



Storytelling – In Our Minds and in the Classroom.
A Narratological and Didactic Analysis of Sherman Alexie's
***The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993).**



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*I remember a place
Where I'd never been
Across time and space and sea.*

*I hear Besta's voice
Trembling with magic
Bringing that place to me.
(Faythe Dyrud Thuren)*



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1. Introduction

Once upon a time, in a secondary world, long, or not so long ago... This might have been an appropriate introduction to this thesis, reflecting its main concern, namely storytelling. It would, however, fail to indicate its academic nature and didactic aim. Thus, a more narratological approach will be a better reflection of its true nature, a narratological approach which connects narratives with reality and the classroom through a coherent line called didactic. *Atlantic Monthly Press* claims on the cover of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*¹ (1993) that Sherman Alexie is a modern mythmaker, and I strongly agree; he is a storyteller with a firm belief in the power of storytelling. They furthermore write that what is explored in *The Lone Ranger* is the “distance between people: between Indians and whites, reservation Indians and urban Indians, men and women, and, most poetically, between modern Indians and the traditional figures from their past.” This is a good description, in my opinion, of a collection that explores the nature of relationships between people and these characters’ struggle to find an autonomous modern identity.

My claim is that by studying literature and the structures in literature, one may come to new understandings useful to our conception of the world and how we view ourselves. Hence, literature has a legitimate place in second language teaching. My aim is to simplify the theories of narratology to make them more accessible in order to make possible a practical use of the findings in the analysis in the classroom. In addition, it will reflect my view of literature as a piece of art which reflects a reality outside the fiction and also this composite of short stories, Sherman Alexie as a writer and his didactical voice as a storyteller. It will furthermore illustrate why Alexie’s fiction in particular should be included in the curriculum in Norwegian secondary schools. The main focus will be the complex narration and focalization and also the narrative structure of several of the short stories that appear as frame stories with several embedded narratives which serve to boost themes of personal and collective crisis, “hurricanes,” the social situations for Native Americans, and, above all, the theme of storytelling and the didactical power of the storyteller’s voice. The view of literature as a means through which one may understand life and develop as a human being must also be reflected in the teaching. By placing a teaching plan for these findings in the Didactic Relationships Model and the national curriculum, I will address several aspects of teaching.

¹ Hereafter shortened to *The Lone Ranger*.

This, in turn, will ensure a well reflected teaching consistent with both the core and the subject specific curriculums' aim to teach language, communication and culture and to inspire the pupils to develop as reflected human beings. My approach will mostly be the vertical structure which will reveal a more in depth, more hermeneutic, analysis to answer the question, in what ways are the events presented and how does that contribute to the meaning of the narrative? An analysis of the vertical structures alone, however, is not sufficient to account for meaning, so where appropriate, the horizontal structure will also be discussed. To understand the meaning of a narrative it is essential to allow oneself to follow the horizontal structure through an implicit vertical structure.

Before I begin my analysis of Alexie's *The Lone Ranger*, I will briefly present the leading theories on the field of narratology, mostly those of Mieke Bal. More specifically, I will explain how a hermeneutic approach will reveal how narratology can be didactic, and how information and knowledge can be presented as a narrative. I will also present the elements of narration and focalization, and those of frame stories and embedded narratives. My aim is to simplify the theories in order to make them more accessible to those readers who are not narratologists, but who for several reasons are interested in critical analysis of literature. For me and teachers alike, this approach will make possible a practical use of the findings in the analysis in the classroom in both lower and upper secondary school. My aim, however, is not to oversimplify, but keep the high academic standard provided by Bal and wrap them up in a more common demonstration.

I will also briefly present Sherman Alexie. Though not necessarily vital for the analysis of the short stories in themselves, a biographical presentation of the author may be included in a teaching scheme in the classroom and provide the background information needed to view his writing as literature which reflects a reality outside the fiction and Sherman Alexie as a writer; a writer who explores the terrain of reservation life where anger times imagination is the ascribed method for survival, a reality in which Alexie has taken on a similar role of a storyteller and trickster employed in his fiction. Exaggeration and humor, commonplace details and vivid imagery are hallmarks of Alexie's style. Though often labeled "postmodern" it, in fact, mirrors the oral Native American storytelling tradition. His use of humor and irony and exaggerated stereotypes of Native Americans is a written representation of an oral form in which the trickster figure functions as a comic trope to challenge the order of things: "Making fun of things or being satirical [...] is a tool that enables me to talk about anything. It makes

dialogue possible” (Alexie: *A World of Story-Smoke*). Furthermore, it leads to the last part of the essay which is of a more didactic character. The view of literature as a means through which one may understand life and develop as a human being must also be reflected in the teaching. The last part of the essay will make use of the findings of the analysis in a didactic manner by presenting an example of how my study may be placed in the school curriculum in Norway. In order to do this, I will approach the task having a didactic model of relationships in mind. I will comment on how this material can be placed in the Didactic Relationships Model in order to develop a teaching plan which will take into considerations several aspects of teaching. This, in turn, will ensure a well reflected teaching, one that will make possible to develop theories based on praxis, a praxis theory. The reason for this approach is that I recognize in myself and my colleagues and fellow students an emotion depicted well by Julia Alvarez, though in another setting, which is the primary emotion the first years in the profession for many new teachers as they idealistically enter the school ground. We “were thrown in the deep end of the public school pool and left to fend for ourselves. Not everyone came up for air” (62). As Paulo Coelho so eloquently puts it: “What drowns a person is not the dive, but the fact of staying under water” (*Warrior of the Light*).

1. 1 Narratological Didactics and Didactical Narratology.

The reason both for studying literature and teaching literature is because a story may only be given its sense from the world that is using it. Outside the story is the world. One may understand a story with the conception one has of the world and one may use the story, if one is able or willing to learn how to, to understand the world. My claim is that by studying literature and the structures in literature, one may come to new understandings which are useful in our conception of the world and in that sense narratology is didactical. In the quest for a growing awareness in one’s pupils, this understanding of narratology must be applied with words as adequate as possible at a level as appropriate as possible in order to make each pupil able to enlarge his or her own understanding of the world through the world of literature. To achieve this goal, we need to communicate an understanding of the narratological techniques and tools through the means of the theory and methodology of didactics.

The aspects of interest in this essay are both of narratological and pedagogical character. Even though the main part will treat the narratological aspects, my aim is to have both in mind

throughout the analysis. Therefore, the connection between the two will be implicit throughout. This is also what I find that the work in question does and it is what I believe literature in general does even though it is easy to “forget” this reality while diving into a technical narratological analysis. This essay will concentrate, therefore, mainly on the small narratological aspects which, in my opinion, are the most prominent in *The Lone Ranger*. Although setting and characterization and how those interconnect with the theme are also interesting, I will merely touch upon these subjects in this essay.

The main focus, however, will be the complex narration and focalization and also the narrative structure of several of the short stories in the collection which appear as frame stories with several embedded narratives and how this contributes to a very visual presentation of the stories. This makes it relevant to distinguish between the narrative perspective and the focal point. I will focus on this by looking at themes of personal and collective crisis, “hurricanes,” the social situations for Native Americans, and, above all, the theme of storytelling and the storyteller. It is precisely through storytelling and the voice of the storyteller, that Alexie makes his stories both entertaining and didactical. In my opinion, one should strive to achieve this kind of voice in the classroom as well, the voice of the storyteller. In Alexie, the personal level of the themes can be seen as a representation of themes on a collective level. The projection from the personal levels onto a collective level is done through the subtle means of narrative techniques and the use of nature imagery. As for the movie *Smoke Signals* (1998) based on the works treated in this essay, it is only mentioned simply as an example of one didactic method although a narratological study of movies would be an interesting study on its own.

The overall purpose of this essay is to make an academically and theoretically based reflection which may be useful in the classroom. Therefore, the reflections are based on teaching literature in general and Native American literature specifically, but may also be applied to teaching in general and how storytelling is one of the many didactic methods which may and should be applied in the classroom. The syllabus in English in Norwegian lower secondary school is most often arranged thematically. Native American writers and/or interviews with Native American pupils of the same age may be included in different topics or arranged as a topic on its own, dealing with only Native Americans, containing cultural and historical facts as well as Native American literature, in which case this thesis will be highly applicable. It may also be especially useful in teaching critical analysis in general. The latter

is what I have chosen to have my focus on which is reflected in the teaching scheme provided in the appendices.

The reason for this interest in storytelling is based both upon my experience as a student and as a teacher. Teachers that still stand out in my mind from my own period as a pupil in lower secondary school more than twenty-five years ago are those who mastered the skill of telling stories. Little did I reflect on the didactic aspect of these stories back then. From my experience as a teacher, however, my reflection on my own teaching led me to strive to present a new topic in my English classes in the most interesting way as possible for the pupils. This, in turn, was caused by my observation of how the work with one topic was fruitful or not, depending enormously upon how we entered it.

Not all information can be presented in the form of a story and storytelling cannot be the only method by which to teach. The question I asked, however, is why my teaching often worked when storytelling was one of the pre-chosen methods, meaning that the pupils learned something of course, and why other sessions seemed to be fruitless when it came to the learning outcome of the pupils even when I was well prepared. Like I said, storytelling cannot be the only method of choice and the topics must be further presented and worked with, i.e. with various fictional and documentary clips, i.e. from YouTube, which not only serve as a continued presentation of the story, but also acknowledge the fact that pupils may acquire knowledge in different manners. Some may be visual and some auditory learners, or both, to name a few learning styles. Therefore, the pupils have to work with different kinds of assignments with the aim of making them assimilate the information in the story into new knowledge. Also, as the editors point out in *Veiledning i tilpasset opplæring* (2009), variation and differentiation is a vital necessity in the Norwegian school: “In the Norwegian school, the pupils are together no matter what their learning abilities are. The diversity of pupils we find within one class makes it essential to vary the approach to the curriculum and to offer the pupil many various ways to work with the subjects”² (6).

² My translation of Sandal et. al.: “I den norske grunnskolen går elevene sammen uansett læreforutsetninger. Det mangfold av elever vi finner innenfor en skoleklasse, gjør det påkrevet å variere innfallsvinkler til lærestoffet og å tilby elevene mange ulike måter å arbeide med lærestoffet på.”

The significance of storytelling in teaching, however, is not merely a claim of mine. The very genre of short stories has its origin precisely in the oral storytelling. The Norwegian fairytales, a great part of our cultural inheritance, often had a moral lesson to teach. Even before that, the skaldic art of the Vikings, another part of our Norwegian cultural inheritance, employed the proud and acknowledged art of storytelling precisely because “the way of teaching is to tell stories” (Silko, *An Interview*) and when information, scientific, technological, historical, religious, is put into narrative form, it is because “it is easier to remember that way.”

Furthermore, the Vikings even had their own famous trickster, the Norse God Loki who, for the most part, was malicious. He challenged the structure and order of the Gods but was necessary in order for things to change. A prime example from the fairytales is Espen Askeladden as the naïve hero who, because he was good, ended up with the princess and half the kingdom although his methods were not always honorable. Usually, the trickster is a figure, most often male, who appears in stories as cunning or foolish and often funny and who contributes, not always intentionally, to the well being for the community. Trickster stories often have a didactic purpose, a moral lesson to teach. He appears in many cultures’ folktales and often in Native Indian mythologies, also as a hero. Often, he has a two-spirited nature, the ability to change form and even magical powers. Somewhere along the historical path, we seem to have lost this notion of storytelling as a didactic method and we are left with merely the entertaining aspect of it. In his writing, Alexie plays upon this part of an old oral tradition and uses it in order to convey serious issues in a humoristic way. Thereby, he both softens the blow of his social commentary and makes the pain of difficult life experiences a little more bearable.

I do acknowledge that many teachers apply storytelling as one of their teaching methods, consciously or subconsciously. One person, however, who claims have actually found theoretical basis from another science than narratology to support the notion of storytelling as a powerful tool to teach, is Associate Professor Brian Sturm at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He claims that telling stories is a way of organizing information and perhaps the most powerful way: “Stories and storytelling is a way of thinking about information. Storytelling is really a way to convey emotions and build community. That’s fundamentally what telling a story and listening to a story is all about. ” What Sturm illustrates, is that when you put a narrative shell around information, and do it well, it allows the reader to enter a different space. J. R. R. Tolkien calls this other space “The Secondary World.” This other place, this “Secondary World,” is what authors try to create when they

write because if you don't have the stories "you don't have anything" (Silko, *Ceremony*: 1). Sturm furthermore claims that by listening to a story, the listener enters a slightly altered state of consciousness, similar to theories of the experience of listening to music. He offers a model he calls The Storylistening Experience in which the experience of listening to a story is explained. According to this model, the altered state of consciousness is a state in which the listener fixates the logical part of the brain, the left hemisphere, and free up the visual and spatial part of the brain, the right hemisphere. This, in turn, actually helps the reader to become immersed in the story because the brain thereby programs the listener to visualize the story.

1. 2 Introductory Summary

My claim is that by studying literature and the structures in literature, new understandings of how we view life and ourselves may emerge and therefore literature needs to be given a significantly larger space in second language teaching than what has been the tradition in Norwegian schools. I will briefly present the leading theories on the field of narratology, mostly those of Mieke Bal. I will explain how a hermeneutic approach will reveal how narratology can be didactic, and how information and knowledge can be presented as a narrative. This approach is chosen because of my desire to make possible a practical use of the findings in the analysis in the classroom. The main focus will be the complex narration and focalization and also embedded narratives. The themes of personal and collective crisis, the social situations for Native Americans, and the theme of storytelling and the didactical power of the storyteller's voice are brought forth by these narrative techniques. I will also present Sherman Alexie as a writer. Alexie is a writer who explores his life experience as a Native American and who has taken on a similar role of a storyteller and trickster employed in his fiction as a means to survive reservation life through exaggeration and humor, mirroring the Native American storytelling tradition. My aim is to have both a narratological and a pedagogical approach throughout the analysis and therefore, the connection between the two will always be implicit, much similar to Alexie's work. This thesis offers a narratological approach which connects narratives with reality through a coherent line called didactic. After a thorough analysis of seven of the short stories in *The Lone Ranger*, the findings will be placed in a teaching scheme to illustrate the practical purpose of the analysis.

2. Narratology

Although a different approach, the theories of Stur姆 based on the science of neuralgia, is not so farfetched to claim as one argument in this analysis, neither on the part of the pedagogical aspect of it, though probably more obvious, nor the narratological aspect of it. Not only is literature, needless to say, given meaning from the world outside literature, Bal recognizes how the science of narratology must likewise incorporate meaning from “the world outside” narratology. Even though cultural sciences have as their object the functioning of communication itself and only study the problems in the communicative system, arguments in a narratological study “can be borrowed from perception, from the empirical base, but just as well from other fields, such as the logic of technical and social implications” (*On Story-Telling*: 33-34). Furthermore, that it is important in analyzing the narratological techniques in a work not to forget the “discursive aspect of the cognitive process” (30) as it is, after all, a cognitive process to write and a cognitive process to read and interpret.

