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**Antithetical Dialogue: Claiming Rhetorical Sovereignty
in Contemporary American Indian Literature**

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By

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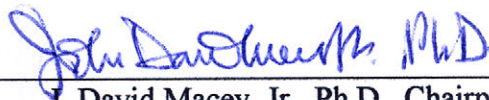
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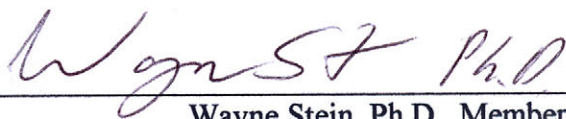
**Antithetical Dialogue: Claiming Rhetorical Sovereignty
in Contemporary American Indian Literature**

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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“Never, never, never quit” – Winston Churchill

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Canonical Euro-American literary and historical discourses exhibit American Indians in stereotypical terms. The characterization of American Indians in Euro-American discourse creates a silent absence in which American Indians are denied rhetorical sovereignty; American Indian rhetorical sovereignty is therefore difficult to assess within the canonical Euro-American rhetorical tradition. Efforts by American Indian authors to claim rhetorical sovereignty demonstrate that not everyone reads from the space that Euro-American authors occupy. American Indian writers have developed a rhetorical model that allows them to claim rhetorical sovereignty. This model, which is antithetical in nature, requires a dialogue between two opposing discourses: American Indian discourse *by* American Indians and discourse *about* American Indians by Euro-American authors.

This antithetical model and its results can be understood through an analysis of Robert Bird's Nick of the Woods and Sherman Alexie's Indian Killer. Bird presents the stereotypes ascribed to American Indians in Euro-American literature, while Alexie shows the way American Indian authors claim rhetorical sovereignty through American Indian writing. This antithetical rhetorical practice allows American Indian authors to

assert sovereignty by reclaiming the absent voice of the “other,” and it enables both American Indian and Euro-American audiences to see the space between the two opposing discourses where that rhetorical sovereignty can operate. This model, illustrated the relationship between Bird’s and Alexie’s novels, challenges the authority of the Euro-American canon and its representation of American Indians while highlighting the importance of American Indian literature and the need for minorities to claim rhetorical sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

Canonical historical and literary texts have painted American Indians as primitive or subversive to the colonizing powers. American Indian cultures and traditions have continuously been overwhelmed by Euro-American colonization and forced assimilation. Richard Henry Pratt's "kill the Indian, save the man" adage played out in the ideology of the Carlisle Indian School described in his autobiography Battlefield & Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian. Pratt describes how Indian children were stripped of their language, religion, and tribal clothing while their parents were goaded into good behavior as a prerequisite to seeing their children. Even as Pratt attempted to assimilate the American Indian other texts, such as James Fennimore Cooper's Last of the Mohicans use the American Indian to romanticize conflict with Euro-American culture and values. Resistance to Euro-American assimilation has been varied throughout history, often entailing violence and protests; yet one form of resistance, perhaps the most powerful, has received little recognition. American Indian writing has offered not only an effective method of responding to the damage done to American Indian cultures but has also manifested the desires of the American Indian community. Scott Lyons writes that "resistance to assimilation through acts of writing should entail something more than counting coup on the text...we might name [that something more] Rhetorical Sovereignty" (449). The struggle for rhetorical sovereignty has been a common thread throughout American Indian history. Ever since American Indians learned to use European languages they have insistently conveyed to the colonizing culture their beliefs, traditions, culture, community and lives. Rhetorical sovereignty has allowed the American Indian to reach beyond political promises made by the Euro-American

colonizers, which have yielded only diminishing territories and broken words, and, as Lyon writes, to assert “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles and languages of public discourse” (459-50).

Rhetorical sovereignty is difficult to assess within the terms of the canonical Euro-American rhetorical tradition. As Malea Powell notes, rhetorical studies are often based on a rhetorical tradition rooted deeply among the Greeks and Romans and in Europe and Euro-America – a tradition that allows for few if any additions (397). Canons are consistently traced back to a mainstream tradition that rarely allows minorities, such as American Indians, to contest or refigure established canons. Minorities, left out of the canon, are denied the tools or the standing to claim rhetorical sovereignty. Powell’s solution is to “make visible the fact that some of us read and listen from a different space, and to suggest that, as a discipline, it is time we all learned to hear that difference” (398). The different spaces about which Powell writes can be used to achieve rhetorical sovereignty; she claims that “this is the space of absent presence” (398). The absence of a minority voice within the canon allows Euro-American authors to misrepresent the minorities in order to suit the needs of the Euro-American readers. American Indians are thus transformed into thieves, murderers, or over-romanticized heroes. They are written into the canon from a space that is not their own but that they are forced to own. The addition of works by American Indian writers to the canon allows American Indians to negate this absent presence and define their own realities, emerging for the reader as rounded characters and, more important, claiming their own rhetorical sovereignty.

Within these spaces American Indian writers have developed a rhetorical model that allows them to claim rhetorical sovereignty. This model is antithetical in nature and is rooted in the spaces to which Powell refers, and it demands a dialogue between two opposing discourses: American Indian discourse *by* American Indians and discourse *about* American Indians by Euro-American authors.

Euro-American culture, through its films and texts, has categorized American Indian communities as villainous, uncivilized, savage or extinct. In American Indian reality, lands were stripped away by settlers, promises were made by the United States government only to be continually altered or broken, oral traditions and native languages were suppressed in Indian schools, cultural beliefs were taken away with baptisms, and the individuality of the person and the tribe was suppressed in favor of stereotypes of the American Indian as wild, mysterious and defiant. While exploiting the American Indian as a stock figure in the settlement stories of the United States, Euro-American authors have subjected the American Indian to unwarranted criticisms, stereotypes and fictitious representations. The American Indian has been defined by the Euro-American canons that have, in turn, promoted preconceived notions in the minds of the non-Indian, leaving little room for American Indians to represent themselves in their own image. From the moment the American Indian community learned to communicate in Euro-American culture, American Indians have sought rhetorical sovereignty by establishing themselves as individuals, distinguishing themselves as different tribes, and defining in their own terms their various communities and realities. American Indian authors have not sought so much to correct the numerous fictional accounts of the American Indian as to express

themselves within their own space. In doing so, they have created a rhetorical model that opposes the stereotypes that inform mainstream canons.

This antithetical dynamic allows the American Indian to claim rhetorical sovereignty while addressing the use of literary techniques including genre, theme and characterization and social issues such as violence or conflicting claims about identity made by these two groups. While this antithetical method can be seen in numerous examples and media, this study will focus on Sherman Alexie's Indian Killer and Robert Bird's Nick of the Woods, texts that exemplify the kinds of antithetical rhetorical strategies employed more generally by American Indian writers.

