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LITERARY COUSINS OF *RESERVATION DOGS*: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WORKS BY LOUISE ERDRICH AND SHERMAN ALEXIE

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ABSTRACT

The article is a comparative analysis of contemporary Native American fiction (Louise Erdrich's novels *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*, Sherman Alexie's short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*), and the series *Reservation Dogs* by Taika Waititi and Sterlin Harjo. The aim of the article is to indicate similarities in the construction of young protagonists of the selected literary texts and the series, with an emphasis on Indian stereotype deconstruction, survival humour and the genres. This last category encompasses bildungsroman, road novel/story, homing novel/story and magical realism. The methodology used in the article includes cultural studies, postcolonialism and postmodernism. The author of the article wants to argue that many stylistic devices used in the character construction in *Reservation Dogs* have appeared much earlier in the canonical works of Native American fiction and Waititi and Harjo seem to enter into an intelligent dialogue with the literary tradition because similarly to it, they affirm contemporary indigenous culture, stress its connection with popular culture and very often introduce the black humour which turns Native Americans into subjects of their narratives and gives them back control over their own stories.

Keywords: Native American fiction, indigenous film, young protagonist construction, Indian stereotype deconstruction, survival humour

The first season of indigenous series *Reservation Dogs* has already received positive critical reception (see Jones 2021; Felix 2021) and in this paper, I argue that the young protagonists of Taika Waititi (Māori) and Native American (Muscogee/Seminole) Sterlin Harjo's series descend from literary ancestors. It is important to notice that indigenous teenagers and young adults have formed a very prominent part of contemporary Native American fiction (starting from Native American Renaissance in 1969). In this comparative analysis, I concentrate on several characters from the critically acclaimed works by Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe) and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur D'Alene) juxtaposed with the teenage quartet from *Reservation Dogs*. To be precise, the focus of the analysis will be the character construction of indigenous youth in *Reservation Dogs*, Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*, and Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. A critical framework comprising of identity construction (American versus indigenous), stereotype deconstruction (cultural studies) and the category of survival humour (Lincoln 1993) guides the methodology of this paper.

Since the advent of the Native American Renaissance, N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer prize-winning seminal work *House Made of Dawn* has inspired fiction writers to focus on the indigenous young generation and explore issues of contemporary indigenous cultures, dynamic and vibrant, rather then focusing readers' and critics' attention just on the past which often resulted in relocating Native American literature to anthropology shelves. Many Native American novels describe conflicts between the past and the present, between preserving tradition and accepting transformation, and between revising history and regaining (often celebrating) indigenous identity. Young protagonists are indispensable to these stories because they are the future of their nations and they help us to see, on the one hand, how certain aspects of indigenous cultures change (a natural process for all living cultures), and on the other hand, how this younger generation interacts with global culture,[1] especially in contemporary plots. In my opinion, these are the main reasons why it is difficult to find a Native American novel without memorable youngsters. Apart from Momaday's Pulitzer winning text, there are other novels featuring compelling teenage protagonists. Some examples include Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* and *Power* which focus on young girls rediscovering their past, James Welch's historical fiction *Fools Crow* in which the Pikuni youth challenge the elders, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* about a young veteran Tayo and her *Gardens in the Dunes* about a Pueblo girl Indigo looking for her lost mother after a ghost dance gathering. More recently, Tommy Orange's *There There* portrays a whole group of troubled indigenous youth.

Louise Erdrich is particularly noteworthy because she writes successive novels in which the same characters reappear. She created iconic young rebels such as Lipsha Morrisey from *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace* that I will elaborate on later, Lulu, Pauline and Fleur (*Tracks, Love Medicine, The Bingo Palace, Four Souls*), whom we meet as young girls and mature as characters in subsequent novels, Joe Coutts from the National Book Award winner *The Round House,* and many other young

1 Which is very often narrowed down to popular culture and mythology.

characters who are less prominent, but are essential to the plots of *The Last Report on the Miracle at Little No Horse*, *The Painted Drum*, *LaRose* and *The Night Watchman.*