Bal renders Wilhelm Dilthey hermeneutic understanding of knowledge as “the projection of the self into something external, in such a way that an unfamiliar or past experience is represented in the experience of the self” (*On Story-Telling*: 31). Furthermore that self-understanding, “indispensable to a social communication that can meet these demands, is constituted at the intersection of the mutual intersubjective understanding of others and the intersubjective understanding of oneself. This is why self-reflection has a socially indispensable critical function.” Alexie recognizes and acknowledges that self-reflection has this socially indispensable critical function in *The Lone Ranger*, both overtly and covertly. This will be revealed through a hermeneutical approach to a narratological analysis of the collection. The characters struggle with an unfamiliar or past experience which is reflected in their perceptions of the self and that of the community. That is what constitutes their “hurricanes” or “skeletons.” Those who are allowed to have an autonomous self seem to have a large degree of self-reflection. In addition, the collection seems to encourage self-reflection and the subjective responsibility to acquire knowledge of one’s individual and collective past and present in order to assert both an individual and communal identity. “There is an abyss between a (lived) situation and its linguistic expression” (*On Story-Telling*: 32) Bal claims, and so does the narrator and focalizer, Junior, recognize in “Family Portrait” when he says that each story seemed to change “with each telling until nothing was recognizable or aboriginal” (192). In order for the characters in the universe of the story to assert a collective

and personal autonomous identity, the use of self-reflection and self-understanding in a social communication is crucial. Otherwise, as illustrated in the diegesis, the individual is lost, exemplified for instance by Victor in “All I Wanted to Do Was Dance.” He had been figuratively lost for forty years but “he wasn’t going to save anyone. Maybe not even himself” (90). This is part of what the author wants to communicate to the reader, and therefore why a hermeneutical approach to literature always must be present, implicitly or explicitly. This connection to a narratological analysis is precisely what Bal refers to in *On Story-Telling*:

Hermeneutical understanding is in this sense indispensable. The hermeneutic corresponds to the distance which the human subject must both maintain and express between itself – that is, its identity and its structures in the history of (its) life – and its objectifications. Without this distance, the subject risks being reified by those to whom it addresses itself, since it would be identified with what it expresses. But without the hermeneutic, the distance would remain irreducible, intersubjectivity would be destroyed, social life impossible, the individual lost. (32)

Technical mastery alone cannot make any sense without reflection, and is therefore purposeless on its own right. Furthermore, reflection which is not based on technical models which contribute to the structuring of a narrative makes incomplete explanations. Thus, the two must go hand in hand in critical analysis of literature as they are equally indispensable. The connection between narratology, literature and life must not get lost in the process of analyzing because a story will only be given its sense of meaning from the world that is using it. In turn, the very purpose of critical analysis of texts is to make use of the story to understand the world at one level or another. Posited as a critique of modern approaches such as structuralism, positioning hermeneutics all the way on the other side of the axis and totally separate from it, Paul Ricoeur once said that narrative ordering is “a fundamental human experience, a way of structuring human existence in time and of opening up for the possibility of meaningful action” (35). That is precisely what constitutes the power of storytelling. Social expectations are part of the socialization process which takes place continually and it is precisely the trouble of identifying oneself which leads to the personal and collective identity crisis in humans, their “hurricanes.” This is because “social interaction goes on at the level of signs” (Bal, *On Story-Telling*: 38) and because the “possession of signs makes possible the representation of authority, and assures the possessor a place in the ideology under formation.” Storytelling is “a way to convey emotions and build a community” (Sturm).

2. 1 Focalization and Narration

Although what leads to the action of narratives are the characters, and therefore is most commonly analyzed, other aspects of a narrative, Bal claims, must be examined before that of character, namely that of the focalizer, “who sees,” and the narrator, “who speaks.” In lower secondary school, however, I believe that identifying and interpreting characters probably must come first, or at least simultaneously. Having in mind, of course, the level of maturity of the pupils, I do believe all these aspects can be taught in lower secondary school in order to provide a growing awareness of narrative structures.

Although fiercely criticizing Gérard Genette on many points, Bal gives due credit for his recognition, at least, of the need for a theory in narratology which distinguishes between the function of “seeing” and “speaking.” Bal’s method helps to reduce the confusion in narratology between vision and speech. Based on focalization, the narrator can be classified in terms of his or her absence or presence in the narrative. If, in the narrator, we recognize a “person” who is absent from or invisible in the story, Bal claims, the narrator is “heterodiegetic.” In that case, we have an external focalizer which she refers to as EF. This narrator “says less than the character knows,” of course, as the thoughts and dreams of the character may not be revealed as long as they are presented only from the outside. On the other hand, if we recognize the narrator as someone who is present in the story he tells, the narrator is “homodiegetic.” In that case the focalization is internal and we have a character focalizer which Bal refers to as CF. The narrator may say “more than any of the characters know” or “only what a given character knows,” depending on the degree of presence. This classification clarifies a previous confusion between speaking and seeing and restricts itself to the notion of the narrator as “the one who speaks,” which previous theories have failed to encompass. Bal and other critics elaborate further this notion of a homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator. This distinction is, however, sufficient for my analysis. The narrator is “the one who tells,” who is doing the narrating. The focalizer is “the one who sees,” who gives the perspective from which the story is seen. In Alexie’s fiction in particular, it is relevant to make a distinction between the narrator and the focalizer because his fiction integrates elements from both Western forms and tribal storytelling to create a modern Native storytelling voice. This creates very visual as well as oral images in which both the perspectives from which the action is viewed and narrated are important.

The new aspect of Bal's theory is that it assigns "an autonomous role to the focalizer" (Garcia Landa: 115) as the point from which the elements are viewed. In some narratives, the focalization technique is fairly simple and the focalizer remains constant throughout. Other narratives, on the other hand, have a complex focalization technique. It is sometimes necessary to sort out, if possible, whether there is ambiguity with reference to the focalization. For example, the "voice" may vary within a narrative, creating a mixed focalization with a variation in the focal point, and sometimes a double or ambiguous focalization. The "voice" may be the one of the external focalizer or a character or a whole community. It may vary and overlap. By sorting out the reference to the focalization, we may credit the author, who delegates his or her voice to the narrator who, in turn, delegates his or her voice to the focalizer. After all, it is the focalizer's view the reader is presented and "the image we receive of the object is determined by the focalizer"³ (Bal, *Narratology*: 153). The focalizer can be outside or inside the story. If the focalizer coincides with a character, the reader is inclined to accept this vision as the "truth." In other words, the choice the author makes through the focalizer, in the way he or she presents the story, influences the way the reader perceives the story.

For example, the focalizer in the first story, "Every Little Hurricane," seems to be an external focalizer who sometimes leaves the focalization to the main character, Victor. It is evident, however, that the point of view presented is not always that of a child's even though Victor tells his story from the point of view of himself as a child. It is not clear, however, when the focalizer is the EF and when it is CF_{Victor}. This kind of focalization is what Mieke Bal refers to as ambiguous focalization EF/CF_{Victor}. The external focalizer sometimes watches along with the character in a double focalization, EF + CF_{Victor} or an ambiguous focalization where it is not clear whether the focalizer is the external focalizer or the character focalizer, EF/CF.

Following Bal's terminology, I will distinguish between external (extradiegetic) and internal (intradiegetic) focalization, by employing "EF" to refer to the narrator as focalizer and "CF" to designate when a character in the story is focalizer. Focalization technique is part of the signs which form the network, "a web," of significations, one "thread in the cloak of the story" contributing on a subconscious level in the reader to the interpretation of the story.

³ 'Focalizer' is the spelling employed by Mieke Bal. I prefer to use the more standard spelling 'focalizer' throughout my thesis.

2. 2 Embedded Narratives

In some narratives, of course, the plot is arranged as a neat recount of events from one point in time in the story, to the next. It is important, however, to distinguish narrative levels and diegetic levels and their mutual relationships. In *The Lone Ranger*, the plot in most of the stories is arranged as a frame story while another story is told at the second or third level, either as flashbacks in the form of memories or as dreams or visions. Alexie often employs oral narrative techniques as reoccurring characters, alternating narrators, flashbacks, historical references and time shifts. Unlike the classically conventional linear form, *The Lone Ranger* is episodic in structure. Bal uses *Arabian Nights* as a good and much used example of frame stories and embedded narratives. A frame story, a “primary narrative,” presents the story of Scheherazade who, in a “secondary narrative,” every night tells a story and in that story new stories are embedded. Sometimes “the apparently loose relationship between primary and embedded text is relevant to the development of the primary fabula” (*Narratology*: 57) as is the case in *Arabian Nights*. The act which produces the embedded text is the important event in the story of the primary text. The relationship between the primary narrative and the secondary narrative lies in the symbolic act of the narration. To the king and to Scheherazade narrating means life, although in two different senses. Another example, very similar to what will be revealed in this analysis, also offered by Bal, is Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*:

In Morrison’s *Beloved*, [...] narration gives life – is also dramatized. [The] primary narrator says that “the two did the best they could do to create what really happened”, and indeed, *Beloved*’s existence as a subject must be ‘created’ by story-telling. This storytelling must be performed by the primary narrator because, precisely, *Beloved* herself lacks the subjectivity that is required for the act of narration. (*Narratology*: 58)

Bal distinguishes several kinds of relationships between a primary (the frame story) and a secondary (embedded) narrative. For the sake of my analysis of *The Lone Ranger*, I will recount two. The function of the embedded narrative may be merely explanatory or it may be explanatory and determinative. In the first case the embedded narrative explains what happens in the frame story, the primary narrative, either explicitly or implicitly leaving the explanation up to the interpretation of the reader. Sometimes even the embedded narrative is the one that is important as the frame story depicts a situation in which change cannot appear is the case in many of the stories in *The Lone Ranger*. In the case of the latter, where the function of the embedded narrative may be both explanatory and determinative, the “explanation of the

starting situation may also lead to change” (*Narratology*: 59). This influences what goes on in the frame story making the structure of the narrative even more than just a story-telling device. It serves to boost the themes on a new level and storytelling becomes the act of creation, creating a self. This is precisely what emerges as the overall theme in *The Lone Ranger*. Once again, I will borrow Bal’s example from *Beloved* where she claims it is particularly important “for the narrative to be fully appreciated [...] as the narrators’ joint efforts slowly narrate *Beloved* into life. Narration is an act of creation” and that “in this sense the narrative aligns the power of narration with the divine creation [and the] whole point of the narrative is, precisely, the creative power of story-telling itself, as a life-giving act” (*Narratology*: 59). This image of storytelling as a life-giving act is even more explicitly depicted by another Native American author, Leslie Marmon Silko: “Thought-Woman, the spider,/named things and/as she named them/they appeared./She is sitting in her room/Thinking of a story now/I’m telling you the story/She is thinking” (*Ceremony*: 1).

Storytelling is surviving as it is the means by which one can connect the past, the present, and the future. In her first novel, *Ceremony* (1977), Silko weaves myth, history and personal and collective recollection in a similar way as Alexie and explains how vital storytelling is to the Laguna Pueblo culture, and the Native American culture, and how Euro American culture has made many attempts to destroy the stories and thereby the culture of the Native Americans. The opening of *Ceremony* emphasizes the importance of storytelling and exemplify precisely the repeated attempts of white groups do annihilate its power and thereby destroy the Native American autonomy:

I will tell you something about stories,
 [he said]
 They aren’t just for entertainment.
 Don’t be fooled
 They are all we have, you see,
 All we have to fight off illness and death.
 You don’t have anything
 If you don’t have the stories.
 Their evil is mighty
 but it can’t stand up to our stories.
 So they try to destroy the stories
 let the stories be confused or forgotten
 They would like that.
 They would be happy.
 Because we would be defenseless then. (*Ceremony*: 1)

It is not until the end of *The Lone Ranger*, however, the reader truly realizes how thoroughly the structure of the stories has duped us, revealing actually how closely the thematic and the formal structures are related by revealing how the whole point of the narrative is the creative and didactic power of storytelling itself. The signs that form part of the rules of the narrative produce in turn other signs which form a network of significations that manifests itself as the total meaning of the narrative.

2.3 Sherman Alexie

This chapter will introduce Sherman Alexie's writing and his biographical background through a post-colonial theoretic approach that is relevant to the ways he weaves his life experience as a Native person into his fiction. The chapter will also touch upon the cultural, historical and social situation for Native Americans as these are mainly themes that Alexie's fiction revolves around as well as universal existential questions.

The Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian Sherman Alexie has made an impact, not only on contemporary Native American literature, but also for Native Americans and the process of accepting and dealing with their cultural and historical heritage along with other Native American writers as for example Leslie Marmon Silko. Different literary approaches may be applied to Alexie's fiction. His writing must be interpreted as post-modern with his practice of weaving historical and popular culture characters into his fiction. It is furthermore relevant to see his works in the light of post-colonialism. This, in turn, only adds to the emotional complexity in his works and his work as historian. Notions of race and identity have an interdependent relationship. Although post-colonialism will differ depending on different experiences, a common factor is the portrayal of feelings of marginalization and estrangement. This may, as in much of Alexie's work, emerge as new notions of identification. Åse Nygren writes about how Alexie narrates suffering as a witness to a collective trauma and how, in the attempt to assert a collective notion of identification: "American Indian storytellers have created a body of literature which speaks potently about suffering and the negotiations, both cultural and personal, necessary for survival as American Indians in the United States" (458). An "on-going colonialism" is what Alexie calls the Euro American westernizing of Native Americans and it still asserts a painful presence essential in his fiction.

This pain, however, is presented in a humorous and ironic way which is typical for Alexie. Furthermore, this comic mode is also present in the Native American identity as a way to cope and survive after the repeated attempts to destroy their culture. His writing is simultaneously tragicomic and comic. Alexie recognizes that the stereotype view of Native Americans in the mainstream American culture has resulted in a collective identity crisis for many Native Americans because: "You can never be as strong as a stereotypical warrior, as godly as a stereotypical shaman, or as drunk as a drunken Indian" (Alexie: *A World of Story-Smoke*).