Nick of the Woods exemplifies a Euro-American discourse that manipulates American Indians. Bird's use of the gothic genre and his unapologetic stereotyping of American Indians reflect widespread practices by prior Euro-American authors. Bird also clears a path for future Euro-American authors to take similar liberties with the American Indian voice. Indeed, Bird states in his introduction that he feels James Fennimore Cooper is too kind to American Indians in Last of the Mohicans. Nick of the Woods is not just a story about early settlements but is also a response to equally stereotypical stories from other Euro-American writers such as Cooper; even among Euro-American authors, attitudes toward American Indians differed greatly, but the result was generally the same: they exploit the absent presence of the American Indian and fill it with a Euro-American image of American Indians.

Reading Indian Killer with and against Nick of the Woods exposes the workings and the effects of rhetorical antithesis. Alexie's work is aligned closely with Euro-American techniques. He uses literary techniques and addresses social issues similar to

those that concern Bird in Nick of the Woods. In doing so he opens up a dialogue that abolishes the absent presence. Alexie replaces the empty space in which Bird distorts American Indians with his own voice, the voice of an American Indian. Indian Killer illustrates the rhetorical use of traditional Euro-American writing styles with an American Indian sensibility. The two novels, written over a century apart, constitute a striking antithetical dialogue that illustrates the distinctive and undocumented rhetorical strategies by which American Indian authors engage with and contest the stereotypical images of American Indian communities and cultures perpetrated by canonical Euro-American writers.

CHAPTER ONE

The antithetical model describes the use of literary techniques such as genre, theme and characterization to emphasize the space across which opposing groups write; by this means American Indian writers are able to claim rhetorical sovereignty. While the techniques chosen by individual writers may vary, their use of these techniques and tropes connects the reader to each work. This chapter argues that American Indian and Euro-American writers share a common technical and stylistic repertoire; however the American Indian writers deploy those techniques and tropes differently, adopting a potentially subversive or revolutionary approach creates the antithetical dialogue.

Bird and Alexie both adopt conventions and techniques associated with “gothic” literature. In doing so, Bird conforms to the trends of his literary era, while Alexie uses conventional techniques to claim rhetorical sovereignty and, in doing so, highlights the antithetical model. Nick of the Woods was written at the height of the American Romantic period, when gothic tropes and techniques dominated novels exploring the settlement of the United States. While gothic literature from overseas often used foreboding castles and folklore to create mystery, Bird, among other authors, uses the American Indian and the wilderness to instill fear among readers. Robert Levine argues that the gothic genre supports “cultural projects of removal and expansion, [by] portraying the Indian as a kind of fiend” (93). While the monsters who threatened the characters in British gothic literature had no direct basis in contemporary reality, American gothic literature uses American Indians as villains, which encouraged existing hostility and damaged the relations between American Indians and Euro-American culture. Bird’s novel, however, also foreshadows realism, unlike the works of other

writers who, like Cooper, romanticized the American Indian. Novels such as Cooper's Last of the Mohicans create a picturesque version of American Indians who help settlers and militias make their way through the wild. According to Cooper, the American Indian is the "noble savage"; however, Nick of the Woods represents American Indians as savages who lack any human dimension and thus can legitimately be killed. The gothic aspect of Nick of the Woods focuses on the various tribes in the wild who wait to scalp any of the settlers who dare to venture outside of their fort. The hero who emerges due to the savagery of frontier Kentucky is the Jibbenainosay, a mythical creature who, unlike traditional gothic creatures, is "batting for the other team." The rumor among tribes is that the Jibbenainosay is the sum of the evil acts committed by the tribes and that this monster is their punishment, particularly for Black-Vulture's tribe, who were responsible for scalping Nathan's family. Bird uses the gothic plot to allegorize violence toward the American Indians in order to facilitate the colonization of Kentucky. In the first chapter Bird promises his readers Eden if they can win the land from the American Indians:

Suffering and privation of all kinds were to be endured on the long and savage road, in which mountain, river, bog, and forest were to be passed, and often, too, in the teeth of a lurking foe; while peril of every imaginable aspect was still to be encountered. The rich fields, - the hunting-grounds of a dozen tribes of Indians, - to be possessed, were first to be won, and won from an enemy at once brave and cruel, resolute and wily, who had shown no disposition to yield them except life, and who had already stained them with the best blood of the settlers. (12)

Bird's novel typifies the Euro-American attitude toward American Indians by describing a rich land destined to be possessed by the settlers, as if, by some providence, it already

belonged to the settlers, thus denying the American Indians any rights to the land and situating them rather as an inconvenience to be overcome. Euro-American authors such as Bird turn the gothic genre against the very individuals and communities whom they employ, in stereotypical form, to achieve its distinctive effects and whom they represent as self-destructive and doomed. In the process, they create a space, both physical and conceptual, for an “enlightened” or “rational” Euro-American ascendancy.

Alexie also maintains the gothic undertone in Indian Killer by using the rainy, urban jungle to set up a contemporary mystery. Unlike the early American authors, Alexie uses the gothic genre to connect with the reader, forging a new link in the gothic tradition in America. Teresa Goddu argues that the gothic genre has the disruptive potential to expose the contradictions in American myths. She contends that in early American texts the “repeated massacre scenes and its structural interchangeability articulate a narrative of violence and degeneration rather than civilization and progress (63). Departing from this degenerative tradition, Alexie categorizes neither the Euro-American culture nor American Indians as the villain. Alexie’s mystery deepens with the introduction of several characters and, eventually, the mysterious Indian Killer. The antithetical relationship between Bird’s and Alexie’s novels emerges in the different ways the authors use gothic conventions to advance their stories. Alexie uses gothic conventions to illustrate the effects of the ongoing marginalization of the American Indian community, as well as the conflicts many American Indians face between their historical cultures and the melting pot of the twentieth-century United States. In the process Alexie suggests ways of defining and sustaining an identity when one is pulled in two different directions. American Indians, told to blend in, either conform to popular

stereotypes or defer to over zealous Indian-lovers who think they know more than actual American Indians. The urban jungle of the twentieth-century does not allow space for the American Indian to be an American Indian except in terms of the stereotypes of the dominating culture. The first chapter of Indian Killer, entitled “Mythology,” presents the birth of John and, in doing so, reveals the novel’s narrative perspective. The dirty hospital, the confused “old Indian man” looking for the moccasins he lost when he was twelve (3), and finally the graphic account of John’s delivery while his young mother screams for him and he is torn away all suggest the reality of the American Indian condition from birth until death. The reality of the world into which John is born is dirty and chaotic; Alexie shows the reality of the reservation hospitals and uses this scene to set up the gothic conventions he employs throughout Indian Killer. John is suddenly thrust into a new world: “A large house. Swimming pool. A man and woman waving energetically. Home.” (7) The following sentences, however, reveal that the infant is screaming: “Noise, heat. John cries, louder than before, trying to be heard. Home.” (7) John is stolen from the home he briefly knew and taken to a home with a white family; as Alexie writes, “suddenly this is war.” (6) John is born amid chaos and confusion, where everything happens in a rapidly moving sequence. It is a dank, sickly and worn-out atmosphere: “he remembers the family of four coughing blood into handkerchiefs” (6). At the same time, this is also home for John. He knows the difference between the white woman’s breast and his mother’s breast. Alexie creates an identity crisis for John at birth; this is the space from which Alexie writes. John is born to a teenage mother, from a place that is dirty, has poor health conditions and, overall, a certain overcast ambience. He is

thrown into a white world as an infant, and this tearing away of an American Indian baby is the act of war that initiates the gothic undercurrent in Indian Killer.

