alexie semantic significance determines the form and formal deviation of a piece, poetic and fictional, which is not required for itself. Whatever synchronization between form and meaning a stylistician may ingenuously discover in Keats’ odes, one reason – howsoever naïve and simplistic it may look – is that he decided to write them in ode form and then he had to and he did stick to it. Of course, being a native speaker of English and a consummate artist, he got with ease ‘fixed’ into the pattern he had opted for. So is the case for Urdu poets’ ghazal forms and Wordsworth and Milton’s iambic pentameter, whatever delicate differences between them. But for Alexie (1996) there is no ‘have to’. He has not opted for any form that will then enslave him and bind him to say what can be said within that form. It is the pressure of meaning that pushes various stylistic deviations to a form specific to a poem:

From behind a symbolic chain link fence  
the buffalo stared  
intelligently  
at white visitors  
who soon became very nervous. (Alexie, 1996, p. 18)

The adverb ‘intelligently’ could have been placed in the previous line’s continuum but the placement of ‘intelligently’ separate from the flow is informed and determined by the force of the meaning of this word that he wants it to carry. The poem from which the above lines are taken, has been divided into four parts of three, four and five lines with the last part of two lines, but semantically they cohere well. Another example of employing a form for historically informed purpose is flame-like orthographic writing of how the lives of Native Americans been eaten up by flames of Euroamericangovernmentality:

Fire  
Follows my family  
each spark  
each flame  
a soldier  
in the U.S. Cavalry.  
(Alexie, 1993, p. 21)

Fourthly, Alexie uses ‘I’ in his poetry but it is not personal: it refers to ‘ourself’ rather than ‘myself’; it covers centuries of fishing salmon in the Spokane River. Even when he makes it explicitly biographical, a story or a poem of his family, with references to his mother and father by name, he connotes the whole Native American history. This ‘I’ can be interpreted by the inclusion of all the elements around a deictic reference: “a social relationship, a social situation and a physical world” (Scollon&Scollon, 2003, p. 3). Biographicality of Alexie’s work does not undermine its artistic value; it gives his work warmth, richness and passionate and involved understanding. He does not write with the vanity of representing the whole of mankind, or any claim to universalism because only a Spokane can rescue the poems of Spokane Indian (Alexie, 2003, p. 9). His biographicality is informed by his desire

to counter and critique “so much junk written about Indians” (Alexie, 2003, p. 22). He is “pretty autobiographical” because he is interested only in the stuff about Indians as he is “trying to help the people understand Indians” (Alexie, 2003, p. 22). Biographicality only gives tribally authentic material; seemingly personal in him becomes politically pungent and tribally representative of lived Native American experience. He feels at his best when an Indian approaches him to exclaim: “Hey, man, that poem was me; that was my life” (Alexie, 2003, p. 23). For Alexie (2003), an idea is “worth turning into a poem” if he is sure that his tribal elders would approve of it (p.22). This is Atwater’s statement which is partially applicable to Alexie himself – ‘partially’ because he maintains a duality of suggestiveness in his poetry and fiction. Although he will never forgive what colonialism did to the Native history and culture, [I am told by many / of you that I must forgive and so I shall when I am dancing / with my tribe during the powwow at the end of the world (Alexie, 1996, p. 98)], when his soul wound has got ‘almost’ recovered, his tilt is towards acceptance of whites in fiction, as in case of Arnold Junior in *Diary* (2009), learning and support come from his white friends Penelope and Gordy. But, despite that, Alexie does not lose sight of his resistant aesthetic purpose: “I, Sherman Alexie, / Am the child / Of Lillian Alexie, / who was the child / Of rape. / I, Sherman Alexie, / Am the grandchild / Of rape. / My children are / The great-grandchildren / Of rape. / All of these descendants / Exist / Because of rape” (Alexie, 2017, pp. 407-8). His corrosive but historically true irony declares the colonial rape the Book of Genesis and Adam and Eve of his wretched peoples. Personal is political for Alexie (2017). These lines are from his memoir, poetic-prose work on his family history but with corrosive connotation, he extends the amplitude of his expression from his family to his tribe, from his tribe to the colonial undoing of his culture/s, from colonial encounter with indigenous tribalism to human history till Adam and Eve. This ‘war’ has so deep history that forgiveness is betrayal. Refusing to forgive the “trespasser against the Indigenous First Nations, he announces his personal-cum-historical-cum-aesthetic program:

I’m not some charitable trust.

There are people I will hate

Even after I’m ashes and dust. (Alexie, 2017, p. 343).

#### 4. Conclusion

Postmodern aesthetics have their focus on subverting the rules of the ‘center’ and celebrating the new ones by and for the margin. Alexie is at war with the ‘type of public’ that owns and promotes the elitist ISAs, the white Euroamerican ‘class’, and the ‘social conditions’ of colonization of the Americas, and flouting of genres by mixing prose and poetry, violating the sub-genres of poetry, producing every piece with a new ‘logic’ of its own form and structure, replacing ‘overflowing spontaneity’ with self-conscious anger, inserting picturesque and cartoonist representation into the narrative of *Diary* (2009), replacing anonymity as proud universality with clear and committed autobiographicality of fiction. Alexie with aesthetic bravery tears away what Anderson (2005) calls “the trap of measuring American Indian poetry using non-Indian yardsticks” (p. 53). At war with Euroamerican hegemonic forms, his work violates rules of creative writing, the rules which were arbitrarily developed by classical tradition. His consciously sustained postmodernist writing – every piece with its own different and separate rules – deflates the superiority of

Euroamerican elitist colonial literature and its creative expectations, genre fixation and stylistic slavery.

#### **4.1. Suggestions for Future Research**

This article has briefly suggested some aspects of Sherman Alexie's aesthetics. Future researchers may produce separate articles on each of these aspects and others: i- Orthographic deviation ii- Minimalism, iii- Purposefulness of art can be treated in conjunction with other postcolonial creative writers such as Achebe, Thiong'O, and the *others* who are conscious of (or averse to this view of literature) for contrastive purpose in the paradigm of Comparatist Studies, iv- Role of and attitude to past.

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