That the comic mode “seeks reconciliation and a return to equilibrium using whatever resources at hand” (Castor: 124) is precisely the purpose of Alexie’s comic and ironic storytelling voice. Alexie integrates elements from both Western forms and tribal storytelling to create a modern Native storytelling voice and hence makes a written representation of an oral storytelling tradition. The incorporating of the indigenous trickster stories is part of the indigenous oral literature and part of Alexie’s way to assert an identity rooted both in the traditional Native American and the Euro American past. The trickster figure embodies contradiction and ambiguity and its literary and social function is “to expose the false fronts of the rigid social institutions and call into question the necessity and validity of these and other social constructions” (Blaeser: 152-153) and it often does so through a comic and ironic mode. All humorous work by an indigenous author is not a result of a trickster influence, of course. Nevertheless, in *The Lone Ranger* even storytelling in itself may appear as such a figure to serve as a foil to the post-colonial commodity culture through the many versions of Thomas Builds-the Fire. The purpose of the trickster is to represent a force for balance and survival. Its manifestation in the story is contradictory, ambiguous and exaggerated. Usually it is a solitary figure, but may sometimes appear as dual as in “This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona.” It is always, however, a contributor to the overall well being of the tribe. In *The Lone Ranger* the tricksters function as mediators. They draw attention and respond to various interpretations of the collective hurricanes caused by colonialism and to the cost to one’s pride and sense of self by living on the margins of a white society for generations.

One might wonder, how is this approach connected to narratology since narratology is more a technique of analysis of the structures within a work? The answer is that a story may only be given its meaning from the world that is using it, as does narratology. It is through the post-colonial eyes one may see how Alexie uses his language to free himself as a Native American, both personally and collectively, from the values imposed upon Native Americans by the colonizing Europeans and, most importantly, the conflicting values imposed by themselves. This will become clear through a narratological approach to the interpretation of his works. A good example may be found in how the narrator depicts time, stories and storytelling in “Family Portrait:” “I don’t know where all the years went. I remember only the television in detail. All the other moments worth remembering became stories that changed with each telling, until nothing was aboriginal or recognizable” (192) and: “Often the stories contained people who never existed before our collective imaginations created them” (193).

Alexie has achieved numerous awards for his poetry and his fiction. He also actively works for institutes and programs that help other Native-American writers as adviser or teacher or mentor. Born with hydrocephalus, he not only survived against the odds, he clearly showed an incredible sense for reading and writing at an extremely early age. As a child, he was looked upon as a “freak,” he says in an interview at KCTS9 who was “bullied quite a bit.” “I was labeled an apple early on, red on the outside and white on the inside,” he says. Early on he saw the limitations of the reservation to his development and education and sought out of the reservation to attend high school even though that meant being the only Native American in his school. He published his first works of poetry shortly after graduating from Washington State University in 1987: *The Business of Fancydancing* (1991) and *I Would Steal Horses* (1992). As many of his characters, and many Native Americans, Alexie had a drinking problem. In contrast to many of his characters, though, he managed to overcome these problems early on.

The matter of Native Americans drinking problems might be treated as a theme of its own as it is clear in many of his stories that this is not only a theme on a personal level but one that may be projected on to a collective level. Two good examples illustrate the point well. In “All I wanted to do was dance,” the main character, Victor, drinks. He drinks because he wants “to ease that tug in his throat and gut” (88) and because he “thought one more beer could save the world” (88). Growing up on the Spokane Reservation, his father Coeur d’Alene and his mother Spokane, he lived a very typical reservation life. His mother sobered up when he was seven and had several random jobs, but the family was poor and lived in government houses. In reflecting on his many health problems early in life, he acknowledges that his many problems may have made him stronger and gave him a very strong will to survive. His sister died in a house fire where alcohol played a large role. In the movie *Smoke Signals*, Thomas Builds-the-Fire is saved in a house fire in which his parents died and born like a storyteller. Alexie sees his sister’s death as a symbol of himself being born as a storyteller.

In his 2007 novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* he specifically writes for a young audience. The story is told from the perspective of the Native American teenager Arnold Spirit Jr., better known as Junior. The story is about his life on the Spokane Indian Reservation and how he leaves the reservation to go to an all-white high school off the reservation in the town called Reardon. The story is autobiographical and deals with issues such as racism and poverty and how to find a way to incorporate the Native American

tradition into an identity which is also American. Alexie is very humble in his writing for a young audience and realizes not only that young adult readers outnumber adult readers, but also that the impact he may have on them is much larger. He is very conscious of the greater responsibility as an author he therefore has to them. He recognizes teenagers as extremely passionate and devoted readers, and often receives e-mails from teenagers who recognize themselves and find strength in his work. Alexie says in the interview with KCTSP that he writes about being an outsider and that he believes that is what young people recognize in his writing: "Almost every 16 year old feels like a freak." This is the reason why Sherman Alexie is particularly suited to be taught in secondary school. The themes in themselves concern identity and how to find ways to assert one's identity. Although the motifs may be taken from a setting not familiar to Norwegian pupils, the themes are familiar and conveyed in a way that the pupils will recognize and learn from. It is important to encourage the pupils' understanding of the text both as an independent work of art and as something that reflects life.

2. 4 *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993)

2. 4. 1 “Every Little Hurricane”

Jerome DeNuccio claims that the first story “displays the provenance of those elements that problemize Indian subjectivity” (86–96) using an image of “skeletons” trapped in the present offered by Thomas Builds-the-Fire, one of the protagonists and narrators in a great part of the stories in the collection, as an image that resonates throughout the collection. This is a good image, in my opinion, reflecting how the characters in all of the stories struggle with different “trapped skeletons” both from the past and the present. Another reoccurring image is that of the “hurricane.” In the very first sentence, the image occurs. It soon becomes clear that this nature image of a hurricane is not only reflecting a natural phenomenon, but is also used as a metaphor to depict the personal crisis that torment both the main characters on a personal level and that this theme of “personal hurricanes” is projected onto a collective level, reflecting the situation of Native Americans in general. Through the reading of the twenty-two short stories it becomes evident that this hurricane is not only an image of a natural phenomenon but even more an image of an emotional condition for many of the characters in many of the stories. It may be read as a metaphor for a personal conflict, but also for a collective conflict. The image of a skeleton trapped in the present offered by DeNuccio is therefore a very adequate image. And, as DeNuccio further notices, Thomas realizes that in order to overcome the personal and collective conflict it is essential to recognize how “these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices” (86–96) of one’s self and one’s personal and cultural identity. Consequently, one must strive to “keep moving, keep walking, in step with your skeletons” (86–96).

The story takes place New Years Eve 1976 and the protagonist, Victor, is in his bedroom listening to the party his parents are hosting. As the narrator depicts Victor’s thoughts and experiences, it is from Victor’s point of view. At the same time, it often shows a mature understanding of life. Two of the participants in the party, Adolph and Arnold, were fighting again: “...his uncles slugging each other with such force that they had to be in love” (2). This mixed focalization, where the EF often gives the voice away to the characters and sometimes watches along with CF_{Victor}, continues throughout and it is often ambiguous whether it is Victor or the narrator or both who is the focalizer: “Victor could almost smell the sweat and whiskey and blood” (3) and: “But there was another pain. Victor knew that” (4). This

narrative technique contributes to the building of the theme and illustrates how the techniques and the themes are interrelated. This is furthermore expanded when the notion of the imagery of the hurricane as a natural phenomenon and the notion of the hurricane as a personal crisis are blended: “Victor wanted to know if memories of his personal hurricanes would be better if he could change them” (4).

The larger geographical and cultural setting is the Spokane Indian Reservation. An analysis of the themes and the narrative strategies of the story reveals several interesting facts. The plot is arranged as a frame story with a series of flashbacks. The narrator is external but the question of the focalizer seems to be less clear cut. The overall impression is that the narration is left to an external narrator who often leaves the focalization to the main character Victor: “It was January and Victor was nine years old” (1) but when Victor saw his uncles were fighting so fiercely they had to be in love, he reflects how strangers: “would never want to hurt each other that badly” (2). Using Bal’s terminology, this kind of focalization is what we refer to as EF or CF_{Victor}. But clearly, the point of view is not that of a nine year old boy. In addition, Victor is often described from the outside, from an external focalizer’s point of view. It is not clear, however, when the focalizer is the EF and when it is CF_{Victor adult} or CF_{Victor child}. The alternating and ambiguous focalizers reflect a quality of an oral storytelling tradition along with the time shifts and flashbacks. It creates a visual image in which the reader can easily immerse him- or herself. The external focalizer does not entirely give away the point of view to the character but rather it watches along with the character in a double focalization, EF + CF_{Victor} where it is not clear whether the focalizer is the external focalizer or the character Victor, EF/CF_{Victor}. A further complication in analyzing the focal point of this story is the projection of the themes from a personal level onto a collective level. This shows the interconnectedness of the narrative techniques and the themes. The projection of the personal themes onto a collective level also implies a collective focalizer, CF_{Community}: “One Indian killing another did not create a special kind of storm. This little kind of hurricane was generic. It didn’t even deserve a name” (3).

The implication of a communal level is also implied through the use of the nature imagery of weather phenomena. The most prominent theme of this story, which resonates throughout the collection, explicitly or implicitly, is the personal and collective experience of intensifying anger and painful memories which create a personal crisis within the characters, a personal hurricane. The use of this natural imagery to depict this theme is a narrative technique used to

build the tension and create the powerful image of a crisis. At certain points, the interpretations of the imagery blend and it is not always clear whether the focalizer depicts a hurricane in the sense of a natural phenomenon, or in the sense of an emotional experience. This creates a dual understanding of the imagery. Also, as the projection of the theme from a personal and collective level is subtle, the text becomes doubly complex. This time, it is done not only through the ambiguous focalization, but also through the use of nature imagery and the creation of a dual interpretation. The introduction to the story implies a hurricane forecast: “a hurricane dropped from the sky in 1976 and fell so hard on the Spokane Indian Reservation that it knocked Victor from bed and his latest nightmare” (1). This ambiguity continues throughout: “During other hurricanes broadcast on the news, Victor had seen crazy people tie themselves to trees on the beach” (3) because they wanted to “feel the force of the hurricane firsthand” (3). This was a generic “little kind of hurricane” (3), however, where “it did not create a special kind of storm” (3) if one Native American killed another.

The first flashback depicts another personal hurricane, one of Victor’s father’s and the theme is expanded from the personal level of Victor onto the level of his parents. Here the focalizer seems to be Victor at the age of nine recalling a Christmas at the age of five when his father cried because they had no money for presents. But once again, the focalization is mixed between the EF and CF_{Victor} as his remarks about his mother’s view on the situation show. When she implies that the most important thing is that they have each other, the narrator comments that “she knew it was just dry recitation of the old Christmas movies they watched on television. It wasn’t real” (5). In addition to contributing to the blending of the perspective from which the story is viewed, another important theme in this story and in the collection is introduced: the theme of relationships. For the narrator and the focalizer, relationships seem to be unreal, too difficult to be possible.

The second flashback appears within the first, expanding the theme of the personal hurricane in the form of his father’s despair of having no money. One week before Christmas, Victor’s father checks his empty wallet again and again but “it was always empty” (5). Through the use of iterative technique, Alexie expands the theme even further as in the depiction in the third flashback of how his mother dealt with similar situations: “During all these kinds of tiny storms, Victor’s mother would rise with her medicine and magic [...] and make fry bread” (5) out of air from the empty cupboards. The use of storm instead of hurricane is a way of labeling the degree of the personal crisis by transferring the use of the semantic difference in

degree from the literal meaning of the nature images. The use of “storm” seems metaphorical but it is not always clear when the word hurricane is being used in a metaphorical or in a literal sense. The projection onto a collective level from a personal one is build upon from the earlier scene of the generic kinds of hurricanes. This states the collective nature of the theme. The subtle transition into the fourth flashback brings the reader into Victor’s dream. These dreams pinpoint exactly the use of nature imagery to describe a personal condition and also the blending together of the literal and the figurative meaning of the imagery. In Victor’s dream, Victor and his parents were “waiting out a storm. Rain and lightning. Unemployment and poverty. Commodity food. Flash floods” (5). The mixed nature of the meaning of the images is also reflected in the focalization and offers another example of the interconnectedness of the narrative strategies and the themes. The CF_{Victor} is seemingly the focalizer as he clearly is the only one who may be in his own dreams. But the complexity of the emotions conveyed is not one a nine or a five year old boy may put into such words. Therefore it is clear, in my opinion, that this is another example of ambiguous focalization, $EF/CF_{\text{Victor adult}}/CF_{\text{Victor child}}$.

This doubleness is reflected throughout through the use of narrative techniques and the blending of signification of images. In the dream, his mother’s kitchen was always warm; the song was good; everything was good. The next passage offers examples of all of this as the focalizer mixes reality with dreams. He says that sometimes this dream became a nightmare when in fact describing the reality in which he lives as the nightmare with a leak house and a stomach aching with hunger: “In those nightmares, Victor felt his stomach ache with hunger. In fact, he felt his whole interior sway, nearly buckle, then fall. Gravity. Nothing for dinner except sleep. Gale and unsteady barometer” (6). Once again, the focalization is mixed and ambiguous. The perspective is seemingly CF_{Victor} but the presentation of his view from an adult and mature perspective indicate otherwise. Additionally, the reader’s interpretation of the barometer, as something by which we measure emotional conditions, relies on the previous establishment of the dual signification of the nature images. The narrator continues to depict a mix of reality and dream, as he refers to another aspect of his reality as another nightmare. This time it is his father’s alcoholism, a subject which Alexie returns to many times throughout the stories in the collection. Victor describes how his father would drink on an empty stomach. He uses nature imagery: “. . .it was like tearing an old tree into halves” (6) or “a reservation tsunami” (6) and also manmade “hurricanes” like “Hiroshima or Nagasaki” also using images of war to depict a personal hurricane. In this passage, the notion of the dual

nature of the language is even more evident as aspects of the language itself are used as images to describe his father's condition. When he was drinking he "wasn't shaped like a question mark. He looked more like an exclamation point" (6). Once again, the dualism in the figurative and the literal meaning is played upon and the latter lends signification to the former.

Alexie continues to play upon this in the continuous passage as the focalizer describes his feeling of hate towards the rain by mixing the literal and figurative meaning. Victor hated rain. To him they were just low clouds "and lies" (6) and sudden rain was "like promises, like treaties" (7) alluding also to the long tradition of the white man's broken promises and treaties to the Native Americans and thereby projecting Victor's personal experiences onto a collective Native American level. In between the second and the third and the fourth flashback, the story returns to the first flashback. Finalizing the first flashback is the summing up of all the themes of alcoholism and the personal hurricanes and the social conditions for Native Americans which are introduced both through the frame story and the flashbacks in the mind of the focalizer: "And of course, Victor dreamed of whiskey, vodka, tequila, those fluids swallowing him just as easily as he swallowed them" (7). He also remembered how a drunken, old Native American man drowned in a mud puddle and "at five, Victor understood what that meant, how it defined nearly everything. Fronts. Highs and lows. Thermals and undercurrents. Tragedy" (7). This passage illustrates another example of how the narrator continues to play upon both the ambiguous focalization technique and the ambiguous meaning of the imagery. Along with the episodic structure of the story, it reflects an oral narrative.

