

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### Writing the Native American: An Overview of the Works of Alexie, King and Vizenor

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**Asma Mansoor: Writing the Native American: An Overview of the Works of Alexie, King and Vizenor -- PalArch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Native American Fiction, History, Linguistic and Cultural Deracination, Identity**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This survey paper offers an overview of the primary concerns of contemporary Native American writers as they unravel what it means to be Native American in the contemporary world. It unpicks the complexities of Native American identity and its entanglements with a multi-layered past, its sense of deracination as well linguistic and cultural erasure. In so doing, it uses stories to highlight the Native American identity as a fluid construct that goes beyond its confinement within a stereotypical victimology. However, even as they negotiate with the Us/Other binary, Native American writers do not forfeit their awareness and demand for self-respect in their socio-political circumference. Story-writing is, in effect, a means for them to articulate this awareness and also to transmute it into a collective human experience.

#### **1. Introduction**

For the Native American writers, the present is not merely a temporal space, it is also a canvas which can be reconfigured to reflect the issues of the contemporary world that they live in. While the issues that the Native Americans face today are as multivalent as the hues of discrimination that they experience, my survey paper sets out to explore how these issues are not obstacles, rather they act as stimulants to not merely transcribe a present that is exceedingly fluctuant, but also to derive an understanding of the past that overarches into the future. In addition, while highlighting how these issues are creatively metabolized to create a facsimile of the present, the issues which my paper primarily addresses are the efforts of the contemporary Native American writers to create a world view that is markedly different from the normative

worldview imposed by White American discursive practices. It focuses on how contemporary literary practices are involved in dismantling the accepted historical and political discourses and affirm a more vibrant and alive Indian. In order to do so, my argument has incorporated the works of Sherman Alexie, Thomas King and Gerald Vizenor to concentrate on the afore-mentioned elements. My analysis takes on board the assumptions of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as well as those of Jacques Derrida and Homi Bhabha since the given texts function within a complex “*assemblage*” composed of “multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980:4; italics in original). Hence, this paper takes into account the various strata of multiplicities, be they political, historical or literary, within which the works of the selected writers are embedded. In this context, the premise that “Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981:4) is important. Therefore, what needs to be asked is whether these texts surpass the binaristic discourse based upon the US/Other binary and become a self-referential articulation of the Native Americans in the contemporary times and what mechanisms they deploy to map the socio-political conundrums the contemporary Native Americans experience.

## **2. Negotiating with the Past and the Present: What it Means to be Native American**

One of the major issues that is dealt with by contemporary Native American Literature is its entanglement with history and through this entanglement, its delineation of a specific Indian identity. The reason why identity and history remain so integral to each other in Native American fiction is the fact that colonization involved an abrupt, drastic and meticulous distortion of the Native American heritage. This heritage has become a part of the detritus created by the narratives of scientific advancement and prosperity that accompanied the ardent belief of the colonizers in the ‘Manifest Destiny’. The denigration and deletion of Native American culture and identity was encoded in the aphorism derived from General Sheridan's words: “*The only good Indian is a dead Indian*” (Brown, 1971:151; Italics in Original). This aphorism became the foundation stone of the ethnic and cultural holocaust to which the Native Americans were subjected. Loree Westron states:

The quest for identity is the overriding theme in the work of almost all Native writers. Four centuries of colonisation, during which children, mixed and full-blood, were taken from their homes and ‘civilised’ have scoured away nearly all remnants of traditional Indian identity. Sent to boarding schools such as that in Carlisle, Pennsylvania whose motto was ‘Kill the Indian, Save the man’, these children were no longer permitted to speak their own languages, wear their own clothes, or pray to their own gods. Imperfectly assimilated, they lost their voices and their histories, and found themselves balanced between two opposing worlds: the old world where they no longer belonged, and the new

world in which they would be no more than immigrants, always foreign, always seeking acceptance.

It is this mode of cultural and linguistic deracination that developed a sense of rootlessness and dubiety regarding identity, belonging and history that is at the heart of the works produced by Alexie, King and Vizenor etc. For Native Americans like Corliss, “Indian is easy to fake. People have been faking it for five hundred years. I was just better at it than most” (Alexie, 2003:40) because the image of a true Indian has been repeatedly etched over by the White man's discourse so that even the trace of this supposed identity has become a protean and mutable construct. For King, this Indian is a “cultural lie”; he is “a kind of a 'pretend' Indian, an Indian who has to dress up like an Indian and act like an Indian in order to be recognized as an Indian” (King, 2003:45).