Alexie uses gothic conventions in his descriptions of the conditions of John's birth and adoption, and in doing so he asserts rhetorical sovereignty by filling in the spaces that Bird renders opaque in Nick of the Woods. Bird and other Euro-American authors use the gothic genre against American Indians to create an unknowability. They fill this unknowability with the Euro-American interpretation of the American Indians, thus denying any true voice to the American Indian. Unlike Bird, Alexie uses gothic conventions to show the reality of American Indians. Alexie's gothic conventions are real expressions of the American Indian experience, which makes them that much more frightening to the reader. While the novel is a work of fiction, some of the descriptions Alexie uses are painfully real and commonplace for American Indians. By filling in the spaces left blank in Bird's novel, Alexie claims rhetorical sovereignty; he refuses to let the gothic genre efface or destroy the American Indian but rather uses gothic conventions to communicate a reality that mainstream readers otherwise might not be able to understand.

Euro-American literature uses themes of violence to reinforce stereotypes of the American Indian. This, in turn, reinforces the traditional canon's exclusion or marginalization of anything categorized as "other." American Indians use theme in a variety of oppositional ways in order to deliberately deconstruct stereotypical canonical perspectives and narratives. Daniel Heath Justice states,

Native writers of poetry, prose fiction, and nonfiction speak to the living realities of struggle and possibility among Indigenous peoples; they challenge both Natives and non-Natives to surrender stereotypes,

committing ourselves instead to untangling colonialism from our minds, spirits, and bodies. (5)

This antithetical rhetorical practice allows for a more cohesive understanding not only of American Indian literature but also of the ways in which the traditional canon excludes or marginalizes minorities.

Bird uses American Indians as a means of sustaining an antagonistic, conflict-driven plot line. In the preface he suggests that he may owe an apology to his readers for the characterization of the American Indians but then quickly recants and defends his writing on the basis that “the North American savage has never appeared to us the gallant and heroic personage [because of] the single fact that he wages war – systematic war – upon beings incapable of resistance or defence” (9). Bird asserts that the American Indians are savages who crave war, yet he never addresses the reasons for which they would wage war, nor does he reflect in the novel on why the violence occurs. While Alexie does not offer his readers a preface, he does provide a short yet poignant epigraph from Alex Kuo: “We are what / We have lost.” This epigraph is racially ambiguous, as it is not directed toward one particular group, and it is all-inclusive in its use of “we.” It also engages the reader to reflect throughout the novel on who the addressee of this epigraph might be: society, culture or even the different races. Unlike Bird, Alexie does not begin his novel with half-hearted apologies and excuses for his characters, but his inclusive epigraph encourages the reader to move forward without assigning blame but instead asking questions about who “we” are and what is it that “we” have lost. Janet Dean believes that the epigraph is directly related to the last chapter of Indian Killer, in which the killer dances in a cemetery. Dean writes that “Indian Killer is about acts of

collection and re-collection, the meanings and identities they produce, and, more significantly, the losses they inflict” (31). The collection of objects that the killer has as he or she dances over the unidentifiable graves suggests a new identity created from the old; the killer wears a wooden mask and has a scrapbook, owl feathers, and scalps in a plastic bag. These objects suggest more than an attack on white society, as they evoke the recollection of what was lost and the creation of a new identity, as “The killer is softly singing a new song that sounds exactly like an old one” (Alexie 419) while dancing a dance that is 500 hundred years old (420). Bird uses scalping and violence to represent revenge on the part both of settlers and of American Indians as they wage a relentless war against one another. Bird’s character Nathan epitomizes the use of violence as a means to an end. His revenge on Black-Vulture ends in a rage as he leaves Black-Vulture’s camp, “snatching from the post the bundle of withered scalps – the locks and ringlets of his own murdered family...as if to contrast the two prizes together, the reeking scalp-lock of the murderer” (363). Bird’s attempt to justify the settlement of Kentucky relies heavily on anger and a thirst for revenge, and peace is possible only through the annihilation of either savage or settler, as there is no possibility of peaceful co-existence. The scalping and violence in Alexie’s novel, on the other hand, is not necessarily motivated by revenge but by fear of the unknown. This creates a striking antithetical dialogue as both authors use similar forms of violence but place that violence in very different contexts. Alexie’s violence is a means to claim rhetorical sovereignty. The characters do not kill to achieve personal revenge, and eventually the violence calms and in its aftermath both whites and American Indians must find a way to co-exist. As Dean points out, the last chapter, “A Creation Story,” gives the reader a lasting impression of American Indian rhetorical

sovereignty. The collection of items, owl upon owl landing in the trees, and Indian after Indian gathering to learn the song and dance, is a way to undermine the collection of stereotypes and misunderstandings of American Indians made by Euro-American society and to claim rhetorical sovereignty. The novel is not only about racial issues but is also about the creation of a new identity for the American Indian, one based on the present but rooted in the past, as the song suggests.

CHAPTER TWO

The antithetical model also effectively describes the relationship between Bird's and Alexie's styles of characterization. The stark contrast between the characters in Nick of the Woods and Indian Killer reflects the different political and social orientation of the two texts. Nick of the Woods contains many static and flat characters. Roland Forrester and his cousin, Edith, encounter trial after trial but never learn or change. There is no cause and effect with Edith and Roland; events happen to them, but never as a result of their actions. They are static characters who move the plot forward, but at the conclusion they end up where they began: "He joyously and with Edith, still more joyous at his side, turned his face towards the East and Virginia" (392). Ralph Stackpole also experiences little or no development as a character. Ralph never learns his lesson; he is branded a horse thief at the beginning of the novel, when he steals Briarus from Roland, and he continues to fulfill this stereotype throughout the novel. When faced with the choice to do what is right or to do what he wants, he often chooses the latter. Ralph also categorizes American Indians in stereotypical terms. As Frederick White notes, "what most people think about when they hear the terms 'Indian,' 'Native American,' or 'First Nations'" are "loincloths, teepees, war paint, or nomads" (83). Ralph describes the American Indians as devils and prides himself on being able to kill them; yet his own moral character is not much better than that he ascribes to the tribes. While in Edith's service he has the opportunity to steal only enough horses for a quick retreat or to steal all of the horses from Black-Vulture. Ultimately Ralph's weak character succumbs to the temptation to possess so many fine horses: "the next time I come a-grabbin' hosses, if I don't fetch a bushel of the jinglers, I wish I may be kicked! Them thar Injun dogs is always the devil!"