In returning to the frame story, another theme is introduced, that of memory, both personal and collective memory. Again, the first notion of memory is Victor's: "Victor might have filmed it, but his memory was much more dependable" (7). And once again, the notion is expanded from a personal to a collective notion playing upon the ambiguous use of nature imagery: "But the storm that had caused their momentary anger had not died. Instead, it moved from Indian to Indian at the party, giving each a specific, painful memory" (8). Victor's memory of alcoholism may therefore easily be projected onto a memory on a collective level. The images of the tragedy of alcoholism presented through Victor's perspective, once again through the double and ambiguous focalization, $EF + CF_{\text{Victor}}$ and EF/CF_{Victor} , are numerous. He depicts how his uncle smells: "Alcohol and sweat. Cigarettes

and failure” (9) and how he laid down between his parents who were “nearly chocking alcoholic snores” (9) and how he thought “the alcohol seeping through their skin might get him drunk” (9). The ambiguous nature of the focalization becomes even more evident when the focalizer depicts Victor’s parent’s memories: “Victor’s father remembered the time his own father was spit on as they waited for a bus in Spokane” (8) and “Victor’s mother remembered how the Indian Health Service doctor sterilized her moments after Victor was born” (8). Even though the apparent focalizer is CF_{Victor} , a closer look will reveal that this is another example of mixed focalization where the external focalizer now watches along with the character, $EF + CF_{\text{Victor's father}}$ in the former and $EF + CF_{\text{Victor's mother}}$ in the latter. This passage also expands the theme from concerning only alcoholism and difficult relationships and the lack of money to a more general theme of the tough social circumstances for Native Americans in general. This, in turn, is another example of a technique to expand from a personal to a collective level thematically as well as semantically and adds to the ambiguous and complex nature of the story.

As the story comes close to the end, religion is brought in to the theme as well as part of the identity crisis on the personal and collective level: “He said his prayers just in case his parents had been wrong about God all those years” (10). Once again, the significations of the images blend: “He listened for hours to every little hurricane spun from the larger hurricane that battered the reservation” (10). The reader knows that there is a meteorological hurricane occurring in the nature from weather forecast in the beginning of the story. Yet, the signification becomes dual as the reader’s interpretation builds upon the established notion of the images as metaphors to describe an emotional condition. This is further underlined as the narrator goes on to describe the crisis on a personal level for several of the characters. The story ends with the image of the painful collective memory depicted by the image of Victor describing his parents’ empty stomachs: “There was enough hunger in both, enough movements, enough geography and history, enough of everything to destroy the reservation and leave only random debris and broken furniture” (10-11). The final description of the passing of this hurricane in 1976 is another example of the signification of the nature imagery blending into the personal signification; they become one. The hurricane, as a natural phenomenon, was over for now. So was the personal crisis for these characters, for now, and they “gathered to count their losses” (11), not only on a material basis, but also on a personal level, emphasizing the theme of loss as a part of the overall theme of the circumstances for the Native Americans.

The time span in the plot is one night, New Years Eve 1976. Through a series of flashbacks into memories and dreams and the narrative technique of iterative, a time span of approximately four years is included in the story, between Christmas Eve when Victor was five to New Years Eve when he was nine. Even though the narration is external, the focalizer is not as clear. At the time of the story, Victor is between five and nine years old. Clearly, this way of describing the events and emotions connected to them is an adult and mature way. This adult is not always identified as Victor, neither as a child nor as an adult, or as one of the other adult characters, but still the emotion conveyed indicates that the focalizer is an adult character. This indicates the existence of a communal character focalizer, CF_{Communal} . The suffering is not only personal; it is shared and put into words in a written form that mirrors the oral tradition to permit unpleasant topics to be dealt with. Trickster stories are hence metaphors for a way to survive through humor. Typical of trickster narratives, Alexie employs exaggeration as a means to illustrate Victor's emotional stress: "Victor was back in his bed, lying flat and still, watching the ceiling lower with each step above. The ceiling lowered with the weight of each Indian's pain, until it was just inches from Victor's nose. He wanted to scream, wanted to pretend it was just a nightmare or a game invented by his parents to help him sleep" (8). Such a hyperbolic image grounded in reality characterizes the traditional oral stories Alexie uses to make suffering more bearable and make it a source of life and identity.

2.4.2 "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona"⁴

The generic "little kind of hurricane" (3) described in the first story "Every Little Hurricane" is also the subject in the seventh short story of the collection, "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona." Once again, the theme is introduced in the very first paragraph: "Victor hadn't seen his father in a few years, only talked to him on the telephone once or twice, but there still was a genetic pain, which was soon to be pain as real and immediate as a broken bone" (59). This is a story about pain on a personal level which is also projected onto a communal level in a similar way as in the first story. The plot in this story is also similarly organized in a series of flashbacks throughout the frame story. Moreover, the embedded

⁴ An example of how to make practical use of the findings in the analysis of "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona" in the classroom in the Norwegian secondary school is provided in the appendices where I offer a full teaching scheme for this short story, including background information on Sherman Alexie and references to the Norwegian national curriculum.

stories seem to be equally as important as the frame story even though they seem to be merely explanatory within the context of this story. The main plot is the trip to Phoenix, Arizona to reclaim the cremated remains of Victor's father and metaphorically the estranged father. It is the goal of the journey that drives the plot, but through the embedded stories are the stereotyped depictions of Victor, the stoic warrior, and Thomas, the storytelling shaman, posited to serve as critique of contemporary stereotype assumptions about American Indians. After nearly two pages, the storyteller is introduced for the first time in this story in the form of the character Thomas Builds-the-Fire. The image of stories and the storyteller will turn out to be an important image in the composite. The initial description of the storyteller is negative: "Thomas was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to. That's like being a dentist in a town where everybody has false teeth" (61). This implies that stories and storytelling is not an accepted thing for Native Americans, which in turn can be connected to the theme of tradition and the rejection or accepting of these.

The first flashback is triggered by Victor's memory of his relationship with Thomas as the one who "always had something to say" (61). Once, when Thomas and Victor were seven and Victor's father still lived with the family, Thomas, at the age of seven, anticipated how Victor's father would abandon his family even before he had expressed this urge to himself. In the present, Thomas knows Victor's father is dead, but the reader is not given a clear answer to whether this is due to a seventh sense implied in the first flashback or not. It does, however, further contribute to the characterization of him as the strange, funny storyteller: "I heard it on the wind. I heard it from the birds. I felt it in the sunlight. Also, your mother was just in here crying" (61). Victor points out that he is embarrassed to be seen talking to Thomas. The fact that they are not friends serves to increase the tension in relationships between the characters as a theme.

In this story, I believe Thomas appears as a trickster. The trickster figure appears in the oral literature of many tribes and "physical details clearly create a setting of border existence within which mediation takes place" (Blaeser: 159-160) and here Thomas, the storyteller, with his long braids, big glasses and funny stories, is an example of mediation between the oral and the written traditions. He also functions as trickster in order to present a commentary on both literary and social form without doing so directly but through humor and irony. Blaeser says about Vizenor's view of Native American culture that it is about "survival through wit and humor. It identifies humor as a tool of mediation and a means to achieve

balance” (150). This describes Alexie’s tool to get his point across in a humorous and didactic manner.

The second flashback is triggered by Victor’s memory of Thomas and himself and the many stories of Thomas and builds on the theme of relationships as, at this point of the time of his memory, the boys are friends. It also introduces another theme which is the tragic history of the suppression of the Native Americans and their relationship to the mainstream American culture and Americans. Thomas, the storyteller, says, at the age of ten: “It’s strange how us Indians celebrate the Fourth of July. It ain’t like it was *our* independence everybody was fighting for” (63). At the age of ten, Victor enjoys Thomas’ stories and even asks him to tell him one. Now, the flashbacks also consist of Thomas’ stories and the story in the third flashback, though short, explains both the current situation and the past history of the Native Americans as it depicts “two Indian boys” (63) who wanted to be warriors but since “all the horses were gone” (63) they found a modern way of defining the role of the warrior. They steal a car and park it in front of the police station in the city after which they received praise from their parents and friends. This embedded narrative serves as an expansion of the theme as a critique of the social circumstances for modern Native Americans. It is also a critique of white conquest and the history of white suppression of Native Americans. Victor’s rejection of Thomas as the tribal storyteller, and therefore the keeper of traditional values, may also be interpreted as his rejection of traditional values. It may also be interpreted as a rejection of the traditional values on a larger scale through the projection of the themes onto a collective Native American level. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that Victor is not the only one who does not accept Thomas. On the contrary, “Nobody talked to Thomas anymore because he told the same damn stories over and over again” (62).

Nevertheless, Victor realizes that he needs Thomas for financial reasons to get to Phoenix. Before the narrator continues the story, however, another flashback in the form of Victor’s memory is introduced with the purpose of expanding the theme. This embedded narrative thereby serves both as an explanation and determination for the frame story. This passage is also one of many examples of the same complexity in focalization as pointed out in the analysis of the previous story. Victor is the main character focalizer in this story as well. Yet the focal point, as it was in “Every Little Hurricane,” is ambiguous and the borders between the EF and the CF_{Victor} are blurred. In addition to that, at one point, the EF seems to give away the focal point to or watch along with the CF_{Thomas}: “Thomas shook his head, closed his eyes,

but no stories came to him, no words of music. He just wanted to go home, to lie in his bed and let his dreams tell his stories for him” (65). This flashback treats an incident where Victor was drunk and gave Thomas a serious beating. The beating stopped because of the character Norma Many Horses whom the boys considered “a warrior” (65). This time a subtle sense of a negative attitude is present in the focalizer who, at this point, may be identified as $EF + CF_{Victor} + CF_{Thomas}$. The worst thing Norma could do to the boys was to force them to “listen to some elder tell a dusty old story” (65). After this beating, Thomas was scattered in many ways, also psychologically as “no stories came to him” (65) indicating not only a personal defeat, but also a defeat of the traditional values which he represents in the story. This, in turn, is another example of how the narration contributes to the projection of themes on a personal level onto a collective level by expanding the themes through the dual interpretation of the images in the focalization and the characterization.

Just after the boys arrived at the trailer where Victor’s father died, Victor apologized for beating up Thomas when they were fifteen. Victor is ashamed of this memory of having treated his friend Thomas so poorly. An interpretation of this on a more collective level is once again suggested. In the fifth flashback, the boys were twelve and Victor stepped into an underground wasp nest and Thomas rescued him. The complex narration offers two simultaneous interpretations of this scene. On the personal level, it elaborates on Victor’s shamefulness by showing that the one he rejects has been a good friend who rescues him from danger and offers comfort. On a collective level, this scene offers an alternative positive outcome for Native Americans by showing, through the character of Thomas, how the recognition of the past and tradition allows one to come to terms with one’s own self in the modern world and how, through this recognition, a new collective sense of a Native American identity will emerge.

In the sixth flashback triggered by Victor’s question to Thomas about what he remembers about Victor’s father, Thomas, once again, “closed his eyes and told his story” (69). Now they are thirteen and Thomas had a dream in which he encountered Victor’s father while waiting for a vision according to his dream. In the present, Thomas explains this dream to Victor and says that as a result of this dream and this encounter, he had promised Victor’s father to look after Victor. Thrown right back to another flashback, when Thomas Builds-the-Fire thought he could fly and in his own eyes, and in the eyes of his classmates, he actually did for a few seconds before he “crashed to the ground” (70) and “broke his arm in two places” (70): “One

of his dreams came true for just a second, just enough to make it real” (71). A close reading of this reveals several interpretations of the themes of the social conditions for Native Americans, the complex relationship between Native Americans and the struggle in finding an identity which causes the personal “hurricanes” for many of the characters. Furthermore, it illustrates the complex narrative structure of the story. The story points out how everybody dreamt of being able to fly and when Thomas actually did, or at least gave the illusion of being able to, everybody “hated Thomas for his courage, his brief moment as a bird” (70). This is a story, not only about these characters, but about Native Americans conveyed through the projection of the interpretation of the story onto a collective level and furthermore emphasized through the ambiguous narration. When Thomas dream came true for just a second and thereby making it real, it is ambiguous whether this is the EF, the CF_{Victor}, the CF_{Thomas} or a mixture of all. One interpretation is how the projection of the theme from a personal level onto a collective level is reflected in the focalization, presenting a CF_{Communal} which also blend in to the ambiguous focalization together with the EF.

The eighth and last flashback is also about Thomas in school. At this point, he was all alone because nobody “wanted to be anywhere near him because of all those stories. Story after story” (72). This flashback emphasizes the personal and the collective rejection of Thomas and thereby the traditional Native American values. Furthermore, it emphasizes the focus of stories and storytelling as a theme: “We are all given one thing by which our lives are measured, one determination. Mine are the stories which can change or not change the world” (72) and: “They are all I have. It’s all I can do” (73). By the rejection of Thomas’ one quality by which he measure himself, Thomas is rejected as a human being and shut out from the community in which he lives. Also, by rejecting this quality in Thomas, a quality which is a cornerstone of Native American culture, this same community is also rejecting its own culture.

“It was the beginning of a new day on earth, but the same old shit on the reservation” (73), is the start of the last part of the short story. This is an image of their situation at a Native American reservation. As they both searched for “words to end the journey,” (73) they both realized that the complexity of their relationship had not changed. Victor realizes that he is shallow as the “only real thing he shared with anyone was a bottle and broken dreams” (74) which would also be a general description for relationships for Native Americans in general, according to this collection of stories. As they talked about swinging the ashes of Victor’s

father into the Spokane Falls, Victor promised to listen to Thomas' stories just once as a favor to repay Thomas for his help. Thomas teaches Victor a lesson on how to come to terms with ones past, present and future which also emphasize storytelling as maybe the most important theme. The lesson is a story about how Victor's father will rise as a salmon in Spokane falls and it assigns cultural significance to him and forces Victor to reconsider his earlier thoughts and see the continuity between the past, the present, and the future.