Similarly, Sherman Alexie has always made youngsters the focus of his fiction. Starting from the short stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, where we meet Victor Joseph and Thomas-Builds-the-Fire, Alexie has constructed an impressive array of young protagonists. There is the autobiographical Arnold Spirit from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and memorable indigenous rebels from *Reservation Blues, Indian Killer,* and *Flight.* This list would not be complete without the films featuring young protagonists in which Alexie contributed as a scriptwriter or director. The most influential of these are *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre's adaptation of the adventures of Victor Joseph and Thomas-Builds-the-Fire from the collection *The Lone Ranger*) and *The Business of Fancy Dancing* (directed by Alexie and based on his prose and poetry).

I have selected Erdrich's Lipsha Morrisey and Alexie's Victor Joseph and Thomas-Builds-the-Fire as a comparative basis for *Reservation Dogs* for several reasons. First, these characters are featured in these authors' earlier works and thus other young characters by the same authors are influenced by these predecessors. Second, they perform the roles of "cultural tricksters or jesters" (Rainwater 2000, 2006) that illustrate the category of survival humour (Lincoln 1993), an importance to many contemporary indigenous novelists (and filmmakers). Third, they help the authors exorcise the ghosts of the past and redirect the readers' attention from the stereotypes of Native Americans, stress their stoic predisposition, entrapment in the past and exotic mythology, and/or being stuck in never-ending trauma and a sense of loss. I do not want to indicate here that the plots centring on a difficult past and a grim future are absent from these narratives, but I would like to argue that the uniqueness of *Reservation Dogs* stems from the same tradition of portraying indigenous youth that we find in Erdrich's and Alexie's works, i.e., as independent rebels who learn how to counteract anger and frustration with imagination and action, challenging the perception of indigenous cultures as archaic, static and frozen. Last, but not least, I will comment on the influence of the genre on the construction of young protagonists, because it does matter that Waititi and Harjo's series is catered to young audiences, whereas Erdrich and Alexie, similarly to other established indigenous authors, challenged readers and critics regardless of their age and managed to propose their own artistic hybrids, situated in the spectrum between modernist and postmodernist modes.

There is no denying that stereotype deconstruction is at the core of Waititi and Harjo's project. In recent years the process of indigenizing the cinema has been very helpful in this matter, but for the sake of brevity, I will concentrate here on one work that illustrates this phenomenon (see Hurtubise 2021). Looking at the famous video from Harjo's comedy troupe 1941 titled *Smiling Indians*, dedicated to Edward Curtis' photos reinforcing the stereotype of the Vanishing Indian and the Noble Warrior, one cannot overlook the similarity to the message of *Reservation Dogs*. In the video, Harjo shows the variety of Native American individuals (different ages, looks, styles) who say nothing but smile and generally defy Curtis's stylizations

of Native Americans. Harjo's message for the global viewers is: "If you remember nothing about us, remember that we just smiled" (*Smiling Indians*, 1941). In the short film, he manages to effectively juxtapose the invented vanishing Indian with authentic representation arguing that Curtis's "Romantic charm" pulled over his indigenous models was a hoax masking colonial and neo-colonial desires to make Native Americans disappear, or, in a milder version, to relocate them to the past, as melancholic museum exhibits, unable to adapt, progress and speak for themselves.

Cinema and television have long participated in the process of "freezing" Native Americans in this Romantic posture while Native American literature has become the first platform on which stereotype deconstruction is conducted on a large scale. Even though there is not enough time and space here to mention every important contribution, I would like to emphasise the fact that Erdrich's and Alexie's protagonists that I label "literary cousins" of the youngsters from *Reservation Dogs* could be in fact, their metaphorical parents because they were created in the 1980s and 1990s.