This problem of representation remains at the core of the Native American identity crisis, and yet, it is out of this very crisis that Native American writers are able to generate new notions of their present identity in all its multiple hues. While it may be contested that in the process they remain mired within the Euro-American discursive matrix, this problematic dimension needs to be seen from slightly different angles. One of these is the idea of linguistic deracination. The problem with most Native Americans is that they have forcibly been made to forget their language through a coercive mode of education; hence most of them have to opt for the language of their master. In order to analyse this point, I have taken up a theoretical premise provided by Derrida in *Monolingualism of the other*. He states that language cultivates a man, hence the English language ought to constitute an Englishman. Here, the word 'Englishman' does not imply a man from the British Isles but an English speaking Euro-American. This would syllogistically lead to the assumption that if the Native American speaks in English, he too acquires the identity of an 'Englishman' *per se*. Ironically, therein lies the dilemma. Language fails to meld the Native American identity within the overarching hegemonic Euro-American discourse. When it comes to language and also culture, the Native American is an immigrant, as Corliss specifies in “The Search Engine”, “We are people exiled by other exiles . . . . We who were once indigenous to this land must immigrate into its culture . . . I somehow feel like a nomad” (2003:40).

The motif of being lost, “left and bereft” (Alexie, 2003:12) like a nomad who has been deracinated, brings to mind parallels with the contemporary existence of the diaspora, which in the words of Sten P. Moslund is an “an immense uprooting of origin and belonging, an immense displacement of borders, with all the clashes, meetings, fusions and intermixings it entails, reshaping the cultural landscapes of the world's countries and cities” (2010:2). Therefore, since the Native American's identity comes to be defined in terms of “processuality” (Moslund, 2010:22) as a consequence, it is about “becoming” (Moslund, 2010:22), a fact to which the osmotic quality of Alexie's, King's and Vizenor's narratives attests. A Native American thus becomes a migrant

between an erased past and a fractured present wherein he cannot be accompanied within any “primordial polarities” (Bhabha, 1994:4). Thus, in initiating “new signs of identity and innovative sights of collaboration and contestation”, Native American writings affirm the fact that tradition is not a “fixed tablet” (Bhabha, 1994:1-2). A Native American writer is working from the periphery, but as he signifies the demands of his peoples from the periphery, he is supported by the “power of tradition to be reinscribed” (Bhabha, 1994:2) and by the contingencies and the urgencies contouring the lives of the Native Americans in contemporary America. It is these contingencies and the urgencies which encourage a blending of the literary practices of both cultures, that of the colonizers and the colonized, a feat which is supplemented by the postmodern trends of fiction writing.

Since language is a mode of constructing reality and in Derridean terms a habitat (1998:1) that shapes an identity, so in using the language of the colonizer, Alexie's characters try to make inroads into the rulers' world like migrants as their own languages are dying out. This need is articulated by Alexie in the *First Indian on the Moon*: “One wanted cash for electricity; another wanted to repossess the English language I had rented to own” (Alexie, 1993:70). This is reminiscent of Derrida's claim “I have only one language, it is not mine” (1998:1), portraying the conundrum of belonging and yet not belonging that shapes the lives of many Native Americans. Language constitutes one's sense of the world and the sense of the self as Derrida claims: “It constitutes me, it dictates even the ipseity of all things to me” (1998:1). Hence, if a language is rented to be owned, the identity of the one engaged in renting is an unstable construct. King states:

Many no longer speak their Native language, a gift of colonialism, and the question of identity has become as much a personal matter as it is a matter of blood. N. Scott Momaday has suggested that being Native is an idea that an individual has of themselves. Momaday, who is Kiowa, is not suggesting that anyone who wants to can imagine themselves to be Indian. He is simply acknowledging that language and narrow definitions of culture are not the only ways identity can be constructed (2003: 55).