In "*This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*", the presence of the trickster is noticeable in several ways. The obvious is the funny storyteller Thomas who challenges Victor and the other characters' view on life. In many ways, Thomas is considered a clown by the other characters, even Victor. In some cultures, the tricksters are often funny even when considered sacred or performing important cultural tasks, like Thomas who preserve the history of the tribe, even Victor's history, and thereby fulfils his role in society. In some Native American cultures, however, there are myths in which two trickster figures appear in a complementary manner. Often, they are contrasted, like Victor and Thomas. Both Victor and Thomas represent a hyperbolic, stereotype vision of the American Indian. One is the modern stoic warrior, who often appears funny even though not intentionally, whose personality is influenced by the dominant culture in a way that makes him spiteful and shallow. The irony is that Victor's own conception of a "real Indian" is heavily influenced by the very "John Wayne-Indian" image he accuses Thomas of clinging to while rejecting the very cultural heritage of his fishing people tribe that Victor, in fact, is clearly aware of. The other is the mythical storyteller who, though not ignorant of the dominant culture's influence on his self-image as a Native American, roots his awareness of his value to the community in his knowledge of and relationship to the stories. The two are portrayed in a stereotypical and contrasting manner, I believe, to show the great diversity of Native Americans and boost a critique of the stereotypical and shallow image created by the Euro American society. Furthermore, in many ways this image has influenced Native American's view on themselves and ironically, Victor does not realize this but the reader does. In order to appeal to both a "white" and a Native American audience, Alexie plays precisely on those images and thereby softens the blow of the critique.

2. 4. 3 “The Trial of Tomas Builds-the-Fire”

In some of the stories the theme of storytelling is especially explicit. Thomas Builds-the-Fire was introduced in the second story of the collection, “A Drug Called Tradition,” in which stories and storytelling is manifested as a theme. In the seventh short story “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona,” the reader is further acquainted with this character. The protagonist’s view of him in that story is clearly negative as he rejects him at an early age even though they were close friends at the age of ten. In “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire,” however, the view of the storyteller is depicted in a more positive way and also a very ambiguous way as will become clear through this analysis. Again, the representation of an oral storytelling tradition is present through an ambivalent and shifting notion of time, historical references and the presentation of Thomas Builds-the-Fire as a trickster, not only in this story, but also in connection to the composite as a whole. The trickster can appear in various forms and now he reappears as a similar yet different character than the previous Thomases.

In this story, Thomas is the one on trial, but what actually is on trial is the belief in the power of storytelling, in my opinion: “Builds-the-Fire has a history of this kind of behavior [...] A storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth. Dangerous” (93). This is also about the traditional Native American worldviews and the white conquest of the Native Americans threatening those values as Thomas, the Storyteller once “held the reservation postmaster hostage for eight hours with the *idea* (my emphasis) of a gun” (93) and “threatened to make significant changes in the tribal vision” (93). Through cross-cultural references, stereotypes and humor, Alexie creates a typical trickster narrative in which the trickster function both as the primary character and the story itself. Its purpose is to arouse and preserve cultural awareness. Now, the gag of the traditional culture is depicted through Thomas’ silence: “Thomas had not spoken in nearly twenty years” (94). This defeat of Thomas, and thereby the cultural traditions and values, was not final though: “All his stories remained internal” (94). As the Bureau of Indian Affairs were trying to argue on what charges Thomas should be brought up on, Thomas knew he was guilty because all that was variable on a Native American reservation “was how the convicted would be punished” (95). This is an image, not only of the stories and the storyteller being on trial, but also on the hopelessness in the social situation of the Native Americans. It is done, however, in an ironic way, in order to question the status quo. Rather than to accept Thomas’ stories, it becomes more appropriate

to lock him away as the acceptance of him or his stories implies an acceptance of his version of history, something which proves too difficult both for a “white” and a Native American society. The “dangerousness” in Thomas’ stories is a symbol of the danger of criticizing society. Hence, Alexie disguises the criticism in humor and presents it through the trickster Thomas who appears in various shapes and forms to interpret the past “through stories that often cross boundaries between history and myth, and between indigenous trickster stories and Anglo American stories of Indian captivity” (Castor: 123).

This irony is further developed in the courtroom scene where the judge says to Thomas that “the court must be certain that you understand the charges against you” (95). Thomas, who had not spoken a complete sentence in the last two decades, thereby replied: “I don’t believe that the exact nature of any charges against me has been revealed, let alone detailed” (95). From this passage alone, the author reveals the complicated and interrelated nature of the themes. First of all, the interpretation of Thomas’ guilt projected onto a collective hopelessness is carried on from the previous passage. Therefore, not only Thomas and his unspoken stories are on trial, but a collective Native American storytelling tradition. Secondly, the interpretation of this issue being just as much a matter of Native American stories and storytelling on trial is underlined by the language itself as Thomas’ utterance, after so many years of silence, shows a high degree of articulateness in Thomas’ collective Native American voice. This is furthermore humorously played upon during the trial.

Thomas, who represents himself, calls himself as his only witness and what he brings to his testimony are precisely his stories. The stories are presented as a series of flashbacks, the narrative technique common to most of the stories in the collection as a reflection of the oral storytelling. The first story is set on September 8 1855 and the protagonist presents himself as a pony that is taken captive and transported to the Walla Walla valley and the Coeur d’Alene Mission while watching how hundreds of captured horses were being slaughtered. The purpose of this story is to tell the story of the Native Americans as a tragedy and to contribute to a greater awareness in Native Americans as well as gain emotional support from the Native audience in the court room. The presentation, however, is tragicomic. While he was describing in detail the tragic slaughter of the hundreds of horses “most of the Indians in the courtroom wept and wanted to admit defeat” (98). The image of the Native Americans having a prouder sense of self is presented as “the Indians in the courtroom sat up straight” (98) and “combed their braids gracefully” (98). The image of a Native American in the form of a proud

and undefeated pony, who “galloped into other histories” (98) must, in my opinion, be connected to the beginning of the short story as how Thomas could be charged for threatening to seriously change the tribal vision. It is in the recognition of the power that lies in storytelling that Thomas is dangerous, not only to the “white” American system, but also for many Native Americans. In having to deal with Thomas’ stories, the Native Americans must face their collective defeat, a task which proves too painful on some. This is first depicted through the character of the tribal chairman, David WalksAlong, who “walked along with BIA police so willingly that he took to calling his wife a *savage in polyester pants*” (94) and who arrested Thomas for making his wife leave him because of a noise he made “that sounded something like *rain*” (94) and gave the wife the courage she needed to leave her husband.

The fact that the stories and the storytelling are the issues on trial becomes evident as the trial proceeds. Thomas continues because “there are so many stories to tell” (98) and because “a new story was raised from the ash of older stories” (98). This emphasizes the theme of storytelling and the tradition of storytelling. In the second flashback, once again presented as a story, Thomas other self is a warrior named Qualchan and it depicts a history of broken promises made by white men to Native Americans and the killing of innocent men: “I was hanged with six other Indians, including Epsel, who had never raised a hand in anger to any white or Indian” (99). The purpose of this story is the same as the first, to raise an awareness of pride, to develop confidence and willingness to reclaim a Native American cultural identity and heritage for the Native Americans in the reservation. Thomas continues: “The City of Spokane is now building a golf course named after me, Qualchan, located in that valley where I was hanged” (99). The narrator shows a connection between the past and the present and also both how the acceptance and recognition of the past is the key to come to terms with one’s cultural identity at a personal and collective level and how storytelling is the means by which this connection can be made and the continuity kept.

After the emotional tumults caused by this second story the prosecutor tries to silence Thomas. In the cross-examination, however, Thomas continues with his third and fourth story with the exact same purpose as the previous stories. The cross-examination of Thomas is interesting for several reasons. One is for the third and the fourth stories in themselves, of course, but also for the deliberate confusion in time on the part of the narrator. When the prosecuting attorney starts the cross-examination, he asks Thomas: “Where were you on May

16, 1858?” (100). The effect for the reader may be confusing, but in fact, it only adds to the ironic voice of this story. Not only is the trickster presented as Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the storytelling voice of Alexie emerges through the narrator as part of the trickster. This is finalized in an ending which does not offer a clarification. The setting in time given in the article in *Spokesman-Review* after Thomas had been sentenced “to two concurrent life terms in the Walla Walla State Penitentiary” (102) is: “October 7, 19 – “ (102). It does, however, contribute deliberately to the ironic mode and amplify the theme of the power of storytelling as Thomas is recognized on the bus by the other prisoners: “You’re that storyteller. Tell us some stories, chief” (103). All the embedded stories, however, serve merely as explanations in the frame story. Nothing that is brought forth in the embedded stories has the power to change the development in the primary narrative. The story ends with the image of the storyteller telling his story as Thomas, the storyteller, closed his eyes and told his story as he is locked away.

2.4.4 “A Train Is an Order of Occurrence”

The trickster voice of the author is also apparent in “A Train Is an Order of Occurrence.” This story deals also with storytelling and the social situation for Native Americans as it offers an explanation as to why Native Americans drink and the history of three generations of storytellers. Samuel Builds-the-Fire is the protagonist. The external narration is evident from the first paragraph: “Samuel Builds-the-Fire chanted as he showered and shaved” (130). The exact nature of the focal point, however, is more difficult to pinpoint at an early stage. The tragic nature of the story is subtly introduced as we hear about how Samuel, because it is his birthday, was expecting a birthday card from his children. No card came because “his children were busy, busy, busy” (131). More than subtle is it when on this day of his birthday Samuel is fired from his work at the Third Avenue Motel. The interconnectedness of the stories, which in itself underlines a sense of continuity and a connection between the past, the present and the future, is more than suggested: “Samuel Build-the-Fire, who was father to Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Jr., who was father to Thomas Builds-the-Fire” (132). The overall theme of storytelling and the power of storytelling, not only in this story, but in the collection, now become evident: “They all had the gift of storytelling, could pick up the pieces of a story from the street and change the world for a few moments” (132). The structural pattern is the same. The frame story is interrupted by flashbacks in the form of stories and memories which serve,

not only to entertain, but also have the didactical purpose of trying to awaken a communal Native American awareness through oral narrative techniques.

In the present, the consequence for Samuel of losing his job is unfolded in a rising complication within the story. Samuel, who never had “been fired from a job and [...] never been in a bar, either” (133) had never drunk although he had “watched his brothers and sisters, most of his tribe, fall into alcoholism” (133). By now, the established pattern of widening the theme from a personal level to a collective level is familiar. This move makes it clear that one of the themes evolves around the tragic situation of alcoholism which concerns many Native Americans in general in one way or another.

The complexity in focalization in this story as well is now evident. The focal point is seemingly from that of an external focalizer, EF. But once again, it is blended with the CF_{Samuel}. At some points, it seems to be ambiguous if the EF watches along with the CF_{Samuel} in a double focalization, EF + CF_{Samuel} or if the focalization is entirely through Samuel, CF_{Samuel}: “Embarrassed, Samuel wanted to get up and run home” (133). Sometimes the EF gives the focal point entirely to CF_{Samuel}: “*I understand everything*, Samuel thought” (134) and sometimes the focalization is entirely that of the EF: “The bartender set the beer in front of Samuel” (134). The lines between the EF and the CF are most often blurred and the effect is an ambiguous focalization, EF/CF_{Samuel}. The communal nature of the theme adds to this complexity, making it uncertain whether the internal focalizer is Samuel or a communal Native American voice: “With each glass of beer, Samuel gained a few ounces of wisdom, courage. But after a while, he began to understand too much about fear and failure, too” (134). Furthermore: “At the halfway point of any drunken night, there is a moment when an Indian realizes he cannot turn back toward tradition and that he has no map to guide him toward the future” (134). This passage is, in my opinion, not only an example of ambiguous focalization where the EF, the CF_{Samuel} and the CF_{Communal} blend together. This is also an example of how the author’s didactic voice uses the power of storytelling to convey the complex emotions underlying the personal and collective struggle of defining a modern Native American identity.

The didactic power of storytelling is also emphasized through the protagonist’s own view of his stories: “He knew his stories had the power to teach, to show how this life should be lived” (134). Leslie Marmon Silko has said: “The education of the children is done within the

community, this is in the old times before the coming of the Europeans. Each adult works with every child, children belong to everybody and the way of teaching is to tell stories. All information, scientific, technological, historical, religious, is put into narrative form. It is easier to remember that way” (Silko, *An Interview*). Furthermore, Silko claims that storytelling “is a way of interacting [...] a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location but in terms of what has gone on before, what’s happened to other people. It’s a whole way of life.”

For Samuel, however, the continuity of tradition is broken. His reflection on how the white culture imposed upon the Native Americans, destroy Native Americans by destroying their stories is: “After Samuel had taught his children everything he could, everything he knew, they left him alone. Just like white kids” (135). Another flashback in his memory depicts how the tradition is broken and the stories destroyed also for himself. In this flashback Samuel remembers a young, possibly mixed-blood Indian, who died of a drug overdose: “When the police came and lifted the Indian boy from the bed with a tearing and stretching sound that nearly broke Samuel’s eardrums, the stories waiting to be told left and never returned. All Samuel could do after that was hum and sing songs he already knew or songs that made no sense” (137).

The image of Samuel, the Native American Storyteller, who lost his job and drank alcohol for the first time in his life, is the one who ends the story in a most tragic and powerful way. As the drunken storyteller walks along the railway tracks, he hears the train whistle in the distance confusing it in his drunken mind with the sound of horses. As the sound of the whistle grows louder and louder, the narrator compares the sound with the image of a stick game, and thereby suggests the likeness of a game to the arbitrariness of life. The ambiguous nature of the focalization throughout the story only amplifies the ambiguous ending. The drunken storyteller falls down on the tracks and never gets up. Whether this is a deliberate choice of a tragic consequence of the alcohol, however, remains uncertain: “Sometimes it’s called passing out and sometimes it’s just pretending to be asleep” (138). The trickster here, however, is not a character in the story. It is Alexie’s trickster voice shining through the narrator, laughing at the tragic and ironic consequences of life, using humor as a tool of survival. Either way, it is an image of a hopeless situation leaving no hopes of a positive outcome from a personal “little hurricane” for the characters in this story and thereby implicitly also boosting a social critique.

Alexie is not always satirical, I believe, because he believes that it may change things but because it makes it possible for him to talk about them: “It’s a tool that enables me to talk about anything. I don’t know if it necessarily changes things, or anybody who is listening to me. It makes dialogue possible, but I don’t think it makes change possible” (Alexie: *A World of Story-Smoke*). By making reality more palatable through comic relief, he can make a social commentary and that is part of what constitutes Alexie as a trickster figure.