(294-5). Ralph steals, lies and cheats, yet he is constantly reprieved from the consequences of his actions, unlike the tribes against whom he and the other characters fight. Ralph's repeated captures by the American Indians do not lead him to change. He is also a stock character. Ralph is the stereotypical comic relief who lightens the mood with his broken promises and foolery.

Bloody Nathan is the most round of Bird's characters. Nathan is a complex contradiction. He is a Quaker who condemns any violence toward either the settlers or tribes, yet he consistently warns the forts if any tribes are in the immediate area, as a way to avoid bloodshed. Nathan's alter ego, the Jibbenainosay, is violent and seeks out the American Indian tribes to slaughter and scalp and then he leaves a cross on his victims' chests. The one trait Nathan and his alter ego share is the symbol of Christianity, and eventually Nathan reveals himself as the Jibbenainosay, animated by the desire for revenge. Bird uses Nathan to explain the violence that played so large a part in the settlement of the United States. Nathan is apparently a peaceful, Christian man who is cruelly confronted by American Indians who slaughter his family with no mercy, and he reciprocates in kind. Nathan seeks revenge, which the novel condones, and he is, in fact, encouraged by the settlers who mock him for his condemnation of violence. Bird's characters often give little thought to their violence toward American Indians, except to assert that it is justifiable as a reaction to the violence inflicted upon them by the savage Indian. The novel, however, fails to provide or imagine the perspective of the American Indians and offers little insight into the American Indian world.

Alexie's characters are much more dynamic and round. While the ironically named John Smith initially appears to be the main focus of the novel, the overall

significance of the narrative becomes clear only when one considers the entire cast of characters. While Bird uses his characterization to explain the settlement of the United States and justify violence toward American Indians, Alexie uses characterization to explore the racial tension that permeates modern society. John is described as a full-blooded Indian of an unknown tribe. He is immediately caught in a very complex world where he yearns to identify with other American Indians but can never seem to adjust. Adopted by white parents, John is the only minority in his school, and he experiences racial profiling throughout the novel: “If John happened to be a little fragile, well, that was perfectly understandable, considering his people’s history. All of that alcoholism and poverty, the lack of God in their lives” (19). John is the product of what Wolfgang Mieder describes as the proverbial stereotype that “The Only good Indian is a Dead Indian” (38). Alexie explores this mentality through all of his characters. Marie Polatkin, on the other hand, represents aspects of the contemporary American Indian experience. Unlike John, Marie is able to identify with her heritage while also expressing frustration with those, such as her teacher Dr. Mather, who make false claims about her culture, as well as with those who propagate these false beliefs, such as Jack Wilson, the novelist and ex-cop who wants to be American Indian so badly that he eventually comes to believe he is one through some distant lineage, thus giving himself some right to write novels about American Indians. Marie challenges those who claim rights over her people and over the American Indian experience:

“How can Wilson present an authentic and traditional view of the Indian world if he isn’t authentic and traditional himself?” asked Marie. “I mean,

I've done some research on this guy. He isn't even Indian at all. How would he know about the despair, or happiness, in the Indian world?" (66)

Jack encountered many American Indians during his time as a police officer in Seattle. His encounters gave him little insight into the world of an American Indian but plenty of fodder for his stories. Dr. Mather, a literature professor who champions Jack Wilson as an American Indian author, further promotes the stereotypes that Jack propagates. This aggravates Marie, since she sees them both furthering the widespread misunderstandings of the American Indian community while not giving credit to actual American Indian authors. Dr. Mather is not much better than Jack. He uses "educational purposes" as a justification for stealing family tapes from Marie's cousin, Reggie. Dr. Mather continually interferes in American Indian culture on the basis of "anthropological importance," and he considers himself qualified to teach American Indian college courses because he has studied and written about American Indians. In addition to Jack Wilson and Dr. Mather, other static characters incite violence, including Truck Shultz, a radio host who fuels the underlying flames of distrust between mainstream culture and American Indians. "Citizens, I am outraged," Truck exclaims, "What is our society coming to when good men cannot safely walk the streets of our cities...They were guilty of the crime of being white" (207). Enraged college students act out the anger Truck Shultz encourages. These static peripheral characters illustrate Marie's frustrations with those who perpetuate myths about American Indians. Marie and John are both American Indian but they are opposites in their American Indian identity, which affects the way they interact with the mainstream culture. This interaction suggests different interpretations of the stereotypical claim, "'The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian'; the

word 'dead' meaning both a literal death and, for those who survived the mass killings, a figurative death, that is, a restricted life on the reservation with little freedom to continue the traditional life-style" (Meider 39). Alexie uses Marie and John to claim rhetorical sovereignty. Marie is neither struggling with her heritage, as John is, nor does she accept the anti-Indian rhetoric or the well-intended but misguided work of those who attack the American Indian community; rather she partakes positively in American Indian culture, such as campus pow-wows, and gives to the homeless American Indians in downtown Seattle, while Jack only writes about American Indians, Dr. Mather only studies American Indians, and John struggles with who he is as an American Indian. Marie asserts her American Indian heritage in a way that challenges Euro-American conceptions and in doing so claims rhetorical sovereignty by making herself known and taking away the unknowability Bird deploys.

Bird's and Alexie's novels use their characters differently, particularly in the way they employ their peripheral characters. Bird uses his characters to develop his story about the settlement of Kentucky, to offer comic relief, and to excuse one side in a two-sided battle between the settlers and American Indians. While Bird's white settlers reflect the contemporary attitude of Euro-Americans toward American Indians, he does not demonstrate understanding of the American Indians' attitude toward settlers. The silence that Bird imposes on his American Indian characters enables the novel's anti-Indian rhetoric, whereas Alexie allows the reader to hear the voices of several characters from different communities in Indian Killer. The array of characters Alexie develops allows the reader to reflect on contemporary attitudes *toward* American Indians and the contemporary attitudes *of* American Indians. While Bird silences particular perspectives,

Alexie uses different perspectives to emphasize the complexity of the struggle of the American Indian community and the American Indian identity through different characters, thus claiming rhetorical sovereignty.

CHAPTER THREE

The antithetical model not only explains Alexie's use of literary techniques, but it also addresses social realities experienced by American Indians. Understanding how this model addresses these social realities, in turn, enables the reader to recognize the rhetorical sovereignty of American Indians. The antithetical model juxtaposes Euro-American texts and American Indian texts to elucidate the social realities of the American Indian, asserting rhetorical sovereignty in the space between the texts. Identity, alienation and violence are three social realities that figure particularly prominently in the antithetical relationship between Nick of the Woods and Indian Killer.