What do the literary characters I have selected for this comparative analysis have in common? Lipsha Morrisey, Victor Joseph and Thomas-Builds-the-Fire are fatherless and surrounded by strong females (not only biological mothers, but sometimes clan matriarchs) and they have hybrid identity which differentiates them from traditional Indians (on the use of "Indian" see Treuer 2019, p. 3) and forces them to negotiate their ties with their indigenous tradition. Additionally, they have a strong need to belong to their reservations which they mask by their declarations to leave it; this paradox makes them, on the one hand, excellent figures to discuss identity problems of Native Americans, and, on the other, invokes readers' empathy because so many young people feel lost, despite belonging to a specific culture. In short, a love-and-hate relationship with their home enables the narrators to speak about the experience that is at the same time unique and universal. Finally, Native youngsters are characters on the move and even though some of their trips are failures, we appreciate their courage and understand the paradoxes that guide their choices. As I am aware that some readers might not be familiar with the plots of these classical novels in the Native American tradition, I will summarize them in order to clarify my arguments.

Lipsha Morrisey (*Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*) is born to a mother (June) with a traumatic past, problems with alcohol, and who occasionally turns to prostitution. June dies in a snowstorm at the beginning of *Love Medicine* and her death gradually brings the whole clan of Ojibwes together. In the final chapter, Lipsha guides his mother's ghost back home to the North Dakota Ojibwe reservation. Lipsha is not only unaware who his mother was or why she behaved in a self-destructive way, but at one point he has to face the story of how his mother tried to drown him when he was an infant. Loosely connected to the tribe and the clan, he gradually learns from his great grandmother Fleur what it means to belong. Lipsha experiments with tradition; his most famous failures encompass his vision quest during which he sees pop culture images and dreams of fast food (Erdrich 1994, *Getting Nowhere Fast* from *The Bingo Palace*) and when he caused his grandfather to choke to death in an attempt to prepare a love medicine for his grandparents by exchanging a goose heart with supermarket frozen turkey meat. In *The Bingo Palace,* the sequel to *Love*

Medicine, Lipsha is off the reservation because he is still unsure of his identity and it is only when his female relatives summon him that he reappears, even though he continues to serve the function of the gambler, jester and trickster (Magoulick 2018; Gross 2005). In this novel, Lipsha not only gets in contact with the ghost of his mother, but reunites for some time with his father. In my opinion, even though Lipsha is one of Erdrich's funniest characters, the author does not use him to merely provide comic relief. His function is far more important; he manages to counteract the tragic past with ingenuous projects (some of them fail, but he never gives up) and he is a living proof that it is possible to celebrate survival, to rebel against the stereotype of a passive Indian loser or a permanent victim too afraid to act and take control of one's life (Toth 2007). The fact that Lipsha is always on the move is also crucial for the understanding of the novel, because his dynamic nature makes it impossible for us to freeze him in a desired pose. He is a true Vizenor figure of survivance (Vizenor 1994).

Victor Joseph and Thomas-Builds-the-Fire are two teenagers from the Spokane reservation in Washington who go for a trip to Phoenix, Arizona in order to bring Victor's father's ashes back to their home reservation. Similar to the story of Lispha in Alexie's story, it all starts with a parent's death and a trip taken by young protagonists becomes an identity building experience. Just like how Lipsha bears a grudge against his mother, Victor considers his father worthless, and he is not sure if he really needs any form of reconciliation. Both Lipsha and Victor have a love-and-hate relationship with their reservations. After all, they have experienced poverty and the consequences of alcoholism and violence of their parents (in Victor's case; Thomas lost their parents early and so there is no mention of their abuse), relatives and neighbors (Thomas got beaten by other kids). Victor, in particular, has a desire to leave the place, but they both eventually decide to come back home from their trips in a homing novel pattern (Bevis 1987). The difference between Lipsha and Victor is that Erdrich's character is independent and complete, whereas Alexie creates two characters who complement each other, as if it was not enough to use one protagonist for the trickster role. Victor needs Thomas just as Thomas needs Victor. The former is courageous, determined and stubborn, while the latter is witty, intelligent and compassionate. Thomas offers Victor his friendship (which is not easy to accept because Thomas is a reservation weirdo) and Thomas offers Victor and us, the readers, the power of storytelling. The stories are multifunctional in Alexie's fiction, while they may reveal too much of the traumatic past, they can also heal because they are often built on survival humour and serve to exorcise the ghosts of the past: failing fathers, toxic mothers, alcohol-related accidents, out of control violence, sense of despair, inferiority complex. Gradually, Victor learns to celebrate survival and takes control of his life while Thomas discovers his potential as a modern storyteller who shapes his own narrative and realizes that protecting tradition is not just about continuation, but also about transformation:

> We are all given one thing by which our life is measured, one determination. Mine are the stories which can change or not change the world. It doesn't matter which as long as I continue to tell the stories. (Alexie 1995, pp. 72–73)

Similarly to Erdrich's narrative of Lipsha, Alexie's tale of Victor and Thomas turns into a story of a metaphorical crossing of the bridge between death and life, past and future, crying and laughter, mourning and festivity. They offer us a contemporary indigenous bildungsroman/coming-of-age story with the protagonists who are, on the one hand, psychologically credible and, on the other, partially inspired by indigenous mythologies because they resemble tricksters in their constant rebellion, repeated attempts to outwit the world, combing different traditions and cultures to achieve their goals, and, last, but not least, using humour as a weapon (Rainwater 2002).

Reservation Dogs by Waititi and Harjo features four young protagonists: Bear (D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai), Elora Danan (Devory Jacobs), Cheese (Lane Factor) and Willie Jack (Paulina Axis) who, similarly to Erdrich's and Alexie's characters described above, have to cope with death. They are constantly mourning their friend Daniel (most likely the victim of poverty and addiction) and they blame their home reservation in Oklahoma. As they agree that the place is ruining their lives, they decide to leave it and go to California. In contrast to Lipsha, Victor and Thomas, they decide to break the law to raise money. While it may sound serious, the story is full of black humour, so the youngsters never become fully-fledged criminals. Instead, they make one mistake after another (just like Lipsha, Victor and Thomas) and even though they are aware of the generational trauma affecting them, they refuse to yield to it. They share some trickster characteristics with their literary relatives; they are rebellious, inventive, fallible and hilarious. They challenge the world and never give up.

There is an interesting contrast to acknowledge between Erdrich's and Alexie's characters, and the protagonists of *Reservation Dogs* – the presence and role of male, adult characters differ. In Erdrich's books, Gerry Nanapush, Lipsha's father, was an American Indian Movement member who was constantly on the run. When he appeared in Lipsha's life, he only introduced more chaos, and it was indigenous women that Lipsha could really count on. In Alexie's stories, both Victor and Thomas lost their fathers (*This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*) and it was a mother and grandmother who supported them. Contrastingly, *Reservation Dogs,* features a whole array of male figures who are far from role models, but their presence is reassuring. For example, there is Officer Big (Zahn McClarnon) who impersonates tribal police and turns a blind eye to the young quartet's offences, Uncle Brownie (Gary Farmer) portrayed as a traditional man who accompanies young protagonists on their trips, and the spirit guide (Dallas Goldtooth) appearing to Bear every time he gets knocked who mocks out heroic perspective on history. If readers detect self-irony in the portrayals of Erdrich's and Alexie's characters, they quickly realize that comic characters are juxtaposed with serious ones, hilarious events are intertwined with serious occasions. A good example might be Lipsha's love medicine, the preparation of which is funny, but the consequences are grim, because his grandfather dies.

In Waititi and Harjo's cinematic world, there are also serious moments, but every character has a comical vein and almost every plot has a comical twist. I agree with *The Guardian's* reviewer that stereotype deconstruction fuels this story:

> *Reservation Dogs* is able to lay waste stylishly to centuries of myth and misrepresentation due to one simple, crucial, innovation: almost everyone involved in the production is a Native American, offering a perspective which never panders to the often-fetishising gaze of outsiders. Instead, this show tells of the push-pull of home: that simultaneous yearning to both belong and be free. It is a familiar coming-of-age experience, and one that is presumably only intensified when your homelands have been stolen and sold back by the colonisers more times than history records. *Reservation Dogs* doesn't get too deeply into all that – in the same way the teenagers themselves tend to skate along the surface of generational trauma, aware but apparently unbothered (Jones 2021).