This premise of going beyond the narrow circumference of language as a means of constructing the identity of the Native Americans may be taken as an interventionary notion that induces a transformation not merely in the contemporary Native American discourses regarding themselves, but also within the way the Native Americans are learning to view themselves and their placement within the matrix of power relations and social institutions that frame their socio-political milieu. Through this transformation, Native American Literature engages with a multiplicity of issues and in this process, its textual framework imbibes the same multiplicity so that contemporary Native American Literature displays a plethoric stylistic and thematic variety. To reiterate a point mentioned earlier, Native American Literature becomes a part of the assemblage, and in doing so, it displays an “increase in the

dimensionsof a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands itsconnections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as thosefound in a structure, tree, or root”. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981:8). Native American Literature, in becoming a part of this multiplicity, becomes rhizomatic growing in all directions and in the process, not merely talking back to the colonizers, but re-configuring its past, cavorting with the present, devising its own narratives, subverting the dominant discourses and also embracing the human condition in general. A comment by Vizenor endorses the same fact:

Philosophically, I think we should break out of all the routes, all the boxes, break down the sides. A comic spirit demands that we break from formula, break out of program Suppose I am preoccupied with this theme because the characters I admire in my own imagination and the characters I would like to make myself be break out of things. They break out of all restrictions. They even break out of their blood. . . . They break out of invented cultures and repression. I think it's a spiritual quest in a way (qtd. in Hochbruck, 1992:274).

However, this does not mean that this genre of literature has dismantled all dominant discourses. What I am implying here is that in dealing with these discourses and in portraying the problems within the contemporary landscape of the Native Americans, this genre is not only functioning as a journalistic or a historical *vade mecum*, it is also endorsing the need to define solutions for these problems through their narratives which are being subjected to a process of re-writing and re-righting. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, for instance, Vizenor's characters retell their stories, and in doing so, interweave collective literary traditions, both Native American and Euro-American, within their narratives: “We are created in stories, the same stories that hold our memories and thousands of generations in these stones” (1991:14).

### 3. Reconstructing Myths, Histories and Stories

In such a scenario, history, myth, stories, movies need to be reconstructed and modified according to the changing paradigms of life. In an interview, Vizenor claimed that:

Telling a story is as “dangerous” as hunting — dangerous because your life depends on seeing and catching something. It's dangerous because it's an encounter with the unknown — something generally understood, but specifically unknown that may come together, alive or present in the telling or the hunting. To hunt, to tell stories, to write is dangerous. It's also survivance (McCaffery, Marshall & Vizenor, 1993:54).

Therefore, in the mutatingcontemporary world, “The best weapon are the stories and every time the story is told, something changes. Every time a story is retold, something changes” (Alexie, 2007: 99). In *Flight*, when Alexie modifies language and blurs borders among genres, he is not merely a Spokane Indian, he is also a man trying to defy all fixities associated with the notion of

Native American identity. He presents this identity to be as malleable a construct as of any individual in today's world, characterised with the same nomadic outlook that is a feature of the postmodern existence.

In narrating their stories, the characters presented by Native American writers strive to rise out of constraining discourses and stereotypes. That is why King contests the Biblical stories that create a “universe governed by a series of hierarchies”, and supports the “Native story” where “the universe is governed by a series of co-operations — Charm, the Twins, animals, humans — that celebrate equality and balance” (King, 2003:23-24).

This endorsement of equality and balance, however, does not confine the Native American identity within a binaristic argument. That is why when Vizenor's characters declare: “The notion of tribal sovereignty is not confiscable, or earth bound; sovereignty is neither fence nor feathers. The essence of sovereignty is imaginative, an original tribal trope, communal and spiritual, an idea that is more than metes and bounds in treaties” (1991:7), they are no longer vacillating between “primordial fixities”, rather by deliberately embracing the state of the “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994:2-4) that allows the generation of multiple and inclusive modes of representation. In the process of its negotiating a new identity, Native American Literature does not merely invert and subvert the classical and the accepted modes of the Western literary tradition, it also introduces “other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition” (Bhabha, 1994:2). Hence, contemporary Native American Literature is not merely engaged in exploring the past, or in activating the trace of its history, but in reconfiguring it in such a way that it remains an open system, resistant to foreclosure. In this way also the Native American narrative becomes a rhizomatic structure, radiating outwards in multiple directions, generating multiple ideas. That is why, most of these narratives are of a postmodern character as they deal with what Lyotard has termed as “*fracta*” (1984:60; Italics in Original). In this context, the Native American is no longer merely confined within his racial paradigms. He also becomes the scion of the human race, partaking within contemporary humanity's dealing with a non-linear historical narrative. For instance, Erdrich's stories are narrated by multiple characters from multiple perspectives. Keeping this point in mind, an observation by Salman Rushdie given in the context of the Indian diasporic writers, may be applied here in order to hypothesize in the context of Native American writers. Rushdie posits that presenting a new experience within a liminal Third Space, where concepts and constructs are no longer stable offers a way of echoing in the form of our work the issues faced by all of us: how to build a new, 'modern' world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one. But whatever technical solutions we may find, . . . we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of ‘whole sight’ (1991:19).