2.4.5 “Family Portrait”

Alexie’s humorous trickster voice is also present in “Family Portrait.” It conveys both the notion of stories and storytelling as an all-encompassing theme. The very first sentence introduces a fragmented existence and an image of bad relationships: “The television was always loud, too loud, until every conversation was distorted, fragmented” (191). How the lack of communication contributes to the bad relationships is emphasized linguistically as well as the narrator plays with the semantic meaning of words: “ ‘Dinner’ sounded like ‘Leave me alone’ ” (191) and “ ‘The aliens are coming! The aliens are coming!’ sounded too much like ‘Just one more beer, sweetheart, and then we’ll go home’ ” (192). The lack of continuity in the history of the narrator is conveyed in his own reflections: “I don’t know where all the years went. I remember only the television in detail. All the other moments worth remembering became stories that changed with each telling, until nothing was aboriginal or recognizable” (182). Even his memory of being Native American at six or seven is blurred: “I was Indian. Just like that, there was nothing there beyond the bottom step” (192). Even though in the text, this refers to the surrealistic vision of how the reservation disappeared and there was nothing beyond the bottom step, following the pattern of an ambiguous signification, a simultaneous interpretation of this image as one depicting a personal and collective cultural identity loss, is plausible. A subjective interpretation is also even suggested by the narrator: “For instance, in the summer of 1972 or 1973 or only in our minds, the reservation disappeared” (192).

The image of a fragmented existence is reflected throughout the story, not only a fragmented existence, but one which questions the value of truth and memory. One vivid example is about the hunger that created a memory one of the family members denies happening but which the narrator and his brother remembers vividly: “Still, my brother and I cannot deny the truth of

our story. We were there“ (193). Yet, the narrator also recognizes how people and memories may not have existed “before our collective imaginations created them” (193). The experience of having epileptic seizures and having to undergo surgery to relieve fluid pressure of the brain, is one the author himself has had like the narrator in “Family Portrait.” For the narrator of this story, it seems like a memory imprinted upon him by others: “My family tells me stories of myself, small events and catastrophic diseases I don’t remember but accept as the beginning of my story” (193).

Although it is easy to assume the narrator to be Victor as in many of the other stories, the narrator and the characters remain nameless throughout the story. In this story, the focal point is less complicated as we have an external narrator, EF, and a character focalizer, CF_{Narrator} although it may be argued how this narrator’s voice is taking on the collective voice of the community. One argument to support such an interpretation is how the narrator connects his story to the history of Native Americans and thereby connecting himself to a Native American communal past: “Years ago, these hands might have held the spear that held the salmon that held the dream of the tribe” (196). It also connects this story to previous stories, for example “This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” where Thomas displays the history of his tribe being fishermen and offers an image of the homecoming father as a salmon in the Spokane Falls, reflecting the episodic nature of the oral storytelling. It is through this connection, I believe, an image may be presented which reflects how Alexie’s storytelling can be read. Such a reading is evident through the image of storytelling presented by the narrator of the story.

The narrator’s father offers an image of “a woman sitting on top of a television that showed the same woman sitting on top of the same television” (197). The repetition of this woman as the “girl on top of the world” gives significance to the image as one through which a subjective and collective cultural awareness may emerge only through the acceptance of both the past and the present. The narrator points out that this is “how we find our history, how we sketch our family portrait, how we snap the photograph at the precise moment when someone’s mouth is open and ready to ask a question. *How?*” (197). He has already realized that memory has a subjective and a selective nature: “How much do we remember of what hurts us most? I’ve been thinking about pain, how each of us constructs our past to justify what we feel now” (196). It is through the image of the “girl on top of the world,” repeated four times, the didactic aspect of storytelling becomes evident as her story is the story “by

which we measure the beginning of our lives” (197) and the story “by which we measure all our stories, until we understand that one story can never be all” (197). One official story can never be all and it is through the power of storytelling that one can link the past with the present and redefine a personal and cultural identity. This is why, I believe, Thomas Builds-the-Fire was on trial in the tenth story because of his belief in the power of storytelling. It can also explain why Alexie mixes time periods in the same story as a means to link the past and the present into one narrative. As the narrator says, not all memories are our own. Some are imprinted upon us by others, but this is not necessarily negative. Our family may provide the link in time to our past which makes up what we are in the present. For the narrator, this is acceptable: “I don’t remember but accept as the beginning of my story” (193). I believe this is what Thomas Builds-the-Fire the younger meant when he claimed the necessity of walking in step with your skeletons.

Whether or not this story offers a positive prospect of solving the identity and communication crisis is ambiguous, however. One might interpret the image of the “girl on top of the world” as one where the acceptance of all our subjective stories is a way to find a new self-awareness. Yet, the cyclic structure of the story takes us back to the fragmented image of the introduction, repeating the image which ruins communication in relationships between people: “The television was always loud, too loud” (198). The image of characters hiding their faces “behind masks that suggested other histories” (198) is not one depicting a newly won self-awareness. On the contrary, the narrator is led to an acute realization of cultural loss. The alternative of accepting the communal family history as a means through which one may find an own identity is offered. It remains unclear, however, if this alternative is accepted or even may lead to a development in the characters which may give a less fragmented existence in which truth and memory are less questionable.

The story ends with more questions than answers. The narrator reflects on how his brothers and sisters and he when children “were open mouths” (198) ready to ask the question: “*How?*” (197). “How to live or how to survive” is the question, and it is done in a humorous and ironic way, playing humorously and ironically on the stereotype image of a saluting Native American. Even though this story is a story about storytelling which offers the continuity in our history brought through storytelling as a main ingredient in our quest for a less fragmented existence, it reveals no clear answers. The main question, which remains unsolved, is the question on how to survive. This story might suggest, however that the key to

survival lies in continuing to tell the stories with variations. It may also serve as a warning that Native Americans are forgetting how to do this and therefore their existence may remain fragmented and chaotic. The image of the girl on television who just replicates the previous might just as well be an image of how the commodity culture has taken over the ability of imagination and therefore Native Americans have lost the ability to tell stories and storytelling has lost its power. It seems to me, ironically, that Alexie likes popular culture. However, instead of rejecting it for its stereotypes or accepting it unconditionally and allow it replace his Native heritage, he manages to embrace it. He embraces it and includes it in a successful attempt to embrace both cultures and they merge together in his identity and this manifests itself in his writing.

2.4.6 “Someone Kept Saying Powwow”

Both “Powwow” and “Witnesses, Secrets and Not” are less complicated in their structure. Yet they are important because they offer an optimistic ending of the collection. In “Powwow” we meet, once again, some of the characters who appear in earlier stories. This time, Junior is the narrator and the focalizer even though the question of the character focalizer having a communal voice parallel to Junior’s is plausible. The story is important in several aspects. As it is put towards the end of the collection, one might read it as an optimistic closure on several of the difficult questions put forth by the previous stories. Immediately, the story opens with the notion of tradition as something valuable, even though it recognizes how it might be lost: “I knew her [Norma Many Horses] back when there was good fry bread to be eaten at the powwow, before the old women died and took their recipes with them. That’s how it’s going” (199).

Norma turns out to be the main character in this story, maybe even more so than Junior. She is the one who fiercely keeps the traditional values and she “was always trying to save it, she was a cultural lifeguard, watching out for those of us that were so close to drowning” (198). At the same time she manages to adopt what she finds positive in modern American society, much like Alexie seems to do in his writing: “She didn’t drink or smoke. But she could spend a night in the Powwow Tavern and dance hard. She could dance Indian and white. And that’s a mean feat, since the two methods of dancing are mutually exclusive” (200). This image has both a literal and figurative meaning. As we have seen in some of the earlier stories, images in Alexie’s stories tend to lend significance to one another. This one may not only be an image

of a Native American woman's dancing ability, but even more importantly, it is about her ability to find a way to adopt to white American culture without letting go of her Native American heritage. With this reading in mind, it might be easier to understand the rest of the passage as a struggle for modern Native Americans to assert a cultural identity: "I've seen Indians who are champion fancydancers trip all over themselves when Paula Abdul is on the jukebox in the bar. And I've seen Indians who could do all this MTV Club dancing, electric slides and shit, all over the place and then look like a white person stumbling through the sawdust of a powwow" (200-201).

In this story, the focus shifts in that there is a clear resentment of some modern American values in the story and an acceptance of Native Americans. One example is the view on homosexuality: "Years ago, homosexuals were given special status within the tribe. They had powerful medicine. I think it's even more true today, even though our tribe has assimilated into homophobia. I mean, a person has to have magic to assert their identity without regard to all the bullshit" (203). Another is that Norma Many Horses is viewed as a respected woman precisely because of her advocating the traditional values as well as adapting, though critically, to modern "white" culture. Even though she was young, everybody called her grandmother "as a sign of respect" (199) and everybody "wanted to talk to Norma, to share some time with her" (200). The people on the reservation turned to her in order to assert some sense of cultural identity: "Norma lived her life like we should all do" (200). The connection to the cultural past is made: "Norma could ride horses like she did live one hundred years ago" (202) and a new thing in this story is that this image of a cultural heritage to be proud of is entirely positive. The story ends unambiguously with a positive image as Norma says to Junior: "They just voted to keep you out of the Hall of Fame. I'm sorry. But I still love you" (210). Junior replies: "Yeah, I know, Norma. I love you, too" (210). This, in my opinion, is an image of how the acceptance of one's fate is something positive and a way to walk in step with one's "skeletons." It also depicts a warm and close relationship in which communication is possible and that represents a shift in the collection.

In my opinion, in this story, Alexie connects the stories in the composite as a whole on a new level. In the previous story, "Family Portrait," the promise of an optimistic ending turned more pessimistic reading at the end. In this story, however, the traditional values are depicted as entirely positive and the image of a good relationship between the main characters in the end is an entirely different one than is the previous stories, especially "Every Little

Hurricane.” The narratological structure of the first story in the composite reflects the chaotic inner life of these characters. The organization of the story into a frame story with many flashbacks makes it a story which is structurally complex, as does its ambiguous focalization and this serves to boost the thematic issues. Alexie’s use of many narrative voices is part of the making of this collection as a written composite of oral narratives. It connects all the stories and supports what seems to be Alexie’s vision of many Native voices. In “Every Little Hurricane” assimilation is depicted as something negative, something which may lead to a cultural identity crisis. In “Somebody Kept Saying Powwow,” assimilation is not entirely negative, it may, in fact, even be positive. As far as I can see, this story shows how the solution for the characters lies neither in a clear rejection of Native American values nor in a rejection of modern American values. It is through keeping what is worth keeping after a thorough reflection of both cultures one new cultural identity may emerge. The responsibility to do so is both collective and subjective: “Watching automatically makes the watcher part of the happening. That’s what Norma taught me” (200). This, I believe, is the pedagogical purpose of this story.

2.4.7 “Witnesses, Secret and Not”

It might be convenient for the reader if the collection ended with the previous story giving some kind of happy ending, a clear cut solution. The reality is that it contains one more story and of course, I might say, as by now it is evident that this is a carefully composited collection of short stories. All the stories in the composite may be read as individual stories, enjoyed and interpreted on their own right. This offers flexibility in teaching because one might chose either to teach the individual stories or to teach the whole book. However, an analysis of the composite as a whole allows the reader to interpret the themes at another level. Following a now fairly established pattern of a fairly optimistic path to follow in “Family Portrait,” which nevertheless ends ambiguously with a less clear cut solution, and having in mind the interconnectedness between the stories, Alexie follows the optimistic and uncomplicated with a complication. He refuses to leave the reader with the kind of happy ending that “Somebody Kept Saying Powwow” provides.

In its own right, the last story, “Witnesses, Secrets and Not” is not as structurally complex as many of the previous stories. The plot is presented as a memory told by the unnamed narrator who is also the main focalizer of the story, CF_{Narrator} . In relation to the previous stories in the

collection, however, the reader recognizes him as Victor. The setting is the Spokane reservation in 1979 where he remembers how he was struggling to figure out how to be thirteen. Moreover, he later realizes that he also “had to figure out what it meant to be a boy, a man, too” (211) but most of all, he “had to find out what it meant to be Indian, and there ain’t no self-help manuals for that last one” (211). The focal point changes a few times, and through his dialogue, we gain insight in the narrator’s father. The other character’s dialogue, however, the police officer, is referred by the CF_{Narrator} . Although we are presented with the memories of the narrator’s father a few times, these flashbacks are brief and less complicated than those of previous stories and the timeline of the story is fairly linear.

Thematically, on the other hand, the story is more complex, as the narrator offers mature reflections about life. Recalling a near accident with the car with his father driving, he realizes at twenty-five how a person’s view on life may change: “At age thirteen, nobody thinks they’re going to die, so that wasn’t my worry. But my father was forty-one and that’s about the age that I figure a man starts to think about dying. Or starts to accept it as inevitable” (213). The main theme of this story, I believe, is put forth by the narrator’s further reflections on near accidents: “I’m always asking myself if a near-accident is an accident, if standing right next to a disaster makes you part of the disaster or just a neighbor” (214). The lesson Norma Many Horses thought in the previous story was that watching “automatically makes the watcher part of the happening” (200). This story seems to illustrate how it is impossible to withdraw from a collective responsibility or your past even if you try. So if you are standing next to a disaster, you automatically become a part of it and that is something you have to address.

The story lasts only 24 hours and the plot concerns how the narrator’s father receives a phone call from the Secret Witness Program about a friend, Jerry Vincent, who disappeared about ten years earlier and the father therefore has to go to the police the following day. As it turns out, the narrator’s father was assumedly the last to see this person alive before he “got shot in the head in the alley behind the bar” (214) and buried up in Manito Park. As the case is not yet solved, the narrator’s father is interrogated about it annually. He claims that he knows what happened only because of rumors and that he did not shoot or bury Jerry Vincent. He admits, though, that he would not tell the police even if he had known.

The last two paragraphs of this story are very interesting and connect it thematically both to the previous stories and to the composite as a whole. Firstly, the narrator realizes how memory might be both a subjective and a collective subject which might change with each telling “until nothing is recognizable” (192): “At what point do we just re-create the people who have disappeared from our lives? Jerry Vincent might have been a mean drunk. He might have had stinky feet and a bad haircut. Nobody talks about that kind of stuff. He was almost a hero now, Jerry Vincent” (222). Secondly, some way or another, this incident with Jerry Vincent seems to be bothering the narrator’s father. It seems to be a difficult memory which is emotionally hard for him to handle. Early on, the narrator asks his father about this story asking him: “You got the whole thing memorized, don’t you?” (214). He replies: “That’s how it works” (214) which implies that the human mind seems to handle difficult experiences by memorizing one version of it. This version might even become a collective memory, as the narrator points out. There is more to this story than what is revealed in the course of the plot, however, and it appears to me that this is one of the narrator’s father’s “hurricanes” or “skeletons.” Perhaps it is even a “skeleton” for the collective memory of the reservation community altogether. As they come home after the annual visit at the police station, the narrator emphasizes how everybody was home as if they were expected to be only at the time of the yearly revival of the old story: “Believe me. When we got home everybody was there, everybody” (222). Furthermore, it seems evident that the incident bothers the narrator’s father on an emotional level as it has ever since the event: “My father sat at the table and nearly cried into his food. Then, of course, he did cry into his food and we all watched him. All of us” (222). Little Victor in “Every Little Hurricane” wondered if “memories of his personal hurricanes would be better if he could change them” (4) and claimed that his memory was “much more dependable” (7) than a film recording. This story implies that memory is not always dependable as it is subjected to changes as we try to deal with difficult experiences. Yet, one cannot hide from the truths of one’s past, neither from one’s personal past or the past we inherit from our parents.

