**Sherman Alexie ‘Crow testament’**

Sherman Alexie was born in Spokane, Washington, on October 7, 1966, the son of Sherman Joseph Alexie and Lillian Agnes (née Cox) Alexie. Alexie was born to Salish Indians (Salish, linguistic grouping of North American Indian tribes speaking related languages and living in the upper basins of the Columbia and Fraser rivers and their tributaries in what are now the province of British Columbia, Can., and the U.S. states of Washington, Idaho, and Montana) a Coeur d’Alene father and a Spokane mother. Alexie was hydrocephalic, necessitating brain surgery at the age of six months. The surgery was successful, but he had seizures throughout his youth which were likely related to the birth condition. Alexie had published two volumes of poetry before his first collection of short stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, brought him international fame in 1993. The movie *Smoke Signals* (1998) was based on one of the short stories contained in this collection. Alexie’s first full-length novel, *Reservations Blues*, was published in 1995; and his second novel, *Indian Killer*, followed one year later.

Alexie has appeared on stage as both a singer and a stand-up comic. He also teaches writing and ethnic studies at the University of Washington in Seattle.

As a Native American writer his poetry, short stories, novels, and films about the lives of American Indians won him an international recognition. In many parts of the world, including Northern America, the indigenous peoples who survived military conquest were subsequently subject to political conquest, a situation sometimes referred to colloquially as “death by red tape.” the subjugation was created through governmental and quasi-governmental policies and enacted by non native bureaucrats, law enforcement officers, clergy, and others, the practices of political conquest typically fostered structural inequalities that disenfranchised indigenous peoples while strengthening the power of colonizing peoples.

In the first stanza of this poem, Cain uses “Crow, that heavy black bird” to strike down Abel. This section is alluding to the murder of Abel, by his brother Cain, in the Book of Genesis. In the Bible, Cain uses a stone to murder Abel. This biblical allusion demonstrates the history of Christian missionaries abusing Native American people.

The Crow says, “Damn… I guess this is just the beginning.” The personified Crow, which is a metaphor for the Native American people, recognizes that this act of violence, which is the first murder in the Bible, is also foreshadowing a long line of violence against the Native American people.

The third stanza of the poem states, “The Crow God as depicted in all of the reliable Crow bibles looks exactly like a Crow.” Alexie continues utilizing Christian imagery and the personification and symbolism of the Crow. The Native Americans are demonstrating the same patterns as the white missionaries who have tried to assimilate them and erase Native American religion and culture.

The Crow says, “this makes it so much easier to worship myself.” Instead of following the religious tradition of their ancestors, the Native Americans are following the patterns set for them by the white missionaries. They have reworked their traditions to fit a specific view that makes it easier for them to be self-centered, instead of selfless. This shift in focus from the community to the individual is a lasting effect of Christianity.

In the last stanza of the poem, “Crow rides a pale horse into a crowded powwow but none of the Indian panic.” This statement likens Crow to Death in the Book of Revelations as he “rides a pale horse”. However, none of the Native Americans are surprised to see themselves as Death. Instead, the Crow says, “Damn… I guess they already live near the end of the world.” Crow realizes that the Native American people have been pushed so far from their original tradition by the Christians who came in to assimilate them. They have undergone so much abuse, that they are not surprised, or scared, of death.

Crow is the main character in the poem and represents the Native Americans. The story of Cain and Abel from the bible tells the story of Cain killing his brother, Abel, because Abel’s offering was favoured by God. Abel offered the first born of his lambs, while Cain offered up the best of his cultivating (Ashliman). Like Cain, The Coeur d’Alene tribe were cultivators of the land too. In the end, Cain is punished and the land will no longer produce for him. The Quran version of the story includes God sending a crow down to scratch the ground, showing Cain how to hide his shame, which means his brother’s body (Ashliman). Palestine’s version of the story reveals that Lucifer told Cain he could kill his brother by crushing the head of a bird between two stones. Allah showed Cain to bury the body by the example of a raven. Poland has a story called “The First Grave.” Cain killed his brother out of jealousy. Adam and Eve observed a bird burying its young and followed in example by burying Able (Ashliman). These stories represent the first murder and the first body to be buried. Alexie calls it correctly in the line, “I guess this is just the beginning.” Not only does this symbolize the first of many struggles for Native Americans, but also that the crow was the first teacher and was followed by example. Comparing Crow to Cain, we see that both are cultivators. Cain’s punishment of no longer being able to use the land foreshadows that the Crow will suffer too because of Cain’s actions. The land was taken from The Coeur d’Alene tribe, further evidence of suffering punishment. Cain represents white society.

Sherman Alexie’s “Crow Testament” uses a lot of symbolism and dark humour to testify Native American trials. He uses bible references to describe hardships of Native American’s, and is a primary witness to the life of Native Americans.

The first part of each stanza details what has occurred, and the second section is Crow’s reaction. This sentence is always structured, “Damn, says Crow...” This parallel structure demonstrates the continued injustices that the Native American people face. The poem references the entire Christian Bible, from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation. The Book of Genesis is the first volume in a series on biblical revelations offering timely insights into the world and revealing the prophecies of Jacob. The Book of Revelation is the final book of the New Testament, and consequently is also the final book of the Christian Bible.

Alexie’s writing includes irony and dark humour. Alexie writes about the troubles of Native Americans on the reservation. His work provokes feelings of compassion and respect from readers. Alexie writes of the despair, poverty, and alcoholism of people on the reservation. His characters are depicted in helpless situations involving crime, drugs, and alcohol. These characters are often struggling to survive the reoccurring struggles of mind, body, and spirit due to white American society. These characters feel self-hatred and feel they are powerless. Living on a reservation and having a problem with alcohol himself gives Alexie an advantage with writing his characters. In “Crow Testament,” Alexie’s dark humour is present. Understanding a bit about Alexie’s tribe also helps readers understand his work.