Hence, heteroglossia and multiple narrators abound in contemporary Native American Literature to deal with the “undecidables” (Lyotard, 1984:60) that contour the Native American existence in the fluctuant and liminal space of the present. In presenting these multiple voices, Alexie, King and Vizenor activate the spiritual and the corporeal dimension of experience, negating the body-mind dualism that has, since the Enlightenment, characterised the Western mode of thinking and re-affirm a “psychic wholeness” (McCracken, 1998:35) which sees the sacred and the profane bound together. This demands that both their own people and the dominant culture hear their voices and their notions of the “sacred space[s]” (Alexie, 2003:22) that have been suppressed and repressed by the dominant capitalistic culture.

In the context of their stereoscopic vision, Native American writers bring the past and the present on the same plane so as to question both, however, the stress has now fallen on the construction of the present, as Native Americans deal with racial profiling, unemployment and alcoholism. In dealing with these issues, Native American writers explore solutions for their predicaments and these solutions are as multiple as their causal problems. In doing so, they are constructing a literary tradition that is trying to rise out of binaries and presents new ways of expressing their current selves that embrace both their White and Native American heritage. Vizenor's characters play with the human genome to cure sickness in children, embracing scientific developments, new age panaceas, and recondite shamanistic traditions, dismantling the barriers between them, holding all fixities and unities up to scrutiny:

The genome narratives are stories in the blood, a metaphor for racial memories, or the idea that we inherit the structures of language and genetic memories; however, our computer memories and simulations are not yet powerful enough to support what shamans and hand talkers have inherited and understood for thousands of years (Vizenor, 1991:136).

The alternative to the erasure of local traditions is thus presented through their re-configured collimation with contemporary narratives and discourses, thus, in the terms of Bhabha, a new tradition is being made. The Native American may decry his peripheral position as an immigrant into the dominant culture, yet, at the same time, it is the same peripheral position that is becoming the plane for a more unique way of theorising and framing his socio-political experience in contemporary America. Writing and narrating stories thus becomes a way for the modern-day Native American to explore their contemporary condition, and not merely challenging the dominant discourses of history and demythologizing them, but presenting alternative versions. For instance, an alternate history is presented by Alexie and Vizenor, while King modifies the creativity narratives. In *First Indian on the Moon*, history is questioned and inverted through references to the media as the Native Americans search for their own heroes: “As they wheel Christopher Columbus into an examining room, all the Native American employees shout in unison ‘ Christopher Columbus, you've found us!’” (Alexie, 1993:95).

The media, specifically in Alexie's work, becomes an emblem of Christopher Columbus as well as of Custer and the need to set historical records right, freeing it from the worldview of the White Capitalist. Freedom, for the Native Americans is like an inverted Statue of Liberty where race determines their identity and the main reason why they have incurred so much hate. Similarly, in presenting Columbus as originally a migrant from the New World into the Old World (Vizenor, 1991:38), Vizenor does not merely subvert historical facts, he also blurs the boundaries between the races, specifically in Columbus' surrender to the exotic Samarra. Samarra is almost an Oriental creature with her golden breasts and sensual movements. Through Samarra, the New World becomes an extension of the exotic Orient that had to be domesticated. Ironically, in this narrative, it is Columbus who is domesticated since "Columbus is ever on the move in our stories" (Vizenor, 1991:11). The Native American identity is thus a blend of the identities of the conqueror and the conquered. Therefore, in re-presenting the history of Christopher Columbus, Native American writers endorse the need to re-visit their condition from an alternative position. While an established critique would posit that Native American writers do not, strictly speaking, break the Western stereotypes of the Native Americans that have emanated out of popular literature and the media, however, an alternative way of viewing this issue is that Native American writers take on these stereotypes and through a literary ingress challenge the very sources of those stereotypes. For instance, Alexie's characters might be lost on the reservation or they may drown in puddles, yet through narrating the stories of their conundrums, Alexie's work endorses the need to go beyond their confinement within a stereotypical victimology. Identity for Native Americans becomes a protean or mutable construct since it is the West that has imposed the notion of an authentic Indian, and ironically the Indians themselves try to fit into that stereotype. In order to negotiate with these stereotypes, writers like King and Alexie blend lowbrow culture and highbrow culture, references to Columbus and Native American heroes like Crazy Horse as well as cinematic techniques that are markedly reminiscent of Hollywood cinematography. These are evinced in the writings of King and Alexie, as they refer to the *Godfather* movies, Al Pacino, John Wayne, Will Rogers etc., all bespeak of an inclusionary approach towards all the cultural stimuli that have gone into framing and shaping the contemporary Native American.