Moreover, just like the Erdrich's and Alexie's stories, Waititi and Harjo's series is a realistic tale except for one fantastic plot. The proportions between realism and fantasy, and the focus on exploring the reality of the everyday indigenous life, instead of constructing some escapist fantastic realm, indicate that the poetics employed in the movie are magically realist. Even though Erdrich and Alexie are not particularly fond of that term, I would argue that this peculiar blending of realism and fantasy also characterizes their fiction. Erdrich's examples are obvious; both Lispha's vision quest and his love medicine plot take place between the rational and irrational, and it is important to point out that "the drops of magic" added to the realistic text appear when the characters are between sleeping and waking up or when they are extremely tired so there is always a second, logical explanation to the fantastic. During his vision quest, Lispha is not only scared of the wilderness, but also very thirsty, hungry and sleepy, so what he sees and hears might be considered both as hallucinations and the presence of indigenous magic. In Alexie's prose, there is more of what critics have called " reservation realism" (Grassian 2005, p. 5) but there are stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* when the writer introduces fantastic or magical elements to explore the dilemma of his characters, and thus similarly to Erdrich, Alexie does not want to relocate his characters or his readers to some fantastic land, and we remain on the reservation with the characters. Alexie writes in his collection that "Survival = Anger × Imagination" (Alexie 1993, p. 150), which explains why they need to invent plots or images. There is a story, for example, when the characters imagine potatoes in different colours because they are too tired and ashamed of poverty. Thomas's plots also offer consolation that comes from merging the real and the fantastic, the truth and the lies (e.g., Thomas' story of Victor's father saving him in *This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*). As I have already mentioned, Erdrich and Alexie do not write young adult fiction, but they move between modernist and postmodernist modes, so their interplay with different genres is more experimental than Waititi's and Harjo's (the use of Western models is sometimes contested, see Toth 2007).

In *Reservation Dogs*, magical realism is evident in the plot featuring the spirit guide appearing to Bear every time he gets knocked out. The character of the guide is hilarious because he looks like a plains warrior form classical westerns and is an embodiment of the Noble Savage stereotype, so typical for the white man's fantasy. Nevertheless, his looks contrasted with his speeches mock all stereotypical expectations. For example, he admits participating in Little Bighorn only to add that he was an observer because he was not interested in becoming a heroic scapegoat. We realize at once that he is not interested in being Bear's or anybody else's guide and he is just having fun. Perhaps, he becomes a guide on how to get out of narratives that fix you in one posture and turn you into a martyr and/or a victim of history. He seems to be teaching Bear and other youngsters (later on Bear tells his friend about this apparition) that they should never underestimate the healing potential of laughter.

Laughter is the most important component of the last category that binds indigenous fiction and film, and it is survival humour. I argue that without survival humour, both Erdrich's and Alexie's literary works, as well as Waititi and Harjo's cinematographic achievement, would be just trivial comedies. Survival humour enables serious issues to be addressed in a funny way and it gives control back to the protagonists. Without this strategy of combining the tragic with the comic, what we could see in Erdrich's, Alexie's, and Waititi and Harjo's works, might come down to the stories of losers about other losers, of perpetual mourning and despair, and of begging for sympathy and understanding. Such texts would be unbearably emotional and pity provoking. Equipped with survival humour, these protagonists take control of their stories, create critical distance, and guide us intelligently through the paradoxes of their lives. They are humane, authentic and memorable.

The appeal to the readers' or viewers' pity is often a lamentable strategy and there are not many authors who put it better than Sherman Alexie in his *How to Write the Great American Indian Novel*. I quote a couple of verses here because I am quite convinced that Alexie's advice of "what NOT TO do" applies both to fiction writers and filmmakers, and that the authors of *Reservation Dogs* are fully aware that pathos and trivial didacticism poison both fiction and film.