Once again, Alexie advocates how each is responsible to manage his or her own heritage and in order to find one’s own subjectivity, one must cope with the past. This task is not a matter of one simple recognition and acceptance of one’s self and one’s past and that of our parents, but an ongoing, lifelong process. One cannot run away from reality like Samuel Builds-the-Fire, the drunken storyteller with no more stories to tell who ended his life on the railroad tracks in “A Train Is an Order of Occurrence.” The narrator points this out in the opening

paragraph: “In 1979 I was just learning how to be thirteen. I didn’t know that I’d have to keep thinking about it until I was twenty-five” (211) and that he “had to find out what it meant to be Indian” (211) too. The last story of the collection is not offering a simple happy ending. It reveals how the readers as well as the characters must work to find self-awareness. This reflects Alexie’s outlook on life, I believe, as he says in an interview: “Survival is a low hope. I don’t want just survival, or “survivalence.”⁵ I want triumph! But you don’t get it. That’s the thing. You don’t get it” (Alexie: A World of Story-Smoke).

2.5 Preliminary Conclusion

I understand *The Lone Ranger* to depict a troubled but optimistic view on life. Although expressed as distinctly Native American, this view is easy to transfer to reality in various settings and that is the reason why Alexie’s work may be used as a basically optimistic means through which one may understand the world. In many ways, the view of life expressed by Alexie can be seen as typically North Norwegian. North Norwegians are neither unfamiliar with hardships in life, which they always exaggerate, nor with the ironic and satiric trickster humor. For example, Arthur Arntzen, a storyteller whose humor is reckoned to be worth a star on someone’s Walk of Fame, and whose opinions of the North Norwegian cultural identity causes either hilarious laughter or furious criticism, has created characters who are the prime manifestations of hyperbolic, stereotypical North Norwegians for several generations. Although different in many ways, Arntzen’s characters are similar to Alexie’s in the sense of being exceedingly stereotypical and Arntzen also, I believe, displays his humorous and optimistic view of life through his characters.

The troubled optimism in *The Lone Ranger* is emphasized both through the narrative structure and as regards content. Structurally, the collection opens with a story with a fairly complex narrative structure reflecting a chaotic inner life of the characters. This complex structure carries on until the eleventh story in the collection, “Distances,” after which there is a tendency to a slight decrease in the complexity of the structural organization of the stories. Although the ending of “Distances” offers no simple solution in a return to traditional values, the story ends with an image of a family who stands together and where the members are present. Even though communication seems somewhat difficult, it does appear as something

⁵ “Survivalence” is the term Gerald Vizenor uses to reflect what he wants to avoid most of all, victimization.

possible. I find that the theme of storytelling is evident throughout, implicitly or explicitly, implying that the belief in the power of storytelling as a means through which emotions can be conveyed and information can be passed on in a society is a clear agenda of the author. The last story seems to illustrate the ways in which it is impossible to withdraw from a collective responsibility for your past. If you stand next to a disaster, you automatically become a part of it and that is something you have to address in order to cope with your own skeletons past and skeletons present.

The first story ends with a painful personal and collective image of people suffering from crisis caused by alcoholism, hunger, poverty and cultural loss, boosted both by the thematic and the formal features. The structural complexity brings forth the emotional complexity and is an example of how the narratological techniques boost the thematic issues. In “Every Little Hurricane” assimilation is depicted as something negative, something which may lead to a cultural identity crisis. In “Somebody Kept Saying Powwow,” assimilation is not entirely negative. It is through acknowledging that watching “automatically makes the watcher part of the happening” (200) that one can claim the subjective and collective responsibility of a self and a community. That, I believe is the didactic purpose of Alexie’s stories conveyed through troubled characters who survive with an ironic sense of humor. Contemporary representations of the trickster figure preserve the Native American oral tradition, incorporating a trickster approach to the stereotypical commodity culture, by challenging stereotyped visions of Native Americans in mainstream American culture. This allows him to deal with sensitive topics, creating a social commentary for both a “white” and a Native American audience in a manner they both can relate to and even laugh with, not laugh at. The comic perspective works as a way to soften the blow of the social critique and a safety valve to make pain more bearable.

3. Didactics

The reality is that in the classroom, things do not always happen the way that one plans for them to happen. In my experience, a good story may work as one good didactic method both for a planned session in which storytelling is the chosen didactic method and for the classes which turn out to not work as planned, when it becomes necessary to resort to “Plan B.” Sometimes it is hard to achieve good teaching in spite of all the preparation in the world. In *Språkdidaktikk* (2000) Ulrika Tornberg writes that one of the aspects typical of teaching is that so many things happen at once in the classroom and that most of what happens is unpredictable. One must, as Tornberg claims, realize the necessity of an interest in teaching as communication; the real teaching happens between learners in a classroom. Sometimes that means that it is imperative to concentrate more on the social aspect of teaching than the subject matter. It is important to acknowledge the pupils premises and manage to see each pupil as an autonomous individual. One cannot give the pupils professional development if the social interaction does not work.

My opinion of models and theories is that they are rather like tools in a toolbox which one may chose to use in different contexts or situations. Sherman Alexie offers social and cultural information of contemporary Native American life in the reading of many of his short stories. A selection of texts which includes some of his stories in the classroom in lower secondary school in Norway is consistent with the subject specific curricular aims in LK06. A reflection of content, methods and teaching activities, learning goals, what the pupils and the teacher brings to the classrooms and what the school system in Norway may offer will lead to an internalization of the didactic thinking in the daily work of a teacher. Therefore one will accommodate the didactic aspect and the relation between the different elements of teaching and learning in the classroom. A simple model which allows for the various aspects of teaching and demonstrates how they are interrelated will be useful for the purpose. The Didactic Relationships Model as it appears today is a simple but practical model which has been used often by Norwegian teachers.

Bjørndal og Lieberg (1978) presented the model which they developed from Heiman and Schultz’s preliminary work. As Lyngsnes of Rismark (1999) claim, the professional teacher should have internalized the thinking implicated in such a didactic model. By that they mean, among other things, to seek for ways to realize the aspects implicit in such a model in

practical teaching. John Dewey once said: “Teaching can be compared to selling commodities. No one can sell unless someone buys... [yet] there are teachers who think they have done a good day’s teaching irrespective of what pupils have learned” (35). Such a holistic approach to teaching and learning will, in my opinion, lead to a wider and more correct approach which is decisive for good teaching. Just as Bal recognizes the need to draw from various sciences in narratology, the need to draw from different theories is what enables a teacher to ensure the learning outcome for pupils. By integrating several different theories, the teacher will to a larger extent become able to vary and differentiate his or her teaching. That is precisely what effective teaching is: to facilitate learning by offering varied and differentiated teaching schemes. That means that the teacher incorporates Piaget’s theories of knowledge as something each individual must construct for him- or herself and Vygotsky’s thinking of learning as social interaction with linguistic activity at the center of learning. Learning as both a cognitive and a socio-cultural process was something Dewey, who first presented the well known principle of “learning by doing”, recognized. He understood that knowledge must be related to real life and contribute to a persons growth as a human being in relation to other people in a society.

The view a teacher has of literature as a means through which one may understand life, must also be reflected in the teaching. When teaching, it is important to boost the pupils’ understanding of the text as an autonomous and coherent whole, a view of literature consistent with a modernistic approach where the text itself is at the center of attention but also as a work of art which reflects life. Anne-Kari Skarðhamar (2001) enlightens these two dimensions in teaching literature in *Litteraturundervisning – Teori og Praksis*. The study of literature involves certain knowledge of concrete texts, but also the ability to understand the text and what it may teach about oneself and others. Teaching literature has to do with growth and cultural education and should simulate conscious reflection about oneself, the culture in which one lives and the cultural codes the text reflects. Just as Bal recognizes the need to widen one’s view of literature through a narratological approach, so does Skarðhamar in her didactic approach to literature. She realizes that a method provides a way to better understand the text, and that the borders between the various theories may be blurred. My analysis in this thesis relies heavily on the text-oriented, structuralist method, but it also encompasses an author-oriented and a social and reader based approach. This approach to teaching literature has not always been evident in the Norwegian national school curriculum, but since the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s there has been a positive shift. Since the national

curriculum in L97 (Primary and Lower Secondary Education) and continued in LK06 (Knowledge Promotion), the latest reform in the 10 year compulsory school, the importance of literature as a way to teach language and to develop as a human being is reflected. Alexie's work as distinctively Native American may easily be transferred to reality in various settings and offer both a way to teach language and human relations.

Bjørg Olsen Eikrem has several reflections as to why literature has been given a more significant role in English second language teaching in the last 20 years in *What the Story Has to Offer* (1999). Due to a critique of a school system that kept a distance between the school and the real, emotional and adult working life, L97 stressed an overarching goal in the new curriculum that the school is to give all pupils a broad preparation for life, and stimulate the development of the whole person. This is continued in LK06 and stressed even further is the need to differentiate and include all pupils in the classroom activities: "The goal of Knowledge Promotion is to help all pupils to develop fundamental skills that will enable them to participate actively in our society of knowledge. [...] Everyone is to be given the same opportunities to develop their abilities. The Knowledge Promotion, with its special emphasis on learning, is meant to help ensure that all pupils receive a differentiated education" (LK06: 3 core curriculum). Although I will not address the components such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc., I would like to stress that these elements, too, need to be part of the curriculum. Sometimes in particular and sometimes implied or incorporated as it is in teaching authentic literature.

The national curriculum states: "the important thing is not to find answers but to ask questions and be critical" (L97:55). In addition, Eikrem recognizes the power of storytelling when she claims: "Students need to develop an understanding of language as something more than a linguistic system. They should also experience language as a vehicle of power, a means by which people control, create and preserve" (24). This, I believe, may and should be thought and explained to the pupils as a way to make them understand and realize the reason why they will benefit from study.

It might be argued that L97 signaled that a certain canon of literary texts are more appropriate than others for teaching English as a foreign language. LK06, however, suggests more trust in the teacher as a professional, in that this reform does not provide obligatory reading lists of authors or texts. Eikrem's claim that the short story in particular is especially suited for

second language teaching and learning is a view I share. Literature in general and the short story in particular is a resource in teaching English as a second language because it allows “teachers to focus on language in a way which encourages language learning as well as personal development” (39). The competence aims in English in LK06 is divided into three main subject areas: language learning, communication and culture, society and literature. The latter focuses on “cultural understanding in a broad sense” (2). It furthermore states that: “Working with various types of texts and other cultural expressions is important for developing linguistic skills and understanding how others live, and their cultures and views on life. Reading literature may also help to instil the joy of reading in pupils and provide the basis for personal growth, maturity and creativity” (2). Eikrem recognizes this aim in the national curriculum to make possible for pupils in the lower secondary school in Norway to experience and learn linguistic aspects and simultaneously to see language as part of social and cultural processes through literature.

Furthermore, Eikrem explains why the short story is particularly suitable for this purpose. One reason is that the format is manageable. First, for many pupils in the lower secondary school, the task of reading a novel in English is an overwhelming task. Second, reading in general, even in Norwegian, does not appeal to all students and it is therefore important to provide texts that can be read within a reasonable time. In a mixed ability class, which is by far the most common, these aspects are especially important to consider. To understand how the story works and the meaning it conveys, it is necessary to read a whole short story from the beginning to end, not only an extract. Eikrem continues to argue for the short story as a more appropriate genre to capture the pupils and address to their ability to become involved readers. Even though the ability to “read between the lines” is a matter of maturity, the more traditionally constructed text found in earlier English textbooks may offer interesting topics and relevant facts, the pupils may be captured and spellbound by the power of the story. Short stories offer the reader “a key-piece of a larger whole” (Eikrem: 41) and that strategy involves the reader. Our job as teachers is to train the pupils to fill in the missing pieces. The aims of language learning are met as literature may offer an opportunity to study grammar, spelling and vocabulary. The competence aims of communication are met through the study of the culture and ideology provided in the text. Finally, the competence aims of culture, society and literature are met by studying the short story in particular, in my opinion, as all the features of short stories can be taught and studied more appropriately when the text is considered as a whole providing an authentic and full context.

The subject curriculum demands a teaching which stimulates the pupils' "understanding how others live, and their cultures and views on life" (2) and the core curriculum demands a teaching which demands an education that stimulate personal growth as a human being. A selection of texts which includes some of Alexie's short stories in the classroom in lower secondary school in Norway is consistent with the subject specific curricular aims in LK06. A fundamental pedagogical criterion in the overarching core curriculum is to boost development of social, emotional, moral and intellectual character. Reading Alexie opens up for discussions which may lead to these kinds of developments for the pupils. Although this analysis illustrates that a reading of the whole composite reveals a deeper understanding than the short stories on their own right, many of the stories provide a coherent whole and meet vital demands in both the core and the subject curriculum. The many motifs of Alexie's short stories are universal and deal with human situations the pupils can relate to. Alexie offers an opportunity to experience problems of alcoholism, family breakup, broken friendships in a culturally different setting allowing for the pupils to recognize existential questions general for all human beings and learn about the differences and similarities between and across the cultures. Alexie's motifs may lead to fruitful discussions and spur reflection on the part of the pupils about their own lives and their own selves. With a careful preparation of suitable activities, pupils may access the information in the short story and extend both their knowledge of themselves and other people as well as being exposed to new vocabulary, grammar and authentic idioms. It is challenging to find a level of difficulty appropriate for all pupils in an ordinary Norwegian class. I believe, however, that many of the short stories in *The Lone Ranger*, for example "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," will suit the majority of the pupils in the tenth grade. This short story will provide the level of language input slightly above their own skill level which is necessary in order for language learners to extend their knowledge. This is precisely what Krashen argues is needed in both first and second language acquisition. It also provides an opportunity to expand the knowledge and understanding of oneself and people in other cultures.

There are pupils in every class who are not able to reach above the level of enjoying Walt Disney *Pocahontas*, which is very often found in English textbooks in the Norwegian schools. On the other hand, the film has provided a basis for many fruitful classroom discussions. Similarly, so can "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona." A teaching scheme of this short story should therefore include the film *Smoke Signals*. For that reason, the teacher may

both meet the less verbally proficient pupils who need a more visual approach, and also provide a challenge to the more verbally skilled pupils. This may also in turn open up for a discussion on films and their authenticity. Eikrem shares this view, I believe, as she notes that if we can offer the pupils short stories “which represent different degrees of difficulty, the genre opens up for individualization and differentiation” (50). She adds: “It is not always important that the students all read the same story at the same time. On the contrary, focusing on one theme, but following an individualized programme, they will have more to contribute and are more likely to approach the theme from new perspectives” (50).