The Native Americans who were assimilated and lost their tradition now have their history contained in the book of Christian teachings instead of in their own traditions. Alexie is arguing that the Christian missionaries that came in to the Native American tribes worked to erase the traditions that they found, abusing the Native American people and causing lasting damage that is still working in the society today.’

 **Sherman Alexie ‘Evolution’**

‘Evolution’ is about describing displacement of Native Americans. ‘Evolution’ is a part of the collection called The Business of Fancy Dancing (1992). The title is meant to point towards the social Darwinism of the American capitalist society and how it continues to decimate the Native Americans. Alexie highlights the systematic racism and how it confines the indigenous people into a life of deprivation. It also uses the figure of ‘Buffalo Bill’, based on the figure of William Frederick “Buffalo Bill” Cody (1846-1917), and recasts him as a twenty-first-century businessman. This fictional ‘Buffalo Bill’, just like the historical ‘Buffalo bill’, builds his life on the foundation of exploitation of the natives and thrives while the natives continue to lose their belongings and heritage and are pushed further and further into a state of desperation and despair. The poem ends on an ironical note that shows how the indigenous populations are reduced to a museum piece at the cost of the living members of the community.

the poem is about the relationship between the Native Americans (Indians) and the Americans (Whites). The location of the shop is an important symbol because it’s located right across the border from the liquor store and is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This symbolizes the drug abuse that Indians have. Another important symbol is Buffalo Bill. Buffalo Bill symbolizes the power that the Whites have against the Indians. The conflict in the poem is that Buffalo Bill takes everything from the Indians and opens The Museum of Native American Cultures and still makes them pay to enter. Two themes are racism and greediness.

Evolution is a powerful poem in which Sherman Alexie illustrates the systematic degradation of the Native American people and their culture. A character in the poem, Buffalo Bill sets up a pawn shop along the border of a Native American reservation. This pawn shop was intentionally set up in right across a liquor store. Buffalo Bill manages to take many valuables from the Native Americans in exchange for some money that the Native American people will eventually spend on the liquor store. The Native American people pawn away so many things that they are left with nothing but their hearts which is eventually sold to Buffalo Bill. Once all has been taken from the Native American community Buffalo Bill renames the shop and makes it a museum for Native American culture. Ironically, he then charges the Native Americans five dollars a person to enter.

Alexie’s use of Buffalo Bill is significant, it embodies imagery and reactions from both White Americans and Native Americans. Buffalo Bill is a historically significant character in that he was known to help “civilize the west”. He was prominent in that sense. However, in this poem Sherman uses Buffalo Bill as a symbol that embodies America namely the American government and white people, in their ideals and most importantly in their actions. Through this poem, Alexie manages creates an extended metaphor that highlights the deceit that the American government played against the Native American community and the subsequent usurpation of land, identity, and self that they had to endure. Although this poem is written in a historical light, what occurred in the Native American community is still affecting them to this day. Indeed the Native American people are still suffering from the Buffalo Bills of today, also known as the American government, its oppressing laws and people. Native Americans are in a current oppressed state because they have had their land, their culture /traditions, and most importantly their sense of self (identity) systematically taken away from them

It is a well-known fact that the Native American people had their land taken away from them by the European settlers that came here in the 17th century Native Americans were asked to sign off their lands to the Europeans for alcohol. The Europeans knew about alcohol’s ability to create addiction, intoxication, and impair a person’s mind. So they used this as a tool to take away the valuables that Native Americans owned. Alexie illustrates this point when he writes the story of how “Buffalo Bill opens up a pawn shop on the reservation right across the border from the liquor store”. Buffalo Bill knows that the Native American can’t resist alcohol and systematically sets up a shop right across a liquor store so that the Native American people will feel tempted to go to the liquor stores after pawning their “jewelry, Televison sets, VCRs, and beaded buckskin outfits.” He manages to make money from them “taking everything they have to offer” but we don’t see how the Native American people benefit from this. Another thing worth noting is that Buffalo Bill “stays open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week”. Alexie is showing how those who are plotting against the Native Americans don’t take a break, they seek to gain profit in any way they could at any time of the day.

gradually the Native Americans begin to lose all they had. A dynamic shift can be seen in what the Native American people begin to pawn to Buffalo Bill. They start off with pawning material goods such as jewelry and electronics. This is symbolizing the land that was given to the American Government. But then we begin to see how artifacts of their culture are pawned away. Once all of the material belongings have been given away, Alexie shows the Native Americans pawning their “pawn their hands, saving the thumbs for last …their skeletons, falling endlessly from the skin”. The Native American people begin to sell their body parts, but it doesn’t stop there. When everything, including their physical bodies have been lost “the last Indian pawns everything but his heart and Buffalo Bill takes that for twenty bucks”. This is showing how after the Native Americans lost everything to the American government they ended up giving up their “hearts”. Heart,” here can be read as a core of the Native American identity. The fact that Buffalo Bill put a monetary value on the “heart” of Native Americans show the lack of respect the American Government had for Native Americans as a people. To the American Government the identity of Native Americans was an item that they sought to profit from. We can still see this today.

The Native American themed festivals and ceremonies that are run by whites in an effort to show “appreciation” and gain an “understanding” of the Native American culture when in reality this is nothing but an insult to the Native American culture.