> "All of the Indians must have tragic features: tragic noses, eyes, and arms. Their hands and fingers must be tragic when they reach for tragic food. […] There must be one murder, one suicide, one attempted rape. Alcohol should be consumed. Cars must be driven at high speeds. Indians must see visions. White people can have the same visions if they are in love with Indians. If a white person loves an Indian then the white person is Indian by proximity. White people must carry an Indian deep inside themselves. Those interior Indians are half-breed and obviously from horse cultures. […]There must be redemption, of course, and sins must be forgiven. For this, we need children. A white child and an Indian child, gender not important, should express deep affection in a childlike way. In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts." (Alexie 1996, pp. 94–95)

It is evident not only Victor's and Thomas's plots, but in other plots from Alexie's stories that the author can laugh at everything and break different cultural taboos. He laughs at alcoholism, violence, loneliness, hunger and even cancer. Even the book title *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*[2] is a provocation that invites a smile, similarly to the titles of individual stories, e.g., *A Drug Called Tradition* or *The Approximate Size of My Favourite Tumour*. This interplay with popular culture in Alexie's prose and poetry is crucial (as I have already indicated his *Lone Ranger* deconstructs popular TV series from the 1950s). One of the functions of this strategy has been explained by M. Tellefsen, who writes that Alexie's characters often identify themselves with pop culture images and they can find their way of freeing themselves from it: "Paradoxically, it is the lack of sense of authenticity that simulation creates, which then opens up a space for the American Indian – and, implicitly, all other Americans – to challenge the dominant culture's power to shape the self." (Tellefsen 2005, pp. 125–126)

Many other critics observe that Alexie has a talent for combining the comic and the tragic. David L. Moore (Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature) quotes Alexie's line, "Having fun is very serious" (Alexie 1999, p. 10) to emphasize this important educational function of the writer's use of humour. The narratives about trauma of the past and its present consequences for Native Americans are abundant, but Alexie does not ask for our pity. Using survival humour, he reconstructs the tale of victimisation and objectivization into the story of autonomy and subjectivity. Moore concludes: "Alexie imagines an alternative history of human connection rather than domination that redraws the history of oppression. He transforms the imagery of the colonial rape, domination, and victimization into expressions of agency, intimacy, and mutual, loving power." (Moore 2005, p. 306)

Nancy J. Peterson goes even further when she elaborates on how Alexie juxtaposes the Holocaust with the American Holocaust in his fiction, refuting the arguments of those who oppose using the word *holocaust* by non-Jewish groups (Peterson 2010). Similarly, Erdrich often refers to traumatic indigenous past, not only in *Love Medicine* or *The Bingo Palace,* but in all her texts. She is particularly interested in teaching us counter – or ethno-history, stressing the importance of the consequences of the treaties, the Dawes Act, termination, boarding schools or forced conversion, among other historical legal regulations and processes (Gondor-Wiercioch 2016). As I have already noticed, such an inclusion of serious historical topics together with the participation in the debate how to speak about historical atrocities in the globalising world is far more present in Alexie's and Erdrich's works than in Waititi and Harjo's series, whose characters (young and old alike) seem to be focused on getting rid of the burden of history. In *Reservation Dogs*, serious topics are usually in the background. What matters more is that characters can distance themselves from them, whereas in literary fiction, history seems to haunt the characters more and

2 Which is, by the way, the reaction to the famous American TV series heroes from the 1950s, The Lone Ranger (White Savior figure and white supremacy icon) and Tonto (indigenous and literally "stupid" in Spanish).

there is more reflection devoted to it. Peterson is right when she observes that Alexie's characters, more often than not, are capable of celebrating survival more than experiencing trauma. She refers to Vizenor's survivance theory (Vizenor 1993) operating in Alexie's fiction: "Survivance acknowledges colonialism and trauma, but it claims more than survival as an ending to this history" (Peterson 2010, p. 76).

Joseph L. Coulombe also agrees that Alexie uses humour for serious purposes, especially in The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven. The scholar specifies these purposes as social and moral (Coulombe 2002). Coulombe not only refers to Lincoln's apt definition of this kind of humour, which has "the powers to heal and hurt, to bond and to exorcize, to renew and to purge" (Lincoln 1993, p. 5), but he notices that these "contrary powers" are reinforced by the trickster characters who use this humour with skill. As Coulombe explains: "Like the legendary Trickster figure, humor in Indian communities embodies shifting meanings and serves conflicting ends. However, rather than a sigh of his «hip» irreverence for all things Indian, Alexie's sophisticated use of humor unsettles conventional ways of thinking and compels re-evaluation and growth, which ultimately allows Indian characters to connect to their heritage in novel ways and forces non-Indian readers to reconsider simplistic generalizations." (Coulombe 2002, p. 95).