The identity of the American Indian is often defined generically, as savage and violent. In Nick of the Woods, Bird does not give the tribes much of an identity apart from a violent existence. If the Indians are unwilling to make peace with the settlers and adopt the settlers' way of life, then they are considered more or less "other," problematic but also disposable and cannibalistic: "'Beaten!' said the Kentuckian, opening his eyes; 'cut off the *b*, and say the savages made a dinner of 'em, and you'll be nearer the true history of the matter'" (33). Bird imposes a false identity on the American Indians in his novel. The tribes are described as cannibalistic in order to frighten and disgust readers. Bird sets up the American Indians as an alien race so they will be seen as inhuman and be feared. Not only does Bird skew the identity of the American Indians in his novel, but he also contributes to misrepresent American Indian identity outside of the fictional world of the novel. Theresa D. O'Neil highlights this misrepresentation as reprehensible Euro-American behavior toward American Indians:

I would argue that we can understand the significance of de-humanizing encounters with whites, the narrated events of these stories, only insofar as we come to terms with the kinds of narrative events in which such encounters are constructed. (95)

Bird categorizes the American Indian in broad, generalizing strokes, rather than representing American Indians individually, as he does with his white characters. In addition to stereotyping the American Indian by taking away their individuality and their human qualities, he also separates them physically from the rest of society. The settlers live in small, protected communities while the “savages” live in their villages and threaten the burgeoning civilization that grows within the walls of the settlements.

This highlights a specific issue: the Euro-American settlers and American Indian tribes have never been a coherent community; rather the Euro-American settlement emerges as an exclusive civilization within the fort walls that one either conforms to or leaves. The social reality is that the American Indian, in texts such as Nick of the Woods, has been deemed unfit for society unless he or she adheres to Euro-American rules of conduct. O’Neill notes that this

illuminate[s] an important aspect of the larger context for relations between Indians and whites at the reservation: the social geography of the town, in which Indians and whites live on opposite sides, is a concrete manifestation of the social separation of Indians and whites on the reservation as a whole. (98)

Nick of the Woods gives no identity to the American Indian except as a large group of uncivilized savages without any individuality:

the mortal feud, never destined to be really ended but with the annihilation or civilization, of the American race, first began between the savage and the white intruder. It was, and is, essentially a measure of retaliation, compelled, if not justified, by the ferocious example of the red-man. (280)

Alexie, on the other hand, represents the social dynamics of identity through several characters in Indian Killer. Unlike Nick of the Woods, Indian Killer presents both those who try to strip away the identity of American Indians and American Indians who are asserting their identity. The conflict between the identity that mainstream society assigns American Indians and the identity that American Indians assert creates the antithetical model that elucidates American Indian rhetorical sovereignty. Alexie addresses the same social issue as Bird; however he highlights the separation between Euro-American society and American Indians in a very different way.

Bird describes American Indian communities as violent and secluded. Alexie uses the same notions that many Euro-American authors have used, but he deploys them in a manner that supports the American Indian identity. O'Neil writes that American Indian "narratives represent an attempt to transform the negative messages of prejudice into positive images of Indian identity through implicit contrast with the reprehensible behaviors of whites" (95). Alexie describes the reservation at the time of John's birth, where the Indian Health Services is dirty and everything seems bleak and lost, including an elderly man: "He is barefoot and confused, searching for a pair of moccasins he lost when he was twelve years old" (3). The elderly patients in the hospital are trying to find something that they have lost, the identity that has been taken from them and distorted into something alien to their experience. John takes this confusion with him as he grows

up as an urbanized Indian. John is confused about who he is and about the relationship between the whites and Indians. The conversation between John and Father Duncan allows John to recognize the tensions between the mainstream community and the American Indian community: “John did not have the vocabulary to express what he was feeling. But he understood there was something odd about the contrast between the slaughtered Jesuits and Father Duncan, and between the Indian Jesuit and the murderers” (14). While John struggles to find his own identity despite the tensions between the Euro-American and American Indian communities, Marie’s identity as an urban and culturally distinct Indian constitutes a strong presence within the novel.

Marie is active in her culture and knows who she is:

most every urban Indian still held closely to his or her birth tribe. Marie was Spokane, would always be Spokane. But she was also an urban Indian, an amalgamation that included over two hundred tribes in the same Seattle area where many white people wanted to have Indian blood. (38)

Alexie highlights the difference between an urban Indian and a lost one. John, who has no cultural ties, is lost; he has lost his moccasins like the old man in the reservation hospital. John is not able to navigate life in mainstream society, because while he is aware that he is different, he does not understand those differences in the same way that Marie does. Marie is a successful urban Indian. She knows she is welcomed by Euro-American society only because she is different: “She had watched quite a few white guys pursue brown female students...Go to college, find a cute minority woman preferably with limited English, and colonize her by sleeping with her” (69). The white men want to date her for the same reason others look down upon her, because they consider her

unusual and almost mythical. She is something to be tamed. Marie sees through the intentions of non-Indians; her ability to see non-Indians' motives allows her to retain her identity as an American Indian in an urban setting, because she refuses to cheapen her heritage by entering into relationships or being swayed by mainstream society to conform to Euro-America's concept of the "American Indian." C. Matthew Snipp notes that American Indians like Marie hold onto and conceive the concept of "Indian" in a different way when living in mainstream society:

The growth in numbers of American Indians has been accompanied by increasing diversity. This has meant large changes in the ways that Indians earn their livelihood, practice their culture, and conceive of their identity. Yet American Indians have successfully maintained their distinctive position in a large and complex society. (367)

Euro-American works of literature, such as Bird's novel, lead the reader to be frightened of the other, to believe that the American Indian is dangerous and monstrous and must therefore be exiled. Bird uses the differences and physical segregation between Euro-American settlers and American Indians to justify violence against American Indians and to deny the tribes any identity other than the one he assigns them. Alexie uses the differences between Euro-American society and American Indians to assert the American Indian identity, as well as to highlight the realities American Indians face regarding their identity when they live in mainstream society.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alienation is also a pervasive social experience among American Indians. In Bird's novel the tribes experience hostility from Euro-American settlers, who shun them. Bird alienates the tribes by ascribing to them a false identity. While Roland is having trouble trying to find his way out of the woods, he tries the "Indian" way of navigating but decides it is futile: "The varying shape and robustness of the boughs are thought to offer a better means of finding the points of a compass; but none but the Indians, and hunters grown gray in the woods, can profit by *their* occult lessons" (112). Bird characterizes everything within the American Indian's culture as futile, even skills that could help in survival. Roland decides he would rather let his horse pick a route (113) than try to understand his environment and the survival traditions of others. Bird twists basic survival skills in the wilderness into an occult practice and insinuates that those who live and survive in the wilderness are devotees of "dark" powers. Defining the wilderness and those who live in the wilderness as essentially different from Euro-American society alienates the Euro-American reader from Bird's American Indian subjects. Bird does not allow for a legitimate existence outside of Euro-American culture; rather he takes part in what Lawrence Gross terms cultural genocide:

I would further argue that if the genocide of Indians is to be brought to an end, it must be demonstrated that Indian cultures are pertinent to the experiences of non-Indians so they may better understand and appreciate Indian cultures and therefore recognize the need to end the Indian holocaust. Moreover, if Indians have to learn the ways of mainstream

culture, is it not reasonable for non- Indians to learn the ways of American Indians? (122)

This cultural genocide to which Gross refers occurs when a group is consistently represented as different, in a stigmatized way, from others. Bird prefers to alienate the tribes by keeping them separate from the Euro-American communities; however, he further alienates the American Indians in his novel when he describes Euro-American and Indian encounters. During these encounters, Bird's characters make statements that encourage the reader to repudiate the American Indian as well: "there is more danger in one single skulking Shawnee than ten thousand such sputtering brooks" (139). Instead of fighting the American Indians, Bird's characters would rather cross a river to get away from them. Bird paints his Euro-American characters as innocent victims of the wilderness, while he depicts the American Indians as the aggressors. Bird's representation of the American Indian as wild, cultish and violent perpetuates stereotypes of American Indians held by Euro-American society at large.

Alexie paints a very different portrait of what happens when a dominant culture tries to force its social rules on other cultures. In Indian Killer, the dichotomies among Jack Wilson, Dr. Mather, Marie and John Smith show what happens as the result of such alienation. Jack Wilson believes he is American Indian by birthright; indeed, he believes the lie so much he writes novels about American Indians and claims an American Indian identity, and yet he has never participated in the culture. He likes the *idea* of being American Indian, but he has no idea what it means to *be* an American Indian. Jack has blonde hair and blue eyes; he is not seen by the outside world as American Indian. He claims to have American Indian experiences, but he does not have the social experiences

that most American Indians have. He writes about American Indian figures in stereotypical terms and bases his novels on crimes connected to American Indians; however, he has no experiences of his own to write about and thus he cannot convey the truth of an American Indian's experiences through his writings. He is stealing his American Indian experience from actual American Indians. Jack loves the American Indian culture, but what he, like Dr. Mather, fails to realize is that his good intentions lead to the same alienation as the actions of Truck Shultz, who disdains American Indians. Dr. Mather chooses themes and texts for his classes that have nothing to do with the American Indian experience, and yet his Euro-American students read and connect with works like Jack Wilson's. This perpetuates alienation because the information and knowledge being conveyed to the mainstream culture is stereotyped and faulty. These authors may not mean to do harm, but in their endeavor to promote their version of American Indian culture they are obscuring what is real American Indian culture.

John Smith's experience is more valid than Wilson's or Mather's. John has no culture and is alienated from birth from both the American Indian world and mainstream culture. He has no tribal identity. His adoptive parents try to inundate him with different tribal experiences, which merely confuse John and alienate him further. His adoptive parents are aware he is different from them, and they are aware that there are different tribes, but instead of trying to find some solid ground to help John identify with his culture, they show him a patchwork of different tribes. When they first receive John, "because the baby John was Indian, Olivia and Daniel Smith wanted him to be baptized by an Indian, and they searched for days and weeks for the only Indian Jesuit in the Pacific Northwest" (13). It becomes evident that a white couple is not really capable of

taking care of an American Indian child's cultural needs. While John and Olivia may mean well, they find the only American Indian Jesuit instead of trying to let John find himself. Simply having John baptized by an Indian who practices their religion does not blend Christianity with American Indian cultures or traditions any more than if he were baptized by a white priest. John observes the nuances of American Indian behavior from basketball games to powwows, but he can never assimilate to those behaviors. When other American Indians ask which tribe he is affiliated with, John feels he has to lie. He can never be a "real Indian" because of the lies he feels he has to tell in order to be accepted by other Indians: "Through years of observation and practice, he had learned how an Indian was supposed to act" (35). Ethnically, John is American Indian, but in every other way he is lost. He cannot dance, laugh, or play basketball, and he does not know to which tribe he belongs. He does not know what it is like to be a "real Indian," and yet his experience is wholly American Indian with respect to the way he is treated by American Indians like Marie, who expect him to be familiar with American Indian cultures and his heritage, and he is also treated as an American Indian by the Euro-American society based on the fact that he is physically American Indian. John and his adoptive parents are the product of what Elizabeth Archuleta describes as blood quantum:

American Indians have allowed blood quantum to become a totalizing system used to define Indigenous peoples and reassign us to narratives that trap us into assigned roles—full-blood, mixed-blood, part-Indian, real, authentic, traditional, urban, and so on. (23)

John measures his worth by how Indian he can appear, although he is not in fact a “full-blood”; the problem is that he does not know what “kind” of Indian blood he has and as a result is alienated from society – both Euro-American and American Indian.

John receives snide remarks because he is the token American Indian in a class. The reality of being alienated from mainstream culture is an American Indian reality that John experiences time and again. The only difference for him is that this experience is magnified because he has nothing to hold on to from his heritage. John cannot confront his alienation because he does not feel he has authority over being alienated; unlike Marie, John does not have any association with his heritage to challenge his alienation by mainstream society. Marie has her heritage, experience and knowledge to support her as she confronts Jack Wilson; at the same time, however, Marie’s and John’s experience of being alienated is also the same. Marie and John are both subjected to the same commentary by the public because they are American Indians but their reactions differ: John internalizes his anger, while Marie challenges people like Dr. Mather and Wilson when they further misinterpret her culture. Unlike Nick of the Woods, Indian Killer shows that there is no morally superior culture. The killer in the novel returns the little boy while he kills the white business man. John’s suicide is not sinful but an escape to find himself: “An Indian father was out there beyond the horizon. And maybe an Indian mother with a scar on her belly” (413). Marie, in turn, continues to fight against being pushed into a glass house where the mainstream culture can observe how “Indian” she is. Both American Indians and whites are complicit in harming innocent people; Marie, however, allows the reader to understand American Indian rhetorical sovereignty when she says, “Indians are dancing now, and I don’t think they’re going to stop” (418).

Evocative of the Ghost Dancers, Marie's statement is an exclamation that condemns attempts to "civilize" the American Indian through white adoption or teaching faux American Indian literature, practices that will not stop American Indians from pushing back against the external forces imposing on and distorting their culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

Violence is yet another social reality that American Indians experience. This social reality is exhibited in Bird's and Alexie's novels, even as Alexie uses the antithetical model to claim rhetorical sovereignty for American Indians. The titles of the two novels attempt to be culturally ambiguous. Nick of the Woods is also known as The Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky, and Bird later explains that Jibbenainosay is a name his American Indian characters give to their demon. While Bird attempts to be culturally ambiguous, the latter portion of his title illustrates that the novel is more about Kentucky. This is substantiated by his preface: "In the midst of difficulties and dangers as numerous and urgent ... were laid, upon a basis as firm as if planned by the subtlest and wisest spirits of age, the foundations of a great and powerful State" (7). Alexie's title is even more ambiguous. Indian Killer can be taken as either one who kills Indians or an Indian who kills. Both titles highlight the central point of their mystery: violence. Death in both novels takes place in a similar manner but is explained in two different conceptual contexts. The antithetical model juxtaposes these differences to establish rhetorical sovereignty.