In knitting together all these cultural stimuli, the postmodern narrative techniques provide a plane for these writers to function as tricksters. As a matter of fact, according to Katalin Birone Nagy, Vizenor "utilizes trickster freedom in every aspect of his narrative, displaying playfulness in the postmodern fashion" (2008:245). In viewing Western historiography as a "pastiche" (Nagy, 2008:246), a feat engaged in by Alexie and King as well, this technique displays "a postmodern playing with genres and generic limitation (Nagy, 2008:246), that also allows the engagement of the Native treatment of narratives that are not bound within any fixity. In re-narrating the creativity myths in order to subvert the predominant Christian narratives, what becomes obvious is that the characters he presents have inherited a wider



spectrum of historicity, a mixed tradition expressed in vast and highly divergent agglomeration of narratives as the following quotation from *Green Grass, Running Water* implies:

“Perhaps Hawkeye should tell the story”.

“Perhaps Ishmael should tell the story”.

“Perhaps Robinson Crusoe should tell the story” (King, 1994:10).

References from Herman Melville, *The Bible* and the American media, all lead to the articulation of an urgency within the contemporary Native American to devise some paradigm within which he would be able to analyze his sense of rootlessness and identity crisis. This paradigm involves a re-perusal of the past vis-à-vis the present demanding an existence of mutual coexistence in the present. A classic example is the “Secret Love Songs Which Include the Collected History of The United States of America” where, Alexie rather poetically endorses this need:

I blamed your arrogant grandfathers

for the flames and you

blamed my grandfathers

and their predictable anger

...

My grandfathers and your grandfathers

would have hated each other, traded

only insults and gunfire

but we chose to love (1993: 62).

In doing so, Native American writers like Alexie try to bind all of humanity, yet he is fully aware of race as an unbreakable barrier dividing all people, encoded in the DNA. The same fact reinforces itself in an interview that Vizenor gave to Larry McCaffery and Tom Marshall where he comments on the similarities between his depiction of the trickster figure of Nanabozo and its similarities with the Chinese trickster figure, the Monkey King as “both show how the beginning of life comes from something substantial, like a rock” (1993:50). The stones have absorbed and recorded history, a history that comes in direct conflict with the official historical narratives. And yet, in sharing similarities with the Chinese trickster figure, Nanabozo, and other Native American tricksters becomes a part of a collective human heritage. Embedded within this “collective unconscious” (Jung, 2003:2), these stories are not confined within the binarist discourse, rather, they branch out into the

“common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us” (Jung, 2003:2). In becoming a part of this substrate, Native American literature becomes a rhizome, radiating outwards in multiple directions, inwards and outwards. A rhizome, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a “*map*” (1981: 12; Italics in Original). The reason why, in my view these texts are like a rhizomatic map can be explained in the light of the following notion provided by Deleuze and Guattari:

The map . . . is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. . . . A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same'(1981:12)

In arching backwards and forwards in time, in integrating myths and historical facts, blending the local with the global literary traditions, these texts defy hierarchical patterns and become integrated with their world in the pattern of a map or a skein. Maps establish connections which can be altered and re-drawn. In the unstable contemporary world, these texts too are repeatedly negotiating their connection and placement, and can be seen as art or a socio-political act or both. Therefore, in functioning as maps and rhizomes, these texts can be viewed from various angles and the issues they depict are open and receptive to multiple interpretations.

That is why, in rising out of the binaristic discourse of the Us/Other, Native American writers do not forfeit their awareness and demand for self-respect in their socio-political circumference. Story-writing is, in effect, a means for them to articulate this awareness and also to transmute it into a collective human experience. Story telling is an act since, “To every action there is a story” (King, 2003:29). Stories, being articulated through language, thus become the means for Native American writers to contest the dominant discourses and induce their own narratives within the dominant discourses. Commenting upon Alexie's work, P. Jane Hafen has stated that Alexie's work is a “fusion of historical sensibilities and grim realisms of contemporary Indian life” (1997:71). This comment is equally applicable on Vizenor and Thomas King as historical sensibilities are continually shaping their narratives.