Regarding how to work with the text, many approaches may be fruitful. The important point, in my opinion, is to find a method that will both allow the pupils to acquire knowledge about the short story genre, to develop their linguistic skills, and to spur reflection which may lead to a greater knowledge of life. Eikrem and Skarðhamar both present good methods which have incorporated all these elements and are well supported by leading theories in the pedagogical field.

My suggestion here on how to work with “This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona,” relies heavily on their thoughts but also on my own experience in the classroom. Eikrem proposes a division into pre-reading activities, while-reading activities and post-reading activities which I will adopt as it adequately labels the different types of activity. This approach is consistent with the Didactic Relationships Model for teaching. It is also my opinion that this is most often incorporated in the education of teachers in Norway as well as teachers working in lower secondary schools. Therefore, these labels, though not always explicit, are always evident in the teachers’ daily work.

The pre-reading activity is necessary to prepare the pupils for the text. This may include a presentation of the author and text in question. As the pupils also are to train themselves in how to present a subject orally and how to use digital media, a PowerPoint presentation is appropriate as a way to lecture on Sherman Alexie. Digital competence is one of the basic competences the national curriculum states must be incorporated in all subjects in primary and secondary school. An active use of basic digital media should therefore be obligatory for the teachers, in my opinion. The lecture itself should be at most 25 to 35 minutes. It should, in my opinion, also include other input than that of the teacher’s lecture, such as audio-visual input from other sources. My suggestion is to incorporate part of the interview with Alexie on

KCTS9. This is important because, first of all, Alexie provides authentic language. No matter how well the teacher speaks English, it will not likely be as a native speaker. Also, Alexie's American English is easy to understand and offers a good way to train the pupils in their listening skills. Secondly, he talks about his life and experiences as an outsider, as someone who struggled with alcoholism. He discusses how he overcame his problems and reached for his dreams in a humorous way that the pupils may relate to and which may encourage their understanding of the story and its meaning for their life. By also including either the trailer for the movie *Smoke Signals* or its ending with the poem "How Do We Forgive Our Fathers" by Dick Lourie, which are both available on YouTube, the pupils will meet the themes of the story in a manner that is understandable and even relevant for them. As much as a young person's struggle to accept their parents and themselves feels personal, many of the emotions conveyed in the story, and in this poem in particular, are universal. This may ignite a certain interest in the subject, and is also a way to meet the demands of the national core curriculum: "Good teachers have a sure grasp of their material and know how it should be conveyed to kindle curiosity, ignite interest and win respect for the subject" (21). As a last part of the first introductory lesson or a first part of the next session, the teacher might present a selection of 10-12 words/expressions from the text which he or she writes on the blackboard. From the selection of words, the teacher should make the pupils reflect on how they perceive them, ask them whether the words are positive, negative, or neutral. It is, of course, necessary to secure that everyone knows the meaning. This also provides an opportunity to ask the more competent pupils to explain the meaning to the rest of the class, preferably in English, as a way to differentiate the teaching. From there, the teacher should lead a discussion on what emotions the words arise and whether they can predict what the short story is about. The purpose of this activity is to motivate, arouse curiosity and establish a pre-understanding of the text as well as expand the vocabulary and should occupy 15-20 minutes of the session.

The while-reading activities should be selected with care, for, as Eikrem recognizes, the pupils need to "read without being interrupted" (52). Several questions related to the content of the story will ensure the pupils' understanding. Most of the textbooks offer similar questions, however. To choose a different approach, for example include the comprehension questions with the study questions in the post-reading activities could be a good way to vary. In my opinion, one good exercise in close analysis of literature is to provide two tables or charts. One table would include three columns for Victor and three for Thomas with the following headlines: physical characteristics, personality traits, other information. The second

with the three headlines: where, when, how does it look like or feel like. The purpose of this exercise is to train the pupils to closely trace the setting and character traits. By preparing for the while-reading tasks, the teacher is able to encourage the pupils to be attentive while reading without having to interrupt and disturb them. In addition to developing their reading proficiency, it will prepare for the post-reading activities. It will furthermore help to develop their understanding of how people relate to each other through stories. Whether or not the reading of the short story should be given as homework depends on the class and the situation. In my experience, however, some pupils need the guidance and the motivation from the teacher in order to read. In some classes, the whole class may even have developed a negative attitude towards homework. This culture is unfortunate and must be addressed in addition to teaching literature. It must be taken seriously into consideration when planning teaching, however, and this teaching scheme, as any teaching scheme, must be adapted and adjusted to suit the particular group of pupils in question. I believe, however, that reading sessions in all classes must be provided occasionally. Some of the pupils never read at home, sometimes because their parents are not readers, or because they themselves have developed negative attitudes towards reading. In addition, reading is an activity which may lower the feeling of stress in a class, and spending a few sessions on reading quietly may contribute to a calmer classroom environment.

The post-reading time is, in my opinion, a more proper activity in which to include the contents comprehension questions. Skarðhamar divides the teaching of literature into three phases: the close reading, the analysis of the whole text, the analysis of the text in relation to real life. This mirrors Alexie's method of expanding his theme from the close, personal perspective to the widened, collective perspective. It presumes a view of art, as Skarðhamar notes, as something that reflects a reality outside fiction, whether it be social reality or inner psychological reality.

So far, I have treated the pre-reading and the while-reading activities mostly with respect to Skarðhamar's first phase. I will now discuss how to help the pupils through the second and third phases. Skarðhamar recognizes and incorporates many elements of Reader-Response Criticism but stresses the value of conversation as a method in teaching literature. Whether or not the short story was given as homework or read in class, the third phase should start with easy questions about the content, opening up for a class discussion where the teacher carefully chooses who should be allowed to answer what question. The pupils who are less capable of

reading between the lines should be given enough time and the opportunity to answer the more easy questions as: "What is the name of the main character or characters?" or "Who died in the story?" Other, more difficult thematic questions may be addressed to the whole class, allowing all of the pupils to have the opportunity to reflect. These may be questions where the teacher refers to places in the story and offers examples. For instance: "Victor hadn't seen his father in a few years, only talked to him on the telephone once or twice, but there still was a genetic pain, which was soon to be pain as real and immediate as a broken bone" (59) or: "Thomas was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to. That's like being a dentist in a town where everybody has false teeth" (61) and: "Nobody talked to Thomas anymore because he told the same damn stories over and over again" (62). The pupils may be asked to reflect on what is meant by "a genetic pain" and what they believe the people in the short story think about Thomas or storytellers in general, or what Native Americans themselves think about traditional Native Americans. After such a short activity to bring the pupils into the universe of the story, the pupils should be given time to reflect on study questions preferably in pairs or as individuals. The questions should not be too many or too difficult, but still encompass the different narratological aspects, as well as spur the pupils to connect the text and the realities outside the text. One example of a set of questions is as follows:

Plot:

1. Give a short summary of the plot (action).
2. Does the story have a first person or third person narrator/point of view?
3. Do you think it would be a different story if the point of view were different? For example, if Thomas told the story or someone outside the story told it?

Structure:

4. Is the plot told chronologically? Do you see any examples of foreshadowing or flashbacks? Is there only one line of action or do you find several lines of action that interfere with each other? How are they connected? Do you see examples of other linguistic devices the author uses, for example, metaphors, repetition, irony, or exaggeration?

Character:

5. Who is the main character?
6. Write a short description of the main character's personality. Can you read descriptions of him literarily or do you sense a use of irony?
7. Does he change? If so, how?

8. How does Victor react to his father leaving the family? Do you think he reacts like this because he is a Native American? Do you think his reactions would be different if he were a white American or a Norwegian guy from Tromsø?
9. Do you think he reacts to his father's death the way he does because he is a Native American? What if he were a white American or a Norwegian guy from Tromsø?
10. How is the relationship between Victor and Thomas? Has it always been like this? Does it change during the story?
11. Have you ever had a friendship that changed where you felt like Victor? Or like Thomas?

Setting:

12. Where and when does the story take place? Are you confused about time and place? If so, where?
13. Do you think setting is important in the text? Could any of the things that happen in the text have happened here in Tromsø? Why? Why not?

Theme:

14. What is the theme (or themes)? Is it easy to see it or do you have to read between the lines?
15. What examples of Native American culture can you see in the story "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona"?
16. In what ways are Victor and Thomas different from you? In what ways are they similar to you?
17. Comment on the title. Is it a good title? Why/why not? Does it fit the theme? Why/why not?

After having let the pupils reflect on these questions, the teacher may divide the class into larger groups of four, or at most five pupils, and let them exchange ideas, while the teacher listens in and discusses with one group at a time. How long this session will take depends on how competent the pupils are in reading and discussing literature. This discussion in smaller groups will provide a less intimidating arena for some pupils to speak. It will also give the teacher an opportunity not only to evaluate the pupils but also to lead the conversation and to train the pupils in observing linguistic devices, composition, characterization, and thematic elements, as well as asking questions which will link the story to the real world. It is important to mix the more difficult reflection questions with the identity questions and the more easy observation questions. For example, the teacher can ask for a plot summary. For

many pupils, to be able to summarize a story in their own words is an overwhelming task, even in Norwegian. Therefore, in the conversation with those pupils the teachers should concentrate on questions having to do mostly with the plot. For the very mature pupils, on the other hand, even an extra challenge pointing out the difference in “seeing” and “telling” when it comes to narration and focalization or the similarities and differences between the Native Americans and the Sami people or other indigenous people may be explored. This approach suggests a variety of ways to differentiate the teaching.

3. 1 Preliminary conclusion

The troubled optimism in *The Lone Ranger* is emphasized both through the narrative structure and as regards content and the theme of storytelling is evident throughout. The belief in the power of storytelling as a means through which emotions can be conveyed and information can be passed on in a society is a clear agenda of the author. It is illustrating that watching “automatically makes the watcher part of the happening” (200) and the subjective and collective responsibility of a self and a community that is the didactic purpose of Alexie’s stories. Contemporary representations of the trickster figure preserves the Native American oral tradition, incorporating a trickster approach to the stereotypical commodity culture which allows Alexie to deal with sensitive topics, creating a potent social commentary for both a Euro American and a Native American audience.

My claim that by studying literature and the structures in literature, new understandings of how we view life and ourselves may emerge is illustrated through the analysis and made practical use for in the didactic chapter. The leading theories on the field of narratology have illustrated how narratology can be didactic, and how information and knowledge can be presented as a narrative. This, in turn, has made possible a practical use of the findings in the analysis. The themes of personal and collective crisis, the social situations for Native Americans, and the theme of storytelling and the didactical power of the storyteller’s voice are brought forth by the narrative techniques and demonstrate how Alexie explores his life experience as a Native American through exaggeration and humor. This technique mirrors the Native American storytelling tradition. The connection between the narratological and the pedagogical approach has been implicit throughout, and, in fact, it is very similar to Alexie’s work. This thesis offers a narratological approach which connects narratives with the reality outside fiction and through a coherent line called didactic.

4. Conclusion - Narratological didactics and didactical narratology

My examples are not meant as the only possible way but more as an inspiration. Eikrem and Skarødhamar offer a much larger range of examples with a greater basis in pedagogical and didactical theories than I have discussed in this thesis, and may be recommended as practical guides to teaching literature in the Norwegian secondary school. In my own experience, however, the times when I fell for the temptation of using other teachers' schemes without thoroughly studying them and adjusting them to my personality and my own class, has led to poor learning outcomes for the pupils. The reason, I believe, is that it is almost impossible to convey engagement without thoroughly knowing the material. This is made possible only by, at least partially, studying and adapting and adjusting this particular text for this particular class. I now understand my colleagues' contemptuous frowns and their disapproving comments about me being "that kind of teacher, the one that just turns the pile every August" when I, not so long ago, happily claimed: "Next year will be easier. I now have everything set." Just for the record, I do not think that way any more.

Linda Danielson writes in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* that the structure of Silko's *Storyteller* (1969) resembles a spider's web: "While the radial strands provide the organizational pattern of the book, the web's lateral threads connect one thematic strand to another, suggesting a whole and woven fabric" (21). This image, in my opinion, is perfect for interpreting Alexie's *The Lone Ranger*. All its stories are autonomous, yet their mutual relationships reveal a coherent whole displayed through both the structural organization, resembling a spider's web, and the thematic presentation, providing a written representation of an oral storytelling event. One might fall into the trap of believing that this faith in the power of storytelling belongs exclusively to Native Americans. What my observations in the classroom the last two years have showed, however, is that the power of storytelling is not something that exists only within the works analyzed or referred to in this essay. Stories and storytelling have the power to teach, to bring forth information, to convey emotions and to build relationships inside the classroom, as well as outside it.

What I mean by narratological didactics and didactical narratology is that understanding the world through literature may give the readers, and in this case the pupils, tools by which they can define and develop themselves. Hence, this is the reason why literature in general and Alexie specifically should be included in the curriculum not separate from teaching language

structure, but as a part of a whole. Unfortunately, storytelling, in my opinion, has been underestimated as a didactic method. Somehow, somewhere, storytelling has become mere entertainment. That is why I wished to connect this analysis of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* to the didactic section of this thesis through the theme of storytelling. This theme emerged as one of the two interwoven and interconnected themes in the composite. The second theme is the existential question about how to live life and how to assert an autonomous self in what appears to be a chaotic existence in which the past and the present seem impossible to connect. Storytelling emerged as one of the means by which a reader may overcome the difficulties in the assertion of a self in a chaotic existence. The closing scene of the movie *Smoke Signals*, Alexie's film based mainly upon "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona" pinpoints precisely what constitutes the "hurricanes" and the "skeletons" with which these characters struggle: "How do we forgive our fathers? [...] Do we forgive our fathers in our age or in theirs?" (Dick Lourie). Storytelling is offered as a means through which one may reach an understanding, not as a simple solution but as recipe on how to conduct a lifelong process of developing as a human being. So with the final words of another storyteller, Paulo Coelho, I rest my case. Or maybe not, because the stories continue in our minds and in our classrooms:

Each person can take on two attitudes: to build or to plant. The builders might take years over their tasks, but one day, they finish what they're doing. Then they find they're hemmed in by their own walls. Life loses its meaning when the building stops. Then there are those who plant. They endure storms and all the many vicissitudes of the season, and they rarely rest. But, unlike a building, a garden never stops growing. And while it requires the gardener's constant attention, it also allows life for the gardener to be a great adventure. (*Brida*, 2008)

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