The Jibbenainosay is considered a walking spirit by the American Indian tribes: "them that know more about the Injun garble than I do, say it means the Spirit-that-walks; and if we can believe any such lying devils as Injuns...he is neither man nor beast, but a great ghost or devil" (43). The Jibbenainosay is neither human nor animal and is considered, by the tribes, to be some sort of spirit, a conception that the settlers translate in terms of their own beliefs as the devil. The Jibbenainosay leaves its mark on its victims with a "knife-cut, or a brace of 'em, over the ribs in the shape of a cross" (42) and takes

the scalp, usually with a tomahawk strike to the head. The mark left by the Jibbenainosay on the victims recalls the markings of the “savages,” but the cross suggests someone with a Christian affiliation. When Nathan is revealed to be the Jibbenainosay, it becomes apparent that the killings were a response to Black-Vulture’s tribe’s assault on a peaceful Christian man; Nathan viewed it as his right to kill any American Indian in revenge for the slaughter of his family. This follows the traditional self-consciousness of the Euro-American settlers; as Wesley Craven discusses in his work, English settlers insisted that they “in reality did not seek to dispossess the Indians, but rather to share with them the resources of a rich country and at the same time to confer upon them the benefits of a better life” (66). This conventional thought is highlighted by Nathan.

Nathan assumed that he could live outside the fort walls because he believed that he was offering the tribes something better than their current culture; however, in reality Nathan was intruding on tribal lands. Nathan represents the idea that violence begets violence, yet he refuses to admit that perhaps the root of the problem was the original unwanted intrusion of the Euro-American culture. The settlers did not distinguish tribal lands from other land, thereby causing conflicts with the tribes who already inhabited that land. Bird justifies Nathan’s killing but never acknowledges the motives of the tribe for attacking Nathan’s home. The violence extends beyond the Jibbenainosay to encompass the settlers. The settlements are conveniently warned about the advances of the tribes and ride off to defend their territory outside the walls of the fort. While the settlers and Jibbenainosay kill based on what Bird deems to be justice, Bird often describes the American Indians as mentally unstable, drunk and taking pleasure in death and torture as in the case of “an unfortunate prisoner...whom they had bound by the legs to a tree;

around which the savages danced and leaped, yelling now with rage, now in merriment, but all the while belaboring the poor wretch with rods and switches” (269). Bird describes the use of violence among the American Indians as methodical and cruel. He characterizes his Euro-American characters as laboring to defend themselves, their land, their women and children. He gives motives for the violence between the settlers and tribes but, in doing so, categorizes American Indians as taking joy in violence and death for no reason other than their own amusement.

Unlike Bird, Alexie shows violence from a number of multifaceted perspectives. The violence in Indian Killer is collective and yet, at the same time, individualized. Violence comes from the psyche of the individual characters and manifests itself not only through actions but also through hostile language, descriptions and thoughts. This individualized violence allows the reader insight not only into an individual character’s thoughts but also into the collective feelings of his or her community. An alternative to the one-sided view and the ongoing violence presented in Bird’s novel, Alexie opens to the reader a number of spaces on either side of the conflict in order to show the motivation behind the violence that begets violence, categorizing neither side as exclusively the aggressor nor exclusively the victim. Alexie’s novel completes a dialogue that is lacking in Bird’s. By exploring violence Alexie reveals the social concerns that arise from a set of experiences that is occluded in Euro-American literature. Nancy Van Styvendale describes this occluded space as trauma:

the increasingly popular language of trauma resonates with Native peoples and within Native communities. The deployment of this language provides Native communities with a means through which they can give expression

to their collective and individual pain, doing so through linguistic and diagnostic categories that, because they are sanctioned within the dominant culture, hold out the hope of having this pain recognized, legitimated, and compensated for. (205)

The first act of violence and trauma is John's birth. Alexie depicts an Indian Health Service hospital in the sixties "on this reservation or that reservation. Any reservation or a particular reservation" (3). Alexie describes a reality that does not discriminate based on tribe. This ambiguity regarding John's origins and the violent and chaotic world into which he is born quickly subsides as he is torn away from his young mother and is delivered to his white adoptive parents. Alexie, however, makes clear to the reader that this white, peaceful place, similar to Bird's picturesque description of Nathan's life prior to his family's death, is not peaceful for everyone: "Five acres of green, green grass. A large house. A swimming pool. A man and woman waving energetically. Home...Noise, heat. John cries, louder than before, trying to be heard. Home" (7). The five acres of green land with energetic parents seems to be the perfect place to raise a child and thus a better home for John than the reservation; however, John's increasing cries and efforts to be heard illustrate that this scenic location is not really John's home. However perfect the white parents and their house may seem, the reality is that John was ripped from his real mother, his own people and his home and is forever severed from his own heritage, culture and family. In addition to the social violence committed against John by well-meaning people such as his parents, violence also permeates the thoughts of the characters. John's built-up anger and his confusion about his identity lead him to the conclusion that he needs to kill a white man (25):

John was embarrassed. He felt the heat build up in his stomach, rise through his back, and fill his head. It started that way. The heat came first, followed quickly by the music. A slow hum. A quiet drum. Then a symphony crashing through his spinal column ... John knew if he were a real Indian, he could have called the wind. (24)

John is neither a blue-eyed white man nor a “real” Indian, and this identity crisis leads him to the conclusion that he needs to kill a white man to satisfy this frustration. John blames the white man not only for everything that is wrong with his life but for the degeneration of his culture and of the heritage from which he is separated. John’s violent thoughts toward the Euro-American community represent an attempt to reclaim the heritage and culture that were taken from him at birth and from the American Indian community. John ends up oppressing himself internally because he is unable to create a connection with his heritage or with the Euro-American society around him; he wants to hurt Euro-Americans but remains silent. John disassociates with Euro-American society, such as his boss at the construction site and his parents knocking on his door because he is angry over his lack of identity and longs for the American Indian priest from his childhood to give him clarity. This continual suppression of anger and disassociation with society ends up leaving John alone and he decides it would be better to disappear like the Jesuit. Whereas Alexie describes John as confused and frustrated by his lack of heritage, he describes the killer as methodical and ritualistic. The killer observes white men in grey suits as angry and unhappy. He perceives that “the men in gray suits wanted to escape, but their hatred and anger trapped them” (51), leading them to take their anger out on inanimate objects or others whom they think are beneath them.