In the works of Native American writers, one finds a subversion of a number of Western constructs. These include gender performativity, socio-cultural identity, historical facts, stereotyping in popular culture which all go hand in hand, in enabling this genre to emerge as a facsimile of the cultural meiosis that is contouring and mobilizing the sense of identity and placement of the contemporary Native American as he deals with a multiplicity of obstacles. The Biblical narratives are playfully subverted as the Christian God's standing as the transcendental signified is challenged. The Christian God and colonialism go hand in hand as avarice and greed united to displace the Indian:

First Woman and Ahdamn eat those apples and that pizza and that fry bread. Old Coyote eats those hot dogs and the melon and the corn. That GOD fellow doesn't eat anything. He stands in the garden with his hands on his hips, so everybody can see he is angry.

Anybody who eats my stuff is going to be very sorry, says that GOD. There are rules, you know.

I didn't eat anything, says old Coyote.

Christian rules (King, 1994:73).

Gender roles are also destabilised as the Native American myths present a woman, Charm (King, 2003:20), as the creator of the world, and in doing so, a message is given which is not merely relevant to the Native American condition, but for collective humanity as well. In this collective humanity, differences are never erased, and yet they do not become the source of racism:

Basil Jonston, the Anishinabe storyteller, [. . .] , describes the role of comedy and laughter in stories by reminding us that Native peoples have always loved to laugh: "It is precisely because our tribal stories are comical and evoke laughter that they have never been taken seriously outside the tribe . . . But behind and beneath the comic characters and the comic situations exists the real meaning of the story . . . what the tribe understood about human growth and development. (King, 2003:23).

It is the understanding of the tribes anchored in ages old wisdom that these writers have brought forth in order to present the disastrous impact of their racial alienation that is so very mathematically calculated by the government. As the dominant narratives produced by mainstream America denied them their humanity, Native American writers affirm not only their own humanity but also that of their opponents. It is for this reason that Zits, one of Alexie's notable characters, can be adopted by Whites and thus develop a bond with the race that has historically suppressed them.

In dealing with the undecidables of their lives through their stereoscopic vision, Native American writers play with the palimpsest of history through the engagement of hybridity as a mode of cultural dialogue, as do Alexie, Vizenor and Thomas King. For example, Alexie's character Corliss, in her estimate of race issues, hates the "collective lack of ambition" her family displays, she fears and hates the White people (Alexie, 2003:13-14) and feels like a White Jesuit priest. She does not belong to her people and yet she does not belong to the world of the Whites either: a "stranger" (Alexie, 2003:31), that is what they all have become. At the same time, the idea of a "constructed" and "visual" Indian identity is also contested as they endorse the need of not imagining the Indian as "dying or particularly noble" but to see Indians as "contemporary as well as historical figures" (King, 2003:41-43).

In order to meet this objective, postmodern narrative techniques are deployed which include their attempts to “break out of conventional narrative, break away from established language forms, and from the beginning they have sidestepped the formal patterns judged typical for Native American fiction” (Hochbruck, 1992:274). The reason why Native American writers engage in a postmodern form of writing is because the conditions under which these stories are narrated are never the same and they are connected with the oral tradition which is a “free floating signifier” (McCaffery, Marshall & Vizenor, 1993:54) whose effect depends largely upon who is present. Through the postmodern narrative, the Native American writer is affirming his “survivance” (Vizenor, 1991:3) which not only involves survival and “showing that I’m a survivor of victimization, for example - but also inventing a world view. It’s an attitude of play - lay in a very serious sense. Survivance is the end of domination in literature. It’s also a new kind of existentialism, a source of identity” (McCaffery, Marshall & Vizenor, 1993:54). This identity is multivalent, crafted through the poetics of dialogue (Ridington, 1998:346) so that through the narration of stories, the characters create the world they live in. Through the oral tradition which is adaptable to the postmodern narrative techniques, the native American writers talk the world into being and out of their stories emerge their own conventions of theorizing both their narratives and their issues in life (Ridington, 1998:346). In a way, Vizenor is correct in assuming that the Native American oral tradition of storytelling is in effect “Premodern postmodernist” (McCaffery, Marshall & Vizenor, 1993:53) as their ancient modes of narrating stories transpose into the postmodern modes of narration so that these narratives burrow their way across multiple issues and narratives as they make an effort to construct a Native American identity, discourse, history and story that is more commensurate with the needs of the contemporary world within which they reside.

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