Scholars analysing Alexie's cinematographic works (*Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing*) stress the use of hybrid genre by the Spokane author and his insistence of avoiding exoticisation of his indigenous characters. *Smoke Signal*s in particular, which is not a strict adaptation of *This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*, addresses familiar human conditions. John Mihelich concludes that the experiences of Alexie's characters from this movie resonate with the experience of people within and outside of the indigenous community even though his characters remain Indian (Mihelich 2001). This is exactly the case in *Reservation Dogs*. Not only exoticisation is absent, but we bond with the characters quickly. The young quartet from Waititi and Harjo's series do not mind ghosts turning into clowns, reservation elders turning into liars, tribal police officers turning into friendly uncles, as long as they keep the right to be oneself, the right to make mistakes, and celebrate life that is nowhere easy. Even though the series starts with mourning a friend (just like Alexie's film *The Business of Fancydancing*), in *Reservation Dogs*, there is no prolonged grieving, never-ending funeral and a quarrel incited by the sense of loss and betrayal like in Alexie's work. Instead, there is indigenous hip-hop, mock and real gang fights, stealing crisps instead of drugs, passing down lies instead of wisdom (e.g., Uncle Brownie). If we laugh at ourselves in this way, these characters seem to say, we become immune to the derision of others. Nothing is sacred because the protagonists have learned to lose and regain the world. There is no political correctness because it masks rather than solves problems and it is the language of the academia and of the privileged. Waititi and Harjo tell the story from the heart of the fictional reservation, and they do their best to avoid its idealisation or demonisation. They create intelligent, reflexive and memorable characters that I hope will occupy the same important position in the history of indigenous film that Lipsha, Victor and Joseph hold in the history of Native American literature.

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STRESZCZENIE

Literaccy kuzyni „Reservation dogs": analiza komparatystyczna utworów Louise Erdrich i Shermana Alexie

Artykuł przedstawia analizę komparatystyczną współczesnej prozy rdzennych Amerykanów (powieści *Love Medicine* i *The Bingo Palace* Louise Erdrich oraz wyboru opowiadań *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* Shermana Alexiego) oraz serialu *Reservation Dogs* Taiki Waititi i Sterlina Harjo. Celem artykułu jest wykazanie podobieństw na poziomie konstrukcji młodych bohaterów w tekstach literackich i dziele filmowym z uwzględnieniem takich kategorii jak dekonstrukcja stereotypów Indian, humor umożliwiający przetrwanie (*survival humor* – Lincoln 1993) oraz kwestii gatunkowych. Ta ostatnia kategoria obejmuje opowieści o dojrzewaniu, opowieści drogi, opowieści o powrocie do domu (*homing novels* – Bevis 1987) oraz realizm magiczny. Wykorzystana metodologia to studia kulturowe, postkolonializm i postmodernizm. Autorka artykułu zamierza wykazać, że wiele środków stylistycznych wykorzystanych do konstrukcji postaci w serialu *Reservation Dogs* pojawiło się znacznie wcześniej w kanonicznych utworach współczesnej prozy rdzennych Amerykanów i twórcy serialu wydają się podejmować inteligentny dialog z tradycją literacką, ponieważ podobnie stawiają na afirmację współczesnej kultury indiańskiej, podkreślają jej związki z popkulturą i bardzo często wprowadzają czarny humor, oddając rdzennym Amerykanom sprawczość i kontrolę nad własną opowieścią.

Słowa kluczowe: proza rdzennych Amerykanów, kino ludności rdzennej, konstrukcja postaci młodego bohatera, dekonstrukcja stereotypów indiańskich, humor umożliwiający przetrwanie