Justin Summers' actions toward the killer separate him from the other grey suits. The killer wanted to teach Summers "a simple and slightly painful lesson," but it turns into a hunt on which the killer realizes the purpose of his knife. Alexie describes the killer as confused: "the killer had not necessarily meant for any of it to happen" (53), and yet he follows through with his ceremony and leaves Summers' body but is not satiated by the kill. One dead white man is not enough to satisfy the killer. However, it was not the act of violence or even the blood that the killer wanted. The killer wants control and power over those who exert control over others. When Mark Jones is kidnapped, the killer tries to take care of him. He feeds him, washes him while he sleeps and then, when ready, takes the child home: "The killer had counted coup, had won a battle without drawing blood" (300) by striking fear into the mainstream community by stealing a child from his home and then returning him. When the killer encounters Edward Letterman, he is disgusted by what he finds in the pornography shop. The sexual images on the screen between a white man and a dark brown woman incite the killer's anger, and he is repelled by the images he sees. His reaction to those who enjoy exerting sexual power over others and those who enjoy exerting their power by pushing people out of the way illustrates that to the killer, violence is not just the kind of violence that Bird attributes to American Indians. Alexie focuses on the killer's thoughts and actions but he never reveals the killer's identity. The violence in Bird's novel is centralized to the Jibbenainosay and blaming the violence on American Indians while Alexie uses his killer as a catalyst to explore society and the tensions that exist between American Indians and Euro-Americans. The killer is never given an identity because violence has no particular identity within society; it is something that all of society partakes and not just one

fragment that Bird implies. Alexie challenges the notion that American Indians are to blame for violence by denying the killer a specific identity. Alexie demonstrates that the violent thoughts and actions of the American Indian characters are not based on a desire for violence and that the American Indian community does not thrive on violence, as the historical canon falsely implies.

CONCLUSION

Nick of the Woods and Indian Killer use American Indian social realities differently. Bird distorts the American Indian identity and reifies alienation and violence by using American Indians stereotypes created by Euro-Americans. Bird's use of stereotypes leaves no room for an authentic American Indian reality; thus he silences the minority, as many other Euro-American authors do. While Bird perpetuates American Indian stereotypes, Alexie elucidates American Indian realities. Alexie presents an authentic American Indian experience through the actions of his Euro-American characters as well as of his American Indian characters. He juxtaposes John's search for identity and the power Marie finds through her connection to her heritage with the stereotypical American Indian identity that Bird depicts. Through John Alexie illustrates the effects of the alienation that Bird forces on his American Indian characters in Nick of the Woods. Nick of the Woods places the blame for violence on American Indians, whereas Indian Killer shows that violence begets violence and that contemporary grievances between American Indian and Euro-American communities go farther back than contemporary Euro-Americans think. Alexie connects Bird's inaccurate treatment of American Indian realities by revealing the very complex and multi-faceted realities American Indians experience, and in the process he asserts a form of American Indian sovereignty over these realities.

Canonical historical and literary texts about American Indians by non-Indian authors deny American Indians rhetorical sovereignty. American Indians are painted as rebellious dissenters to the colonizing world, and the dominant narratives of Euro-American colonization of American Indian cultures and traditions exclude the American

Indian perspective. The forced assimilation of American Indians by Euro-Americans leads to a large divide between American Indians and Euro-American society. This divide can be seen in the attitudes toward American Indians expressed in literature and in films such as the western The Searchers. These fictional accounts in literature and film strip American Indians of their identity and replace it with a Euro-American stereotype. Literature about American Indian authors *by* American Indians aims to dismantle the Euro-American stereotypes and to restore the culture and traditions of American Indian tribes. From early American Indian authors such as Zitkala-Sa to contemporary American Indian authors such as Simon Ortiz, American Indian authors attempt to reform Euro-American views by claiming rhetorical sovereignty. While resistance to Euro-American assimilation often includes drastic actions, such as the taking of Alcatraz in the 1960s, American Indian writing has been a valuable, lasting response to Euro-Americans. Daniel Justice argues that,

Native writers of poetry, prose fiction, and nonfiction speak to the living realities of struggle and possibility among Indigenous peoples; they challenge both Natives and non-Natives to surrender stereotypes, committing ourselves instead to untangling colonialism from our minds, spirits, and bodies. (5)

Justice highlights the positive effects of American Indian writing, but he also highlights the necessity of rhetorical sovereignty. The chasm between Euro-Americans and American Indians, which was created by Euro-Americans, is continually filled with American Indian voices that are otherwise silenced in canonical literary and historical texts. American Indian authorship gives American Indians the ability to claim a canonical

voice that is unique to the American Indian culture and tradition, thus giving them rhetorical sovereignty. It is difficult for American Indians to claim rhetorical sovereignty through Euro-American canons because these canons, rooted among the Greeks, Romans and Europeans, rarely allow minorities to speak with their own voices. While rhetorical sovereignty is established outside canonical historical and literary texts, American Indian rhetorical sovereignty still directly affects Euro-American canons. American Indian authors call into question canonical Euro-American depictions of American Indians by initiating an antithetical dialogue between Euro-American texts about American Indians and texts about American Indians written *by* American Indians.

This antithetical dynamic enables American Indians to claim rhetorical sovereignty by challenging what Euro-American canons have identified as “Indian.” The model casts light on much more than genre, theme, characterization or social issues such as violence or identity. The antithetical model can be applied to any juxtaposed discourses, whether those discussing different models of governments, politics or differences between Democrats and Republicans, product placement in advertisements or television shows and film, gender differences, or any other issues that initiate oppositional discourses. Bird and Alexie exemplify what the antithetical model can accomplish for an audience when two opposing texts are juxtaposed. While Bird exemplifies the Euro-American anti-Indian attitude, Alexie challenges mainstream views with the realities that American Indians experience. The perspectives of Nick of the Woods and Indian Killer are so different it is almost impossible for them to exist within the same literature, and yet they do. Renate Eigenbrod writes that with respect to indigenous cultures,

There is still a perception in dominant society that [American Indians] and their cultural expressions are simple, easy to understand. Aboriginal verbal arts draw attention to complexities, and it is exactly because of their lack of transparency; their suggestive, allusive, but not prescriptive characteristics; their avoidance of closure and easy solutions; their shifts and gaps and open-endedness that Aboriginal literatures should become an intrinsic component in the discipline of Native Studies, which, with its mandate to further the struggle toward decolonization, continuously engages in critical inquiry. (15)

Upon reading Euro-American texts *about* American Indians and texts about American Indians *by* American Indians, the audience is left to decide whether American Indians are truly as savage as Bird depicts in Nick of the Woods or whether American Indian experiences is as complicated and multi-faceted as Alexie illustrates in Indian Killer. Both texts demonstrate the ways the perspective of a text can sway a reader. While Bird categorizes American Indians as “other” and gives them no voice, Alexie gives a voice to every character in Indian Killer while avoiding facile closure and easy solutions. Rhetorical sovereignty is reclaimed within the absent voice of the “other,” and the emerging antithetical model helps the audience to see the space between the two opposing texts as one where that rhetorical sovereignty can